

Why Jains are Natural Environmentalists

Our fundamental Jain tenets lead us to have lives with far less environmental impact than the average North American. That's happening even without our acting intentionally to protect the natural world. Not only do we Jains have much lower carbon footprints than others but we also use far less water and do it all with far less cruelty. But how many of us are aware of that? Others should point to us as models for a more sustainable future. Of course, we can and must do better.

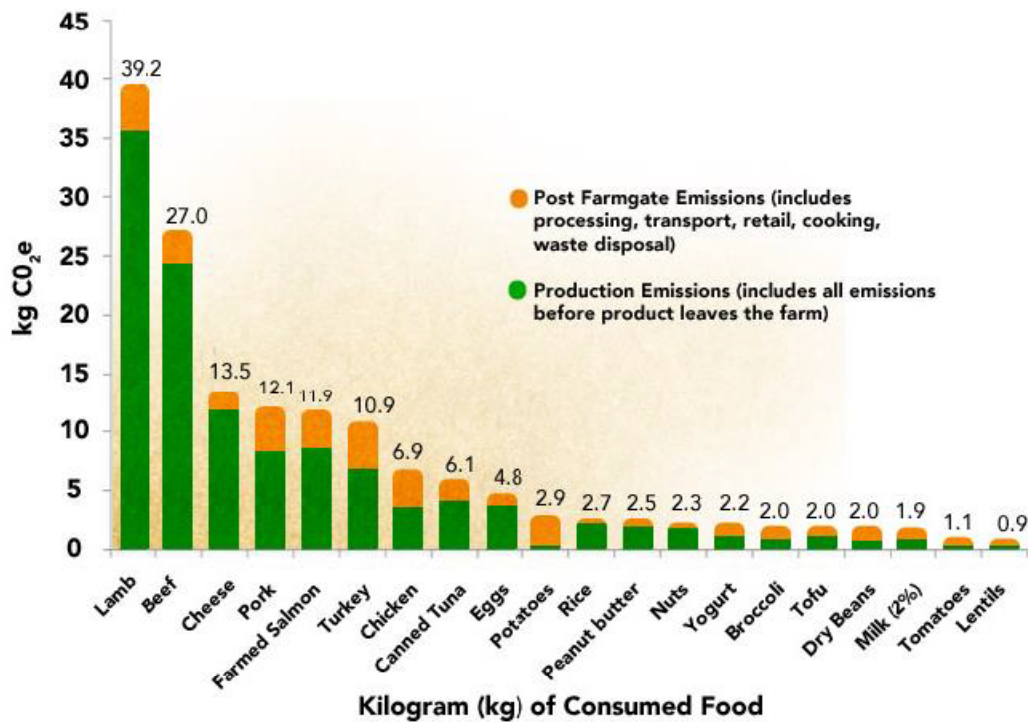
The tenets of Ahimsa (non-violence) and Aparigraha (non-possesiveness) are keys to a sustainable future.

Did you know that a pound of beef requires 1848 gallons of water to produce while a pound of bread requires only 212 gallons? A pound of tofu requires only 334 gallons or 18% of the water needed for the equivalent weight of beef. Similarly one pound of beef contributes 12.3 kg of CO₂e (CO₂e) greenhouse gases while one kg of tofu contributes only 0.9 kg CO₂e which is only 7.4% of the CO₂e of beef. Before you get too self-righteous about this, I'd like to point out that a pound of cheese requires 668 gallons of water and contributes 6.1 kg of CO₂e.

On average, meat-eaters contribute 50 to 54 percent more food-related greenhouse gas emissions than vegetarians and 99 to 102 percent more than vegans.

<http://thinkprogress.org/climate/2014/06/27/3454129/eating-meat-carbon-emissions/>

Figure 1. Full Lifecycle Greenhouse Gas Emissions from Common Proteins and Vegetables



Above chart from 2011 report by Environmental Working Group (EWG):
<http://www.ewg.org/meateatersguide/a-meat-eaters-guide-to-climate-change-health-what-you-eat-matters/climate-and-environmental-impacts/>

If everyone in the world had the same standard of living as Europeans, it would take 3 planet Earths to provide all the resources and 5 planet Earths to match the standard of living of North Americans. We Americans live in bigger houses and drive bigger cars than pretty much anybody else. Furthermore, we fill those big houses with lots of stuff that needs to be mined somewhere and processed using lots of energy.

One of my favorite quotes is quite often attributed to Mahathma Gandhi who was actually quoting St. Elizabeth Ann Seton (1774-1821), the first American saint: “*Live simply so that others may simply live*”. This is where the tenet of Aparigraha applies. If everyone just consumed and owned less stuff, especially disposables, then we wouldn’t have all the pollution (air, water and land) associated with that stuff.

Did you know that it takes between 30 and 100 tons of ore to extract one ounce of gold? Also many additional tons of earth have to be removed to get at that ore. On top of that, cyanide or mercury are used to dissolve the gold out of the rock and there have many releases of these extremely toxic substances into the environment. San Francisco Bay has very high levels of mercury from gold mining that occurred in the 19th century. In 2000, Romania had a spill into a tributary of the Danube river which killed more than a thousand tons of fish. The cyanide plume reached the Black Sea 1,600 miles away. Indians are crazy for gold and yet they don’t realize the severe environmental impacts of this metal whose main purpose is to show off. We should practice Aparigraha and shun the use of gold and diamonds.

Here are some actions you can take. Consider the environment rather than your ego in your actions and purchasing decisions. Don’t use bottled water or single-use shopping bags. Become vegan like President Bill Clinton and Vice President Al Gore. Buy green electricity. Make sure your next car is an electric one or at least a plug-in hybrid.

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