

ECOPOLITICS PODCAST EPISODE 3.2: Can We Eat Our Way to Sustainability?

Additional Pedagogical Resources

Summary: To consume or not consume meat? That is the question plaguing many an environmentally conscious person as we grapple with our personal responsibilities in the face of a warming climate. However, as our guests Paige Stanley, PhD Candidate at the University of California, Berkeley and Tara Garnett, Director of TABLE, a platform for informed discussion about food systems at University of Oxford point out, the answer isn't so black and white. In today's episode, we dive into the nuances of protein production, exploring both the macro and micro ways that farmers, scientists, and everyday people are tackling sustainable food systems. Ultimately, we strive to answer the question: Can we truly eat our way to sustainability?

Key Takeaways

- There is considerable debate around the responsibility of citizens to practice more environmentally-friendly diets versus making structural changes to the food system to help mitigate climate change.
- The discussion around the best diet for planetary and human health is often politically polarized, with increasing ruminant livestock numbers representing one extreme, and compulsory universal veganism at the other. This polarization misses a lot of nuance. As Dr. Garnett notes, “meat is neither god, nor the devil” (26:55-27:43).
- Regenerative grazing offers opportunities to contribute to “near-term climate change mitigation strategy.” At the same time, it risks being co-opted by corporations and those looking to maintain the status quo in food consumption practices (Paige Stanley, 28:56-29:30).
- Creating a more sustainable diet for yourself, family, or community, requires contextualizing this change in larger questions of “carbon and environmental expenditure” In other words, eating a plant-rich diet does not exempt changes to transportation of fossil fuel and other forms of carbon consumption (Dr. Tara Garnett 34:28-35:03). One’s regional context matters too: Regenerative livestock grazing may be better suited than growing crops in certain landscapes.

Discussion Questions

- What do you think is the role of citizens in addressing sustainability through our diets?
- What do you think is the role of ruminant grazers in future food systems? Can they be part of a sustainable food system?
- What do you think different disciplinary perspectives can contribute to conversations about sustainable diets?

Learn more about our Guests

Dr. Tara Garnett

- <https://www.oxfordmartin.ox.ac.uk/people/dr-tara-garnett/>

Select articles, books, projects, and videos

- Cusworth, George, **Tara Garnett**, and Jamie Lorimer. "Legume Dreams: The Contested Futures of Sustainable Plant-Based Food Systems in Europe." *Global Environmental Change* 69 (2021): 102321–102321. Web.
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- **Garnett, Tara**. "Plating up Solutions." *Science (American Association for the Advancement of Science)* 353.6305 (2016): 1202–1204. Web.

Paige Stanley

- <https://ourenvironment.berkeley.edu/people/paige-stanley>

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Explore resources mentioned in these episodes:

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<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2018/may/31/avoiding-meat-and-dairy-is-single-biggest-way-to-reduce-your-impact-on-earth>
- **Garnett, Tara**, Cécile Godde, Adrian Muller, Elin Rööös, Pete Smith, Imke de Boer, Erasmus zu Ermgassen, Mario Herrero, Corina van Middelaar, Christian Schader, and Hannah van Zanten. "Grazed and Confused? Ruminating on cattle, grazing systems, methane, nitrous oxide, the soil carbon sequestration question – and what it all means for greenhouse gas emissions." *Food Climate Research Network*. 2017.
https://www.oxfordmartin.ox.ac.uk/downloads/reports/fcrn_gnc_report.pdf
- Learn more about the TABLE debates <https://tabledebates.org/>
- Learn more about the Climate Research Network and the Future of Food project <https://www.futureoffood.ox.ac.uk/article/food-climate-research-network>
- Learn more about the EAT-Lancet Commission <https://eatforum.org/eat-lancet-commission/>
- Learn more about the *Planetary Health Diet* <https://eatforum.org/learn-and-discover/the-planetary-health-diet/>
- The Lancet. "We Need to Talk About Meat." *The Lancet (British edition)* 392, no. 10161 (2018): 2237–2237.
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Learn more about Methane in Animal Agriculture

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<https://www.oxfordmartin.ox.ac.uk/downloads/reports/Climate-metrics-for-ruminant-livestock.pdf>

Learn more about Animal Agriculture and Climate Change

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- Table. "Grazed and Confused? How much can grazing livestock help to mitigate climate change." Youtube. July 4 2018. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nub7pToY3jU>
- Read more about the *Future of Protein* project <https://futureofprotein.ca/>
- Weis, Anthony John. *The Ecological Hoofprint: the Global Burden of Industrial Livestock* London: Zed Books, 2013.

Learn more about the Food We Eat & Climate Change

- Feed: A Food System Podcast (co-hosted by Matthew Kessler and Samara Brock): <https://www.tabledebates.org/podcast>
- Handpicked Podcast (co-hosted by Amanda Di Battista and Laine Young): <https://researchcentres.wlu.ca/centre-for-sustainable-food-systems/broadcasting-change/handpicked-podcast.html>