

Eat less meat to combat climate change: Dr R Pachauri

UN climate chief Rajendra Pachauri has set off a lively debate with his recommendation that the world should curb its consumption of meat to counter climate change

An important way of combating global warming is to cut down on the amount of meat we eat, according to the world's leading authority on climate change.

Dr Rajendra Pachauri, Chair of the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) which, last year, jointly won the Nobel Peace Prize, told *The Observer* newspaper in an interview that people should have one meat-free day a week and then go on to reduce their meat consumption even further.

According to Pachauri, diet change was important because of the huge greenhouse gas emissions and other environmental problems -- including habitat destruction -- associated with rearing cattle and other animals. It was relatively easy to change eating habits compared to changing means of transport, he said.

Pachauri sees it more as an issue of personal choice. "I'm not in favour of mandating things like this, but if there were a (global) price on carbon, perhaps the price of meat would go up and people would eat less," he said. "If we're honest, less meat is also good for the health, and would at the same time reduce emissions of greenhouse gases."

The UN's Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) estimates that meat production accounts for nearly 18% of global greenhouse gas emissions. Transport, by contrast, accounts for just 13% of humankind's greenhouse gas footprint, according to the IPCC. Livestock emit methane and other greenhouse gases through excrement and belching. As demand for meat grows, the report explains, so does the need for pasture and cropland, making deforestation an additional concern; currently, according to the report, the livestock sector occupies 30% of ice-free land on the planet. Extensive grazing also takes a toll on arable land and scarce water resources.

However, the FAO report does not advocate a meat-free diet but suggests technological solutions and changes in farm policies such as better soil conservation

methods, feeding methods that reduce livestock's gas emissions, and improved irrigation and manure management systems. The report also notes the economic importance of the livestock sector to global populations; work with livestock contributes 40% of global agriculture GDP and employs 1.3 billion people worldwide.

A 2007 report by the Food Climate Research Network at Surrey University claimed that livestock generated 8% of the UK's emissions but eating some meat was good for the planet because some habitats benefited from grazing. It also said vegetarian diets that included lots of milk, butter and cheese would probably not noticeably reduce emissions because dairy cows are a major source of methane, a potent greenhouse gas released through flatulence.

Pachauri's remarks have met with support and derision, the latter most notably in a scathing article in ***The Telegraph*** by London Mayor Boris Johnson, who argues among other things that: "It's not eating meat that does the damage. It's the huge and remorselessly growing number of people who want to eat it."

Source: ***The Guardian***, September 7, 2008

BBC News, September 7, 2008

www.telegraph.co.uk, September 2008