

Ashfield News June 2023

As summer begins in earnest this month's energy committee article will touch on two summer-related subjects: The Energy committee's summer farmer's market booth and the "Climatarian Diet."

Energy Committee Farmer's Market Booth

One of the Energy Committee's goals is to assist/support our town in reducing our carbon footprint by helping residents implement energy efficiency measures and make the transition to renewable energy. We have been sharing information in these monthly Ashfield News Articles and inviting residents to contact us with questions. We know many people might like an opportunity to ask questions/ get information in person so we will be at the farmer's market once a month with materials to hand out and will invite local contractors and representatives from agencies promoting clean energy to come be available to talk to people. The Dates we will be at the market 9am-1pm will be May 27, June 24, July 29, August 26, September 30 and October 28. Let us know if there is particular information you are looking for and we will do our best to help you find it! The June booth will offer information, recipes, and even samples of food that is less impactful on climate change.

Eating to Reduce Climate Change

I have often wondered, here in Western Massachusetts, what is the best way to eat to prevent climate change? Agriculture is estimated to contribute 30% of global greenhouse gas emissions. Where do those emissions come from? Only about 10% of them are from fossil fuel use in farm equipment or in transportation of food. Much of them come from clearing of forests for agricultural land, methane from livestock and rice production, and nitrous oxide from fertilizing or burning croplands.

One way to reduce climate change is to **waste less food**. It is estimated that up to 40% of food in the US is wasted. Obviously if the production of food causes greenhouse gas emissions, wasting less food will reduce those emissions. Also, if food goes to the landfill and rots it creates methane, a powerful greenhouse gas. The World Wildlife fund reports "about 6%-8% of all human-caused greenhouse gas emissions could be reduced if we stop wasting food. In the US alone, the production of lost or wasted food generates the equivalent of 32.6 million cars' worth of greenhouse gas emissions."

What can we do? Plan your shopping and food preparation so you buy only what you need. Freeze leftovers for another meal or feed them to your chickens! Compost food scraps at home. Composting reduces methane emissions AND adds organic matter to the soil which improves carbon sequestration.

I think we have all heard that eating **less meat** is good for the planet. One reason is that vegetarian foods don't take as much land, fertilizer, and water to grow the same amount of food. The other is that cows produce a lot of methane as they digest their food! Methane is a powerful greenhouse gas, so reducing beef intake even in favor of other meats is good. Chicken has ¼ the GHG emissions as beef. Vegetarian protein sources have 1/10 the emissions as beef. And vegetarian options have improved drastically in recent years, with plant based burgers almost indistinguishable from beef burgers in some cases.

Another solution for meat lovers is to eat wild meat such as venison or turkey. **Hunting** is definitely a more climate-friendly way to get ones meat. "We have to grow the cattle to have beef, so you're *adding* methane to the atmosphere with every steak. But the deer are wild, so you're *subtracting* methane with every steak.(Washington Post, 2021)" There are a lot of people in Ashfield who like to hunt and the Ashfield Rod and Gun Club provides classes for anyone who would like to learn.

Of course trying to eat more **local food** and seasonally is also good for the planet. If we can get our apples from Ashfield rather than having them shipped from New Zealand of course that uses less fuel. Did you know many farmers will sell you bulk amounts of veggies to freeze and eat all winter long? Or to store in your basement. Winter squash, Carrots, Potatoes, Onions- all store well. We are so lucky with all the amazing food we can get around here and with a little effort we can take it from eating locally in the summer months to all year long.

But what about when the 2 principles- eat less meat and eat locally clash? Is it better to eat tofu or veggie burgers made with soybeans grown in Iowa, or beef from here at home? What happens to local farmers if we were to stop buying their beef? The fact is the hill towns of New England are generally better for grazing than for crops, and that open grazing land is important for carbon sequestration. For farm or grazing land to stay open and not be sold for development, the farmer needs to be able to make a living from the land. And for that to happen we need to buy local!

The Northeast Organic Farmers Association (NOFA) discusses this topic in terms of degenerative, sustainable, or **regenerative farming practices**: practices which reduce soil carbon, hold it steady, or build it respectively. They say that it is possible for local grass-fed beef to be produced regeneratively through rotational grazing. They point to buying local as important not because of reducing food transport but because it allows us to be more informed about how our food is produced.

Regenerative agriculture or carbon farming is an approach which focuses on improving and revitalizing soil health by restoring the soil's carbon content and supporting the soil's essential microbiology. Regenerative practices include composting, low or no tillage, cover cropping, crop rotations and no pesticides or synthetic fertilizers.

All of the data emphasizes that we do need to start making changes in the way we eat but none of us needs to try for perfection. We can make significant changes in our global GHG emissions related to food if **we all make some changes**. If you are a meat heavy household try a vegetarian dinner once a week - "Meatless Mondays." Or switch from beef to chicken. Compost your food scraps. Buy local and talk with your farmers about their practices. Learn to hunt. All these small changes add up to a significant difference and this is a great time of year to start.

Contact the Energy Committee at energy@ashfield.org with suggestions, comments and questions. The Energy Committee meets monthly in lower town hall and on zoom. You are invited to attend a meeting. Propose ways to increase the use of clean energy and reduce our carbon footprint in Ashfield. Offer support for one of our projects. We truly welcome your input. Our next meetings will be Monday June 5 at 3:45pm and Monday July 10 at 3:45.

Resources:

<https://www.usatoday.com/story/life/health-wellness/2022/01/04/climate-change-diet-foods/9089189002/>

<https://www.carbonbrief.org/experts-how-do-diets-need-to-change-to-meet-climate-targets/>

<http://www.environmentreports.com/how-does-agriculture-change/#:~:text=We're trading enormous greenhouse,plane%2C and train on Earth.>

<https://www.nofamass.org/articles/2020/02/real-climate-change-mitigating-diet>

<http://climateactionnowma.org/regenerative-agriculture/>

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/food/2021/09/23/venison-eco-friendly-hunting/>