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Food, livestock production, energy, climate change, and health

Prof Anthony J McMichael PhD ^a ... Prof Ricardo Uauy PhD ^{c, d}

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Summary

Food provides energy and nutrients, but its acquisition requires energy expenditure. In post-hunter-gatherer societies, extra-somatic energy has greatly expanded and intensified the catching, gathering, and production of food. Modern relations between energy, food, and health are very complex, raising serious, high-level policy challenges. Together with persistent widespread under-nutrition, over-nutrition (and sedentarism) is causing obesity and associated serious health consequences. Worldwide, agricultural activity, especially livestock production, accounts for about a fifth of total greenhouse-gas emissions, thus contributing to climate change and its adverse health consequences, including the threat to food yields in many regions. Particular policy attention should be paid to the health risks posed by the rapid worldwide growth in meat consumption, both by exacerbating climate change and by directly contributing to certain diseases. To prevent increased greenhouse-gas emissions from this production sector, both the average worldwide consumption level of animal products and the intensity of emissions

average worldwide consumption level of animal products and the intensity of emissions from livestock production must be reduced. An international contraction and convergence strategy offers a feasible route to such a goal. The current global average meat consumption is 100 g per person per day, with about a ten-fold variation between high-consuming and low-consuming populations. 90 g per day is proposed as a working global target, shared more evenly, with not more than 50 g per day coming from red meat from ruminants (ie, cattle, sheep, goats, and other digastric grazers).



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