

To Save the Planet, Eat Less Meat, Report Urges

For first time, top nutritional panel says American consumers must cut back on red meat to prevent irreversible climate change

By [Nadia Prupis](#), staff writer [Common Dreams](#) February 20, 2015

To prevent ruinous climate change and stave off an influx of preventable chronic diseases, Americans must reduce their meat intake and switch to a sustainable, plant-based diet, the top U.S. nutritional panel has announced for the first time.

The Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee, which convenes every five years, released its newest [report](#) Thursday calling for Americans to change the way they think about food and make the health of the planet as much of a priority as their own well-being.

According to the report, "The average U.S. diet has a larger environmental impact in terms of increased greenhouse gas emissions, land use, water use, and energy use," compared to vegan, vegetarian, and Mediterranean-style diets, which favor fruits and vegetables, whole grains, nuts, and legumes over red meat, dairy, sugar, and processed foods.

"Access to sufficient, nutritious, and safe food is an essential element of food security for the U.S. population. A sustainable diet ensures this access for both the current population and future generations," the report continues. "The environmental impact of food production is considerable and if natural resources such as land, water and energy are not conserved and managed optimally, they will be strained and potentially lost."

The report's findings confirm numerous recent studies that have sounded the alarm over the climate impacts of a red meat-based diet. In November, a paper published in *Nature* [found](#) that current diet trends are fueling greenhouse gas emissions, particularly through grain-based livestock production. And that paper came hot on the heels of a study [published](#) in May that declared the meat

industry to be one of the biggest contributors to climate change, both directly and indirectly.

Speaking to the *Washington Post* on Thursday, Princeton University agricultural researcher Timothy Searchinger [said](#), "It's pretty much a consensus view among global environmental scientists that we would be better off if we ate less meat."

Moreover, consumers must change their diets to combat rising numbers of preventable chronic diseases which occur from poor nutrition and physical inactivity, the report states. About 117 million Americans are obese or suffer from diabetes, cardiovascular disease, certain types of cancer, and other health problems, due to their diet and lifestyle.

Committee member and report co-author Marian Neuhouser [told](#) the *Washington Post* that the findings are not "gloomy... [they're] reality."

The committee's findings are not official guidelines, but are used to inform the government's updated versions of dietary rules. The Department of Health and Human Services and the USDA will issue their own guidelines later this year based on the report.