

RE- Think Beef

The Untold Story

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Beef and the Environment: The Untold Story

There's lots to consider about beef and the impacts it has on the environment. Some things you know, but maybe some things you don't. Here are some of the little-known facts about raising beef that don't make the headlines. Good news seldom does. There are key reasons why beef belongs as part of a healthy ecosystem.

Are plant-based diets better for the health of the planet?

- This should be a thoughtful conversation as there is no black and white answer. Whether growing lentils or raising beef, the act of creating any food and getting it to market has environmental impacts.
- It's complicated. The United Nations cites 14 Sustainable Development Goals. Sustainability assessments usually consider only water use and green house gas (GHG) emission factors. We need to look at the whole picture.¹
- A comprehensive literature review study has demonstrated that choosing to consume one food over another is not the solution to reducing food production environmental impacts. Removing cattle from the landscape would have significant negative consequences such as the loss of native grasslands and the fragile Prairie ecosystems.¹
- The FAO's study, Livestock's Long Shadow has many short-comings and errors authors themselves apologized for. But once the headlines have been made, they are not easy to erase.²

Cattle and greenhouse gases in perspective.

- Transportation in Canada accounts for 28% of Canada's GHG emissions. Raising cattle in Canada accounts for 2.4% of the GHG emissions in Canada.^{3,4}
- On a global scale, Canadian beef production accounts for only 0.04% of GHG emissions.^{3,4}

Cattle are part of a climate change solution.

- Just as grazing bison kept the grasslands healthy and viable for centuries, cattle grazing has the same beneficial effects. Unfortunately 74% of Canada's native grasslands like the Prairies have been lost due to cultivation or development. Eliminating cattle means eliminating vital ecosystems.⁵
- It's more than just the grass under your feet. Grass and pasturelands sequester (store) carbon.⁶ Grass is like the solar panel that captures energy that becomes nourishment (energy) for cattle. Beef is the nutrient-dense good food for us all as a result.
- Cattle provide ecoservice benefits. 68% of the Wildlife Habitat Capacity of all agricultural land in Canada.⁴ Many bird species at risk and other wildlife call cattle ranges and pastures their home.

An important part of our food-scape.

- Cattle make use of food waste by consuming crops and crop bi-products that can't be used as human food. For example, in PEI, cattle feed on potatoes that are not suitable for us to eat.
- Cattle can take a food that grows naturally (grass), that we can't use to eat and turns it into one of nature's most nutrient dense foods. Now that's efficient processing.



- Cattle are typically raised on lands that can't be used for growing crops and vegetables. You can't cultivate rocky terrain, areas of brush or dry regions.
- Only 9% of annual cropland is used for growing cattle feed in Canada.^{4,6}

Raising cattle is steeped in tradition NOT stuck in the past.

- Over a 30 year span, feed efficiencies and other technologies have demonstrated a 14% decline in greenhouse gas emissions per kg of beef produced since 1981.⁷
- Canadian studies track a reduction of 17% in water use to produce a kg of beef over a 30 year period. Water cycles through the environment and does not disappear forever.⁸
- The Environmental Stewardship Award (TESA) is granted to leaders in stewardship who make outstanding contributions to conservation practices.⁹

Don't just take our word for it -

- Conservation groups like the Nature Conservancy of Canada, Ducks Unlimited and Birds Canada work on efforts to help ranchers and farmers keep their cattle grazing.

Four proven dietary changes that we can all make that will make a difference in reducing environmental impacts.

- Reduce waste. One third of our food production results in wasted food.¹ Use what you have and don't let it go to waste.
- Eat less. Over-eating is a type of food waste after all, so consider eating what you need and not more. Keep portions in proportion.
- Buy in season and buy local. Bringing in foods from other countries adds the burden of transportation impacts on the environment.
- Choose food that matters. Make meals with nutrient-dense foundational foods that use less resources to produce and make a valuable contribution to your health and well-being. Processed foods take more energy to manufacture and package.



1. Bradley G Ridoutt,1,2 Gilly A Hendrie,3 and Manny Noakes3; 1 Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO) Agriculture and Food, Victoria, Australia; 2University of the Free State, Department of Agricultural Economics, Bloemfontein, South Africa; and3CSIRO Biosecurity and Health, Adelaide, South Australia, Australia. Adv Nutr 2017;8:933-46: <https://doi.org/10.3945/an.117.016691>
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