



How can food choices reduce your carbon footprint?

By John Hall and Dave Green

This is a common question from people as they become very aware of climate change and biodiversity loss and how these will impact on their futures.

Councils, Governments and International Treaties seek to address these massive issues with their rules and regulations – Martlesham Parish Council along with East Suffolk Council have declared Climate Emergencies and the UN has had its latest Climate Conference COP26 in Glasgow. However, they are powerless to act without the support of us all being prepared to do our bit.

Of the many things we can choose to do some will be more worthwhile than others. To help us understand what benefit the planet gets from our efforts I will refer to the Carbon Footprint Schedule developed by Prof Jules Pretty of the University of Essex. This explains that the carbon footprint of an average person is around 7.7 tonnes of carbon emissions per year. This includes the carbon dioxide emissions resulting from your food, powering your home, getting around by car or other transport, providing your clothes etc etc. The internationally accepted target is to reduce carbon emissions by 2050 and to do this the UK accepts that we must halve our emissions in the next 10 years. The aim is to reduce our average footprint from 7.7 tonnes to 3.85 tonnes in 10 years and to reduce it further to about 1 tonne in 30 years. This is an average, so some Suffolk people will already be below the 7.7 tonnes and others will be much higher, however, for most of us a massive reduction is required. (Some may argue that there is little point us doing anything in UK unless India and China and others also act – but we must remember that the great majority of people in these developing countries are currently at 2 tonnes emissions per person or less. We have a lot to do in Suffolk and we need to show leadership).

First let's look at the impact of your food choices. If you choose to go Vegan or Vegetarian, then this would reduce your average carbon emissions by about 0.9 tonnes or 0.7 tonnes respectively. This is because rearing animals results in much greater carbon emissions than growing plants.

Not all of us will choose to go Veggie, but we can achieve a similar reduction of 0.9 tonnes by eating less meat and ensuring that we eat meat and vegetables that are grown or produced locally or at least in the UK. To achieve this you will have to buy direct from local farms or check the labels carefully in the supermarket or grow some food yourself in your garden or allotment. Buying local food may well cost you a bit more and growing food will take a bit more of your time, but they are both very satisfying and very good choices to help the planet. There is a big difference between buying food grown locally and buying those from Spain, Kenya or Peru, which then must be transported by airfreight.

If you choose to eat fish, then look out for the Marine Stewardship Council blue tick label (MSC) or check the Good Fish Guide online (this is kept up to date by Marine Conservation Society MCS). Both will show you which fish are sustainably sourced with minimal damage to fish stocks and the environment – good choices for the planet.

The two other main ways you can reduce your carbon emissions in relation to food is:

- 1) Reduce food waste. It is estimated we throw away 1/3 of food bought
- 2) Improve your cooking equipment. When the time comes to change your pans or cooker then think about the planet. If you invest in an induction hob and good pans with good lids, these can reduce your electricity use and hence your carbon emissions by up to 0.7 tonnes within one year.

With those choices relating to food, you can reduce your carbon footprint by at least 1.5 tonnes. That is a good start.