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Are Cows the New SUV?

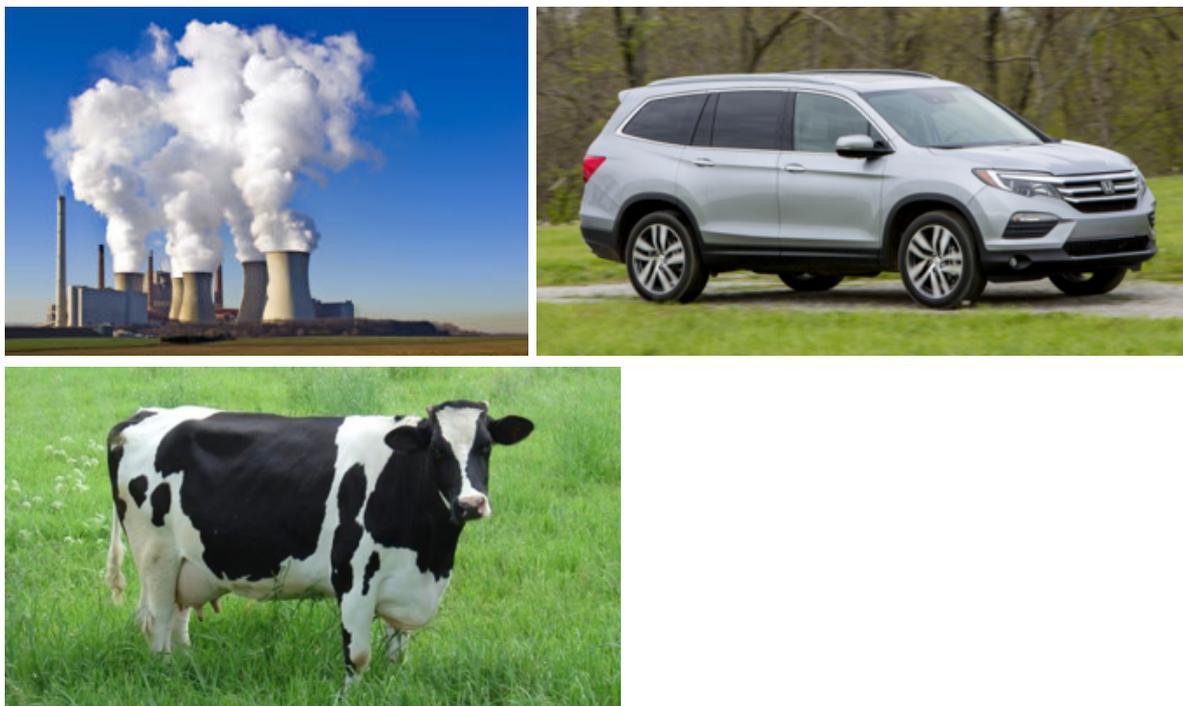
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Written by [Ameg](#), Last modified on [November 4, 2016](#)



A landmark 2009 study by leading environmentalists proclaims that “The single largest contributor to greenhouse gas emissions globally is livestock. It’s not automobiles, it’s not power plants, it’s livestock.”[1] What is the meat manufacturing industry doing to tackle this issue?



Are you willing to pay 330 thousand dollars for a juicy burger? A little steep? Then perhaps 18 thousand dollars for a meatball? That's what you'd have to dish for a piece of lab "grown" meat. There are cheaper options out there, for 6 dollars one can find veggie burgers produced by Beyond Meat. Will we be the first and last generation that eats meat every day, as one industry leader proclaims?[2]

The trend towards meat substitutes is in large part due to the growing awareness of the environmental repercussions of the \$85 billion US meat industry.[3] A recent Oxford study projects that by 2050, food-related greenhouse gas emissions could account for half of the emissions the world can afford if global warming is to be limited to less than 2°C. Adopting global dietary guidelines would cut food-related emissions by 29%, vegetarian diets by 63%.[4]

These are trends that may be hard for the meat industry to ignore. Perhaps the day that governments begin restricting emissions from cows in a similar manner to restrictions on automobiles is not far off. The US Government has announced a plan to reduce methane output from cattle by 25% by 2020.[5] Consumer awareness is another factor to consider. Today's consumers are willing to pay more for sustainable products and increasingly, people define themselves as flexitarians, actively cutting down meat consumption. Department of Agriculture data show that since 2002, beef consumption in the U.S. has fallen 11%. The alternative meat industry is outpacing the food industry as a whole in terms of annual growth,[6] as 70% of American meat eaters said to have used meat substitute at least once a week. Across the Atlantic, the German meat-substitute market is expected to grow 12% annually in the next 5 years, a pace far exceeding that of the meat industry.[7]

It appears that it may be in the best interest of meat manufacturers to rethink some of their operations. Tyson Foods is the largest meat processor in the United States[8] and Rugenwalder Muhle one of the largest in Germany. What are these two companies doing to tackle this issue and are they doing enough?

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One option is transferring to diets that increasingly rely on meat substitutes. Beyond Meat is a startup that aims to recreate meat using plants, they currently sell in over 11,000 stores in the US. Bill Gates, invested in the company after tasting a “chicken” taco with their product, “I couldn’t tell the difference. What I was experiencing was more than a clever meat substitute. It was a taste of the future of food.”^[9] Gates isn’t the only investor. In 2016, Tyson Foods became a part-owner of Beyond Meat. In Germany, Rugenwalder Muhle are taking an even stronger stance and have set a target of having at least 30% of sales come from its new meat substitute range by 2019.^[10]

For people more skeptic about meat alternatives the solution may lie in minimizing the emissions currently produced by cows. Research conducted over the last two decades has proven that selective breeding could cut emissions by as much as 25%.^[11] The genetic options is slow but results would be permanent. A shorter term solution may be the cows’ diet. Experiments with diets have led to reductions in methane emissions of up to 70%.^[12] Results are still inconsistent and the sweet-spot of reduction, economic feasibility and cow health concerns is yet to be found. Finally, scientists in Argentina have prototyped what some, quite simply, refer to as “fart-packs”. These devices attached to a cow capture enough emissions over a day to run a car for 24 hours.



An additional solution could be found in the 100 pounds of manure a cow produces per day, which account for 10% of methane emissions in the US.^[13] Methane digesters, capture methane from the air and use it to generate electricity. As of 2015, less than 240 such digesters were operated in US farms, of which there are approximately 2 million.^[14] These digesters produced enough electricity to power 70,000 homes.

Advancing sustainability in the meat industry appears to be a case where the interests of the manufacturers and environmentalists converge. However, the global industry leaders are not playing a big part in researching and implementing solutions. Sooner or later the industry could find itself under fire and with the stakes so high, it may be time for its leaders to take an active stance in exploring and advancing possible solutions.

(771 words)

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[13] [ibid](#)

[14] [ibid](#)

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Sink or Swim: Saving Florida's \$89.1 Billion Tourism Industry [1]

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Can Florida rise to the occasion before the sea-levels do?

By 2100, the global sea-level is projected to rise by 3 feet [2]. While this may sound insignificant, for a state like Florida, which has a low-level coastline, the effects can be devastating on its coastal cities and tourism industry.

With 105 million visitors in 2015 [3], Florida is one of the top travel destination in the world. And let's face it, who doesn't want to spend time on Miami's South Beach, soaking up the sun, or in the Everglades, exploring the tropical wetlands? But as our planet gets warmer, how will that impact some of America's top vacation destinations?