



Progressives Say No to Meat, But the World Thinks Otherwise

By Steve Goreham

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Once again, meat consumption is under attack by progressive leaders. Politicians and the United Nations call on all of us to eat more plant-based foods and less meat and dairy products in the name of saving the planet. But it's clear that most people across the world disagree.

US Senator Cory Booker recently [shared](#) his "journey" to a vegetarian diet. Booker warns, "The tragic reality is this planet simply can't sustain billions of people consuming industrially produced animal agriculture because of environmental impact."

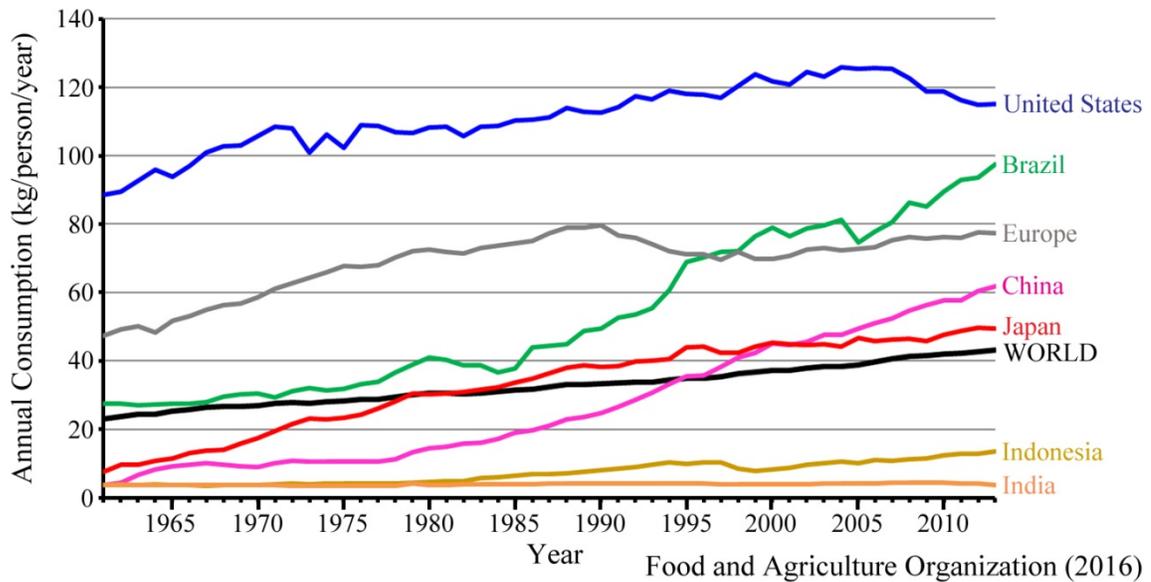
The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) [calls](#) for a "great food transformation." The UN states, "There are more of us, we're getting wealthier, and we're demanding more protein-rich foods, such as meat. In the long run, this is simply not sustainable." The UNEP quotes a recent 50-page study by the EAT-Lancet Commission.

The EAT-Lancet Commission [study](#) is an alarming document. It begins with the statement, "Civilisation is in crisis...For the first time in 200000 years of human history, we are severely out of synchronization with the planet and nature."

The EAT-Lancet study [recommends](#) that people reduce their daily intake of red meat to less than one ounce per day, or less than one 8-ounce hamburger per week. The study recommends a maximum of two ounces of poultry per day, or less than a chicken breast per day. The study also calls for more than a 100 percent increase in consumption of legumes, nuts, fruits and vegetables. Without these changes, the study warns of "reduced human life expectancy" and "continued environmental degradation."

But it's clear that people want to eat meat. As wealth rises, people increase their consumption of meat, fish, and dairy products in almost all nations.

Meat Consumption, World and Selected Nations (1961-2013) (Livestock and Fish)



Data from the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) [shows](#) that world annual per person consumption of meat, including livestock and fish, rose 88 percent from 1961 to 2013. US per person meat and fish consumption increased 30 percent, Europe's consumption increased 63 percent, and Japan's consumption increased by more than six times since 1961.

In developing nations, consumption also [skyrocketed](#). From 1961 to 2013, per person meat and fish consumption more than doubled in Mexico, and more than tripled in Brazil and Indonesia. The average person in China now eats 16 times more meat and fish than in 1961. India is the only major nation without an increase in meat and fish consumption over the last 50 years.

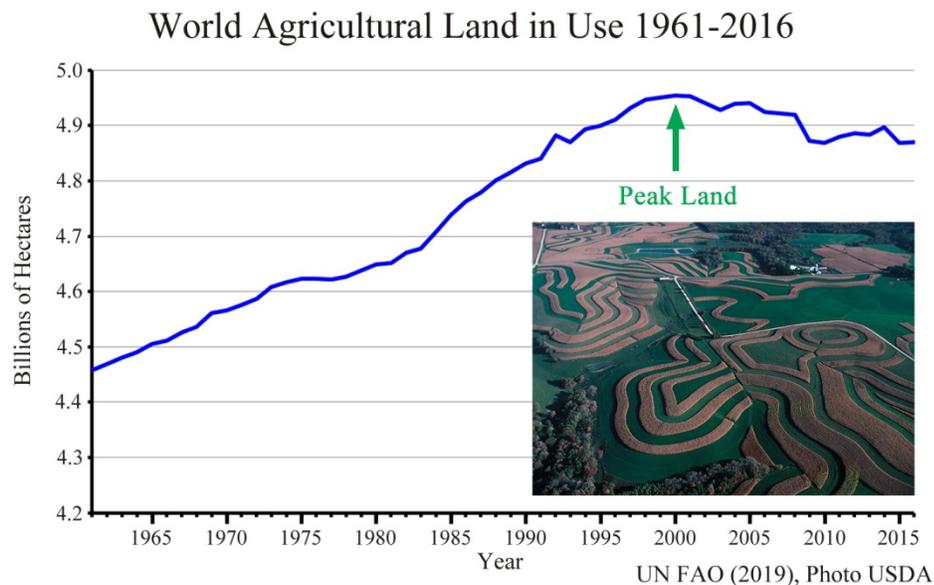
The Lancet Commission and other sources warn about reduced human life expectancy from modern diets, but supporting evidence is not strong. It's true that diseases of obesity are rising due to protein- and fat-rich diets, but human life expectancies continue to rise as well. From 1960 to 2010, during the period of rapidly rising per person meat consumption, average world life expectancy at birth [rose](#) from 53 to 70 years.

According to the World Bank, in the 50 years after 1960, life expectancy [rose](#) from 69.8 years to 78.5 years in the US, the world's largest per capita consumer of meat. Life expectancy increased from 70 years in France and the United Kingdom to 79 years and 82 years, respectively. In China, now consuming 16 times more meat per person than in 1960 and above the world average consumption, life expectancy climbed from 43 to 75 years.

Nor do modern societies care to eat more beans and peas, also called legumes or pulses. According to the UN's FAO, world per person pulse consumption [dropped](#) 19 percent from 1961 to 2013. Per person pulse consumption dropped in Japan (61 percent), Brazil (79 percent), and China (84 percent). As wealth grows, people choose to eat more meat, fish, and dairy products, and less beans and peas.

The target of the “no meat” advocates is modern agriculture. Senator Booker warns about “industrially produced animal agriculture.” US Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez [says](#) we need to address “factory farming” and that “maybe we shouldn't be eating a hamburger for breakfast, lunch and dinner.” The Lancet Commission [warns](#) about farm land use that threatens ecosystems.

But in fact, the modern agriculture that is under attack has become the savior of the world's ecosystems. High-yield agriculture is now so productive that less land is needed to feed the world's growing billions. According to the UN's FAO, total agricultural land, pasture land and farm land in use, peaked in the year 2000 and has been [declining](#) over the last 16 years. For the first time in the history of agriculture, farmers are returning land to nature.



Earth's population is projected to grow from about 7.7 billion [today](#) and [level](#) off at about 9 or 10 billion sometime this century. Without high-yield agriculture, land use would instead continue to rise, displacing more and more of the world's ecosystems. So Senator Booker and others should be *praising* industrially produced agriculture, rather than attacking it.

Of course, a big driver of the environmental concern about meat diets is the fear of human-caused climate change. The Lancet Commission [estimates](#) that food production accounts for up to 30 percent of human greenhouse gas emissions. So we need to stop eating meat to prevent global warming.

But evidence [shows](#) that human emissions play only a small part in Earth's climate, which is

dominated by natural factors. Water vapor, not carbon dioxide or methane, is Earth's dominant greenhouse gas. According to the carbon cycle model of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, every day nature [puts](#) 20 times the amount of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere as all of human industry. Claiming that eating beans can stop the rise of the oceans is about as plausible as believing that switching light bulbs can save polar bears.

Steve [Goreham](#) is a speaker on the environment, business, and public policy and author of the [book](#) *Outside the Green Box: Rethinking Sustainable Development*.