

# POTTSTOWN CITIZENS FOR Enlightened LEADERSHIP

## Give up meat?

Last week, we discussed efforts by Pottstown High School students to discourage food waste.

Growing food consumes an enormous amount of water and energy, and yet a third of the food raised or prepared on this planet is wasted.

According to experts, reducing food waste is one of the most effective ways humans can protect the environment.

Next in importance is reducing meat consumption — or as nutritionists put it, eating a plant-rich diet.

Eating meat might be tasty, but from the perspective of human and environmental health, it's a custom whose time has passed.

Americans eat about 220 pounds of meat per person annually. To do this, we grow and kill nearly 10 billion animals a year (yes, that's billion with a "b"). There are many reasons this is a bad idea.

The first one is animal cruelty. All animals are sentient creatures. They experience fear, they feel pain, and many live very short lives in brutal confinement.

Another is efficiency. We use two to five times as much grain to feed animals that we then kill and eat than to obtain the same amount of healthy calories from simply eating the grain ourselves.

Animals raised in factory farms are routinely injected with antibiotics, which leads to antibiotic-resistant bacteria that threaten human health.

There's overwhelming evidence that eating meat is a disaster for planetary health, especially as the amount of meat being eaten worldwide is skyrocketing. Per capita consumption has doubled since the

1960s, and will likely double again by 2050, when the world population will top 9 billion.

Already, nearly a third of the world's ice-free land is directly or indirectly involved in raising animals for food, according to the United Nations. Livestock and poultry are major generators of greenhouse gases — largely because of animal manure, but also because of the tropical rainforests cut down to provide grazing land and crops to feed animals.

Moreover, an astronomical amount of water is needed for livestock production. For example, one ton of beef requires 4 million gallons of water to produce. And as climate change alters weather patterns and the human population grows, the United Nations predicts that within 15 years, the world will only have 60 percent of the water it needs.

At present, all these compelling arguments carry little weight in a nation of confirmed meat eaters. Considering that only 5 to 10 percent of Americans are vegetarians, trying to wean more people off meat might seem like mission impossible.

But the same could have been said of cigarettes five decades ago, when the Surgeon General first linked smoking to lung cancer. Years of public service campaigns have reduced the ranks of smokers from 42 percent in 1965 to just 12 percent today.

We know the planet cannot sustain raising and killing tens of billions of animals globally every year.

It would be politically impossible for the school district to stop serving meat. But could we cut back a little?

*Tom Hylton is a member of the Pottstown School Board. However, the views expressed are his alone and not the board's.*



Commentary by  
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**AMERICANS eat 8 billion chickens every year.**