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MEMO FROM MFJ

# Hoofing it Away from Beef



Deciding between steak and chicken tonight? Corn-fed beef is by far the worse choice, not just for you, but for the environment and for the welfare of the animals.

■ **Health.** Today, most cattle end up in feedlots, where high-calorie grains fatten them up quickly. The extra fat eventually zeroes in on human arteries. And red meat—especially hot dogs, sausages, and other processed meats—promotes colon cancer.

■ **Environment.** Whether cattle live out on the range or in feedlots, they emit methane gas, a potent cause of global warming. What's more, growing corn and soybeans for feed requires huge amounts of fertilizer, pesticides, water, and fossil fuel. Statistics Canada estimates that beef and dairy cattle are responsible for 30 per cent of all food-related greenhouse gas emissions. That's triple the global-warming impact of fruits and vegetables.

Then there's the stench from the manure at feedlots—they're called "concentrated animal feeding operations," or CAFOs—that can sicken nearby residents.

■ **Animal welfare.** The grain that's fed to animals in feedlots can cause digestive, hoof, and liver diseases and may necessitate the continuous use of antibiotics. That can trigger the growth of antibiotic-resistant pathogens that can infect humans.

The good news: beef is losing ground. Canadians ate about half as much in 2012—around 12 kilograms per person—as in 1976. And the country has gone from eating three times as much beef as poultry in 1976 to slightly more poultry than beef today.

Animal-welfare activists are teaching young people about the miserable lives of animals grown on factory farms. Some university and corporate cafeterias have adopted Meatless Mondays. And some people are switching to vegetarian fare. When I was a student, vegetarians were cultural curiosities. Today, most restaurants have at least one vegetarian option.

The government could help protect our health and the environment by banning the routine feeding of important antibiotics to livestock, which should lead to cleaner, less densely populated CAFOs and healthier animals. It also could set limits on the air and water pollution from CAFOs. Moreover, it could mount mass-media campaigns aimed at encouraging people to continue switching from red meat to poultry and legumes and to eat more produce, seafood, and whole grains.



Eating less beef saves money, the environment, and lives.

But those are improbable reforms considering that one out of every nine MPs in the governing Conservative Party—including the Minister of Agriculture—is a farmer. And there are no conflict-of-interest rules to force farmer-MPs to recuse themselves from farm-policy decisions in the House of Commons or in Cabinet law-making roles.

But you don't need to wait for the government to act.

Just think twice when you approach the beef counter at the grocery store; skip the burgers and steaks at restaurants; and encourage your school or workplace cafeteria to save money, the environment, and lives by serving less beef.

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