

## Forest Family Forever!

# Facts about Beef

Many of us love to eat hamburgers, hot dogs, bologna, and other items made from beef or red meat. While these foods may taste delicious, they often have a negative effect on the rainforests. In fact, one of the main causes of rainforest destruction in Central and South America is cattle ranching. Cattle ranchers slash and burn the rainforest to make room for cattle pastures. First, the ranchers cut down the trees and set the forest on fire. Then they plant grass and bring in cows to feed on the grass. When the cows are grown, they are slaughtered and turned into cheap beef. The beef is used in fast-food hamburgers, frozen meat products, and canned pet food.

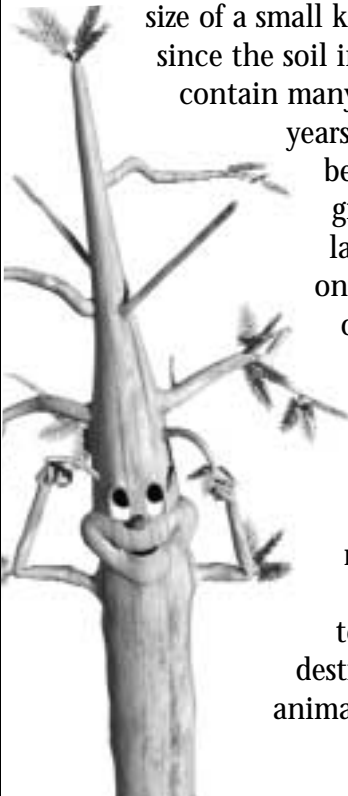
It takes a lot of rainforest land, water, and energy to make a fast-food hamburger. As a matter of fact, fifty-five square feet of rainforest is destroyed for every quarter pound hamburger that comes from a cleared rainforest. That's the size of a small kitchen! Not only that, but since the soil in the rainforest doesn't contain many nutrients, after a few years of cattle ranching it becomes very difficult to grow anything on the land—even grass. What was once a beautiful, lush, full-of-life rainforest becomes a dry, desert-like wasteland. When this happens, even more rainforest is slashed and burned for cattle ranching.

Clearing the rainforest to produce beef also destroys the homes of the animals that live in the

rainforest. Without their rainforest homes, many of these animals simply cannot survive and may become *extinct*. When an animal becomes extinct, it disappears forever like the dinosaurs.

Raising cattle for beef not only damages the rainforests in Central and South America, it also impacts the environment closer to home. Over half of the water used in the United States goes to beef production. That's a lot of water! In fact, it takes an average of 2,500 gallons of water to produce a single pound of red meat. That's as much water as a typical family uses in a month! With the amount of water it takes to produce one pound of red meat, farmers can grow up to one hundred pounds of grain, which makes a lot of bread, pasta, and cereal. One pound of beef can only feed four people for one lunch, whereas one hundred pounds of grain can feed four people for a month!

Raising cows for beef—whether in rainforest countries or the United States—also adds to *climate change* or *global warming*. It takes a lot of fossil fuels (oil, coal, and gasoline) to raise cows, slaughter them, freeze the meat, ship it overseas or across the country, and then transport it to grocery stores and restaurants. The burning of fossil fuels creates a greenhouse gas called *carbon dioxide*. When cows digest their food, they also release a greenhouse gas called *methane*. These greenhouse gases trap heat from the sun close to the Earth's surface. When too much heat is trapped, it causes the planet to warm up, which in turn causes dangerous changes in the weather. For instance, less rain may fall in the rainforests, making it difficult for all the trees, plants, and animals that depend on rain to survive. Climate change is a very big problem facing the rainforests and our planet. We must do all we can to stop it from getting worse. One easy way to do



that is to eat less red meat!

People in the United States eat a large amount of beef. In fact, although we make up less than 5 percent of the world's population, Americans consume almost 25 percent of the world's beef. Medical studies have found that eating too much red meat can cause health problems. Many doctors believe that a plant-based diet (also called a *vegetarian* or *vegan* diet) full of fresh fruits, vegetables, legumes, nuts, seeds, and whole grains is the healthiest way to eat.

Some people choose to eat more chicken, turkey, and fish instead of red meat. While this is a step in the right direction and will help save the rainforests, it is important to know that eating a plant-based diet is the best thing that you can do for the environment. If people eat too much chicken, turkey, or fish, it can have a negative impact on the environment, just like eating too much beef does. For example, raising thousands of chickens for food in a factory—or *factory farming*—uses a lot of natural resources, such as water and fossil fuels. So remember, a plant-based diet is not only good for you, it's the best thing for the planet!

## What You Can Do

If everyone in the United States reduced the amount of beef they ate by half, we would save a lot of energy and water, and rainforests wouldn't need to be cut down for cattle ranching. That would really help save the rainforests and our environment!

There are a lot of ways to eat less beef. One easy way to eat less beef is to eat more plant-based foods like fruits, vegetables, nuts, seeds, whole grains, and legumes. Have you ever tried a vegetarian burrito filled with beans, rice, and vegetables? Or a tofu hot dog topped with ketchup, mustard, and relish? You'd be surprised at how tasty beef-free foods can be!

Many grocery stores now carry a wide variety of meat alternatives, including veggie burgers, soy sausage, soy baloney, and other soy-based deli "meats." If you can't find these items at your local grocery store, ask the store manager to

special order them. It may take a while, but if enough people ask for and buy meat alternatives, grocery stores will be happy to carry them.

The next time you're at a restaurant, consider ordering something that doesn't contain beef. You can also talk to your parents about the food your family eats at home. If your family normally eats beef four times a week, suggest that you eat it only two times a week. On the other days, replace beef with a rainforest-friendly alternative. You may want to try this new way of eating for a week. When the week is up, ask everyone how they felt about it and if they're willing to try eating less beef for another week. Remember, small changes at every meal add up to a big difference!

If you'd like to learn more about eating a plant-based diet, visit these websites.

[www.vrg.org](http://www.vrg.org)  
[www.earthsave.org](http://www.earthsave.org)  
[www.pcrm.org](http://www.pcrm.org)

Remember, a plant-based diet is good for you and good for the planet!

