

Article by Greenpeace <https://www.greenpeace.org.uk/news/why-meat-is-bad-for-the-environment/>
- accessed 7.3.23

Meat – or more specifically, ‘industrial meat’ – is bad for the planet.

The vast majority of meat bought in the UK is produced in intensive factory farms. These farms are part of a destructive global system of mass-produced industrial meat and dairy.

This system is driven by supermarkets like Tesco, Sainsbury’s and Asda; as well as fast food chains like KFC, Burger King and McDonald’s. Many of these household names buy from companies owned by JBS – the largest meat processing company in the world. Through its meat production, JBS produces around half the carbon emissions of fossil fuel giants such as Shell or BP, and is driving deforestation in the Amazon.

The industrial meat system requires a huge amount of land to sustain itself. Forests, particularly in South America, are deliberately slashed and burned every year to graze cattle and grow enough crops to feed billions of farmed animals.

1. It causes deforestation and forest fires

Industrial meat is the single biggest cause of deforestation globally. In Brazil, farmers are deliberately setting forest fires – like the Amazon rainforest fires you may have seen in the news – to clear space for cattle ranching and to grow industrial animal feed, like soya, for farms back in the UK.

2. It causes climate change

The climate impact of meat is enormous – roughly equivalent to all the driving and flying of every car, truck and plane in the world.

When forests are destroyed to produce industrial meat, billions of tonnes of carbon dioxide are released into the atmosphere, accelerating global warming. The fallen trees are often left to rot on the forest floor or are burned, creating further emissions.

Healthy trees are essential for absorbing carbon from the atmosphere. If we cut them down, they can no longer help us in the fight against climate change.

3. It’s pushing the Amazon rainforest closer to a tipping point

Trees in the Amazon rainforest produce their own rainfall, which keeps the whole forest alive and healthy. If deforestation (for things like industrial meat) continues at the current rate, the Amazon could reach a ‘tipping point’, where it can no longer sustain itself as a rainforest.

This would have a devastating impact on the people and animals who live in, or depend on, the forest directly. It could also lead to less rainfall, affecting drinking water and irrigation across large parts of South America; and changes to climate patterns in other parts of the world too.

4. It’s responsible for human rights abuses and land-grabbing

Indigenous People and traditional communities – like the geraizeira communities in Brazil – are at the frontline in the fight to protect forests. An investigation by Greenpeace Brazil showed that security forces working for soya producer Agronegócio Estrondo harassed, detained, abducted and shot members of the traditional geraizeira communities.

Meanwhile, President Bolsonaro and his government tacitly encourage illegal loggers, miners and farmers to occupy Indigenous lands, by rolling back historic regulations and trying to legalise land-

grabbing. Land invasions often become violent and loggers have killed Indigenous People in these conflicts. Mass meat producer, JBS, has been repeatedly linked to suppliers who operate illegally on protected Indigenous lands.

Cattle ranches and soya producers in Brazil have a history of profiting from modern day slavery. That includes suppliers to JBS (the meat processing giant). JBS' abattoirs have been linked to terrible working conditions, mass outbreaks of Covid-19 and salmonella-ridden chicken exports.

5. It's killing wildlife

By clearing forests, destroying habitats and using toxic pesticides to grow animal food, the industrial meat industry is contributing to the extinction of thousands of species, many of which haven't even been discovered yet.

We depend on a healthy environment for our own survival. The huge abundance and variety of the natural world (sometimes called biodiversity) is essential for food, clean water and medicines. The rapid loss of biodiversity, largely driven by industrial farming, could be as big a threat to our existence as climate change.

6. It's increasing the risk of future pandemics like Covid-19

Destroying forests and other wild areas for animal agriculture is a major cause of new infectious diseases. Three quarters of new diseases affecting humans come from animals. Cutting down and burning forests brings wildlife into closer contact with people, enabling deadly viruses to pass from animals to humans. The more forest that is destroyed, the greater the risk of a new pandemic.

But that's not the only disease risk from industrial meat. Factory farms can also increase the spread of disease, both between animals and from animals to humans. The risk is higher for industrial meat farms because huge numbers of animals are crammed into small spaces, and the animals themselves have weaker immune systems. This means that viruses can develop more rapidly and have the potential to pass to humans.

7. It's an inefficient way to eat

Companies sometimes argue that industrial meat is an efficient way to produce food, but this ignores its true costs. Over a quarter of the world's entire land area is used to graze or grow food for farm animals – food that could have been eaten by people in the first place. Just 1kg of chicken meat takes 3.2kg of crops to produce.

If everyone ate a plant-based diet, we'd need 75% less farmland than we use today. That's an area equivalent to the US, China, Europe and Australia combined. That's because it takes less land to grow food directly for humans, than to feed animals, which humans then eat.

In countries like the UK, we need to be eating 70% less meat and dairy by 2030 to prevent climate breakdown. By eating mostly plant-based food, we could feed more people – with all the calories and nutrition needed for a healthy diet – without destroying forests.

But this isn't just about people's individual choices. The government has a huge role to play too, but right now they're ignoring the huge damage caused by industrial meat and dairy. Join the campaign to put pressure on them to act.

<https://foodrevolution.org/blog/grass-fed-beef-2021-update/> - accessed 7.3 2023

Amazonian cattle are free-range, grass-fed, and possibly organic, but they are still a plague on the planet and a driving force behind global warming.

Although well-managed grass-fed cattle might be able to sequester carbon in the soil, and they can be raised on natural grassland instead of freshly destroyed rainforest, they still contribute to climate change in other ways. The greenhouse gas methane, which cattle produce in staggering amounts, is 28 times more potent than carbon dioxide over a hundred-year time frame. With the higher fiber content in grasses than grains, cattle may produce even more methane than grain-fed ones. And with grass-fed cattle living up to twice as long as feedlot cattle, they produce methane for longer, too.

Feedlot beef as we know it today would be impossible if it weren't for the routine and continual feeding of antibiotics to these animals. This leads directly and inexorably to the development of antibiotic-resistant bacteria. These new "superbugs" are increasingly rendering our antibiotics ineffective for treating disease in humans.

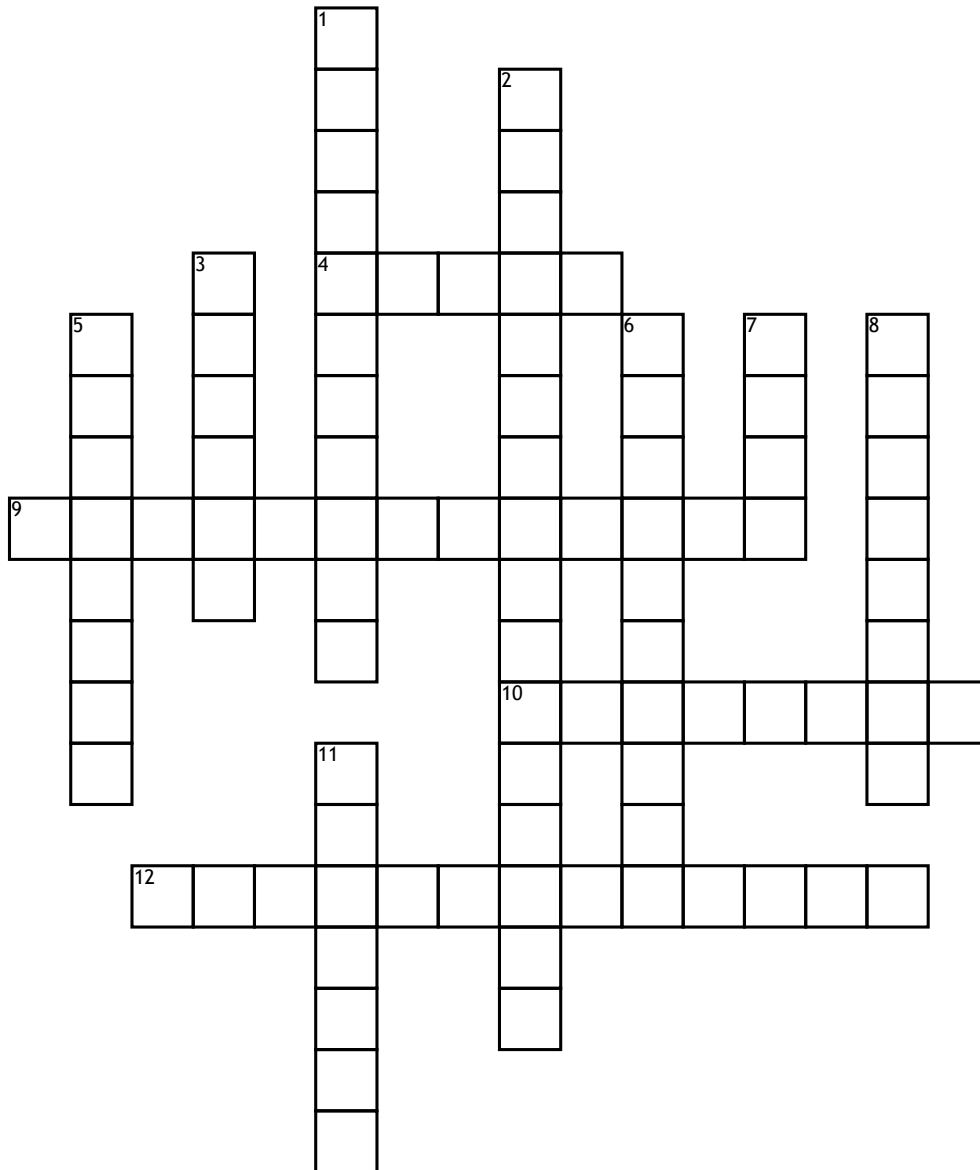
In comparison, cattle experience greater well-being and better health when they're able to eat the diet for which their digestive systems were designed, and when they have access to more outdoor space.

While it's certainly true that grass-fed cattle live significantly better lives than their feedlot counterparts, there's still nothing cheery about their deaths. According to People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, many cows are alive and conscious for as long as seven minutes after their throats are cut. And some have their legs cut off while still breathing.

But if you want to save money, and do a good turn for your health, the planet, and the animals, there are plenty of plant-based options to choose from.

There are also plant-based meats, of course. But don't forget about beans. If the whole world started swapping beans for beef, we could take a huge bite out of climate change. We could save what's left of the Amazon rainforest. We could spare the lives of tens of millions of cattle. We could restore the fertility of our soils. And we could prevent countless heart attacks, too.

Animal Farming is Bad. Well duh!



Across

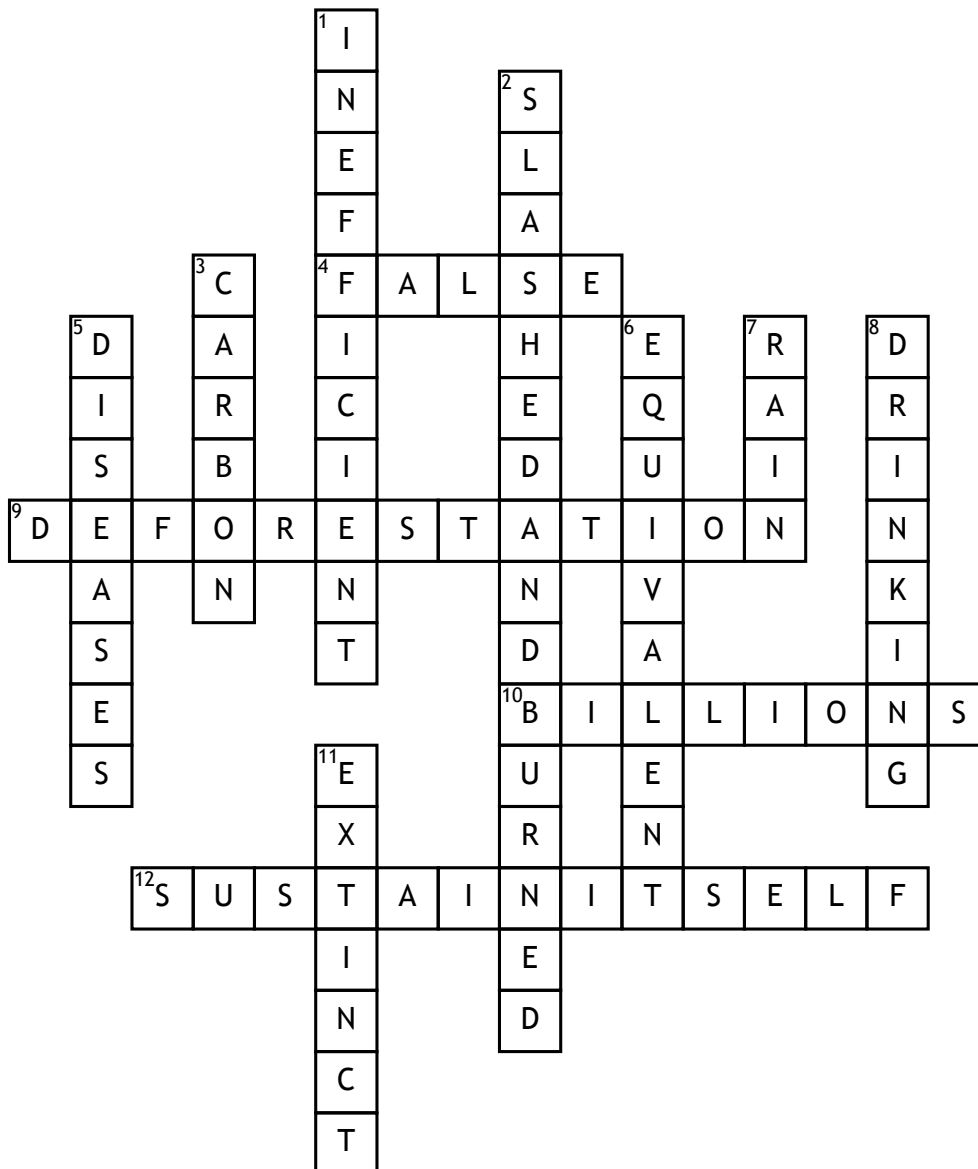
4. Cows raised on natural grassland instead of freshly destroyed rainforest are good for the environment: True or False?
9. Globally, industrial meat is the single biggest cause of what?
10. When forests are destroyed to produce meat, how many tonnes of carbon dioxide are released into the atmosphere?
12. If deforestation for industrial meat continues, the Amazon Rainforest will become unable to what? (2 words)

Down

1. One kg of chicken meat takes 3.2kg of crops to produce, making meat production very what?
2. Every year, in order to clear land to graze animals or grow food for them, rainforests are deliberately what? (3 words)
3. We need as many trees as possible to absorb what from the atmosphere?
5. Destroying forests, encroaching on wild animal habitats, and keeping farmed animals confined, are the most common causes of new infectious what?

6. The climate impact of meat compared to that of ALL cars, lorries, boats and planes put together is roughly what?
7. Rainforests are so-called because they produce their own what?
8. Reduced rainfall caused by reduced rainforests means less water for what?
11. Destroying forest habitats and using toxic pesticides to grow food for farmed animals, is causing many wild animals to become what?

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