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https://www.thecheyennepost.com/opinion/eating-for-climate-change/article_796ab55a-d3e9-11ed-b423-7fae10c4e6ea.html

Last year, according to the National Centers for Environmental Information, climate events inflicted more than \$152 billion in damages across the US. Already this year, climate change has brought flash floods in California, Kentucky, and Montana as well as wildfires in Alaska, California, and New Mexico. Increased tornado and hurricane activities have hit hard.

While the Inflation Reduction Act, approved by Congress and signed by President Biden in August 2022, is set to deliver the largest investment in climate action in U.S. history. Congress has directed nearly \$370 billion over the next decade to rapidly scale up renewable energy production and drive substantial reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, it includes no provisions to make sure buildings will withstand the climate-fueled extremes the nation is experiencing and will continue to endure. When communities rebuild after disasters, they risk restoring structures doomed to fail in the next catastrophe, since the United States lacks climate-resilient building codes.

Worse yet, the legislation includes a provision that tethers offshore wind leasing to oil and gas extraction. Over a ten-year period, the Interior Department will be prohibited from issuing a lease for offshore wind development unless at least sixty million acres—the size of Michigan—have been leased for oil and gas in the previous year. The bill also requires that the Interior Department offer to lease two million acres of public lands—more than double the size of Rhode Island—for oil and gas drilling as a prerequisite for any renewable energy development on public lands. Handcuffing renewable energy development to new oil and gas extraction will “fan the flames of climate disasters torching our country,” fumes an irate Brett Hartl of the Center for Biological Diversity.

Key findings from the U.S. Inventory include:

- In 2021, U.S. greenhouse gas emissions totaled 6,347.7 million metric tons of carbon dioxide.

- Emissions increased from 2020 to 2021 by 6.8 percent, driven largely by an increase of emissions from fossil fuel combustion. In 2021, these emissions increased by 7.0 percent relative to the previous year.

On another but related matter, food and its production are both essential aspects of life and considerable sources of greenhouse gas emissions. The agriculture sector is responsible for nearly half of methane (CH₄) emissions, two-thirds of nitrous oxide (N₂O) emissions and three percent of carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions from human activities worldwide.

“We found that sustaining current dietary patterns worldwide through the rest of the century could amount to nearly 1°C of additional warming beyond today’s level of ~1°C above preindustrial times,” write researchers in “Future Warming from Global Food Consumption” in the March 2023 issue of Nature Climate Change.

“Seventy five percent of this warming is driven by foods that are high sources of methane (ruminant meat, dairy and rice),” write the authors.

What can any of us do on an individual level? Changing our eating habits is one way.

My eldest sent his brothers and me a synopsis in The Fencepost of the Nature Climate Change article. The Fencepost cited UC Davis specialist, Professor Frank Mitloehner, who included recent dietary recommendations of the Harvard Medical School.

It surprised me that my son sent an article that urges restriction of red-meat intake, since he raises Angus cattle (in addition to his teaching job at Texas A&M) and, consequently, eats more beef than what’s good for his heart. True, the Fencepost article includes apologist comments to the effect that raising beef and dairy cattle is more efficient in the US than in developing countries—Fencepost readers are primarily ranchers and farmers. Will the article induce decisions toward healthier eating? One can only hope. We lower our risk of heart disease by 30% just by regularly swapping a serving of red meat with fish or chicken, says the Harvard study.

If we limited red-meat intake to one serving per week and, instead, promoted a protein-rich diet with less saturated fat and cholesterol, we would live healthier lives while helping reduce our carbon footprint.

Moreover, says Mitloehner, consumer-level food waste is a significant contributor to food-driven global warming. Globally, forty percent of food is wasted, primarily in the form of fruit and vegetables that perish before being eaten. “This is the main contributor to environmental harm,” he points out. In the US, 60 percent of produce goes to waste, along with 10 to 20 percent of animal-sourced food, he says. And that doesn’t include the leftovers from take-outs or restaurant meals that are left in the fridge to perish.

The sell-by date stamp on food greatly contributes to food waste also, says Mitloehner, since consumers often mistake the stamped date as an expiration date and throw the labeled food away. Even grocery stores throw away food with an expiring sell-by date rather than donate it, for fear of law suits resulting from alleged sickness. I know of people who regularly dumpster-dive at grocery store sites, bringing home slabs of salmon, tubs of yogurt, etc.

Finally, our unwillingness to use produce that is not visually perfect also contributes to food waste, Mitloehner points out.

If you access the online Harvard Medical School diet recommendations, you'll find useful tips for improving your health that coincidentally reduce consumer carbon footprint. You can even purchase the school's six-week plan for healthy eating. All the same, we already know, don't we, that munching an orange beats drinking a glass of orange juice, that processing food can destroy nutrients like vitamins B and C, and that supplements don't do much to improve our health. If we opt for a serving of fish with fresh veggies in lieu of a pizza, it's a win-win for our health and for the health of our planet. So is limiting eating out in favor of preparing a meal at home. That's easy to say for someone who is retired, you might object, when the working life has us crazy busy—and wasting less food isn't going to limit a winter storm's destructiveness. I agree, there is no easy answer. Still, giving thought to the problem is the first step.