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How **green**
are you?



Taking a Bite Out of the Environment, One Meal at a Time

BY CAROLINE A. FISHER | CONTRIBUTING WRITER

A basic necessity of life, food is our obsession, joy and curse, and can also leave a carbon footprint bigger than Bigfoot's. Juicy steaks, sweet watermelon, homemade bread and macaroni and cheese—we all have our favorite food and rarely, if ever, think about the impact any of them have on our environment. But if even if you don't have the time, resources, energy, or money to buy a hybrid vehicle or stay at eco-friendly hotels, you must eat, and everything you eat has a footprint—and the more you know about the size of that footprint, the more informed your food choices will be.

Why does your food footprint matter? Despite all of the advertising about hybrid vehicles and reusable grocery bags, it is our food choices that are the least expensive and simplest means of keeping our environment healthy. Nearly 1/5 of human-produced greenhouse gas pollution comes from animal agriculture, way more than that produced by automobiles. (Animal agriculture includes both animals and the feed they eat.) Producing grain includes the effects of the fertilizer made to grow the feed; the farm's energy usage; transporting the feed; transporting the animals from farm to food lot; processing the animals, and even changes in land use.

THE BIG, FAT LOWDOWN

A carbon footprint is simply a way to measure how our daily activities impact the environment, particularly climate change. According to carbonfootprint.com, our footprint measures the amount of greenhouse gases produced through burning fossil fuels for electricity, heating and transportation, etc. The more emissions produced, the larger our "footprint." On average, Americans produce 22 tons of carbon dioxide per year, per person.¹

While you're chewing on the ramifications of your next meal, consider the following global environmental impacts of meat production:

- Every year, Americans grow and kill nearly 10 billion animals for food.²

- A meal of meat, grain, fruit, and vegetables accounts for 4 to 17 times as much petroleum if it comes from afar than if a consumer buys the ingredients locally, according to a recent Worldwatch Institute report. The fuel burned to transport and refrigerate that food contributes to global warming.
- Twenty percent of the world's total carbon accumulation is generated by raising animals for food.³
- A 2006 United Nations report assessing livestock raising and its impact on the environment determined that up to 45 percent of the global budget of water (direct and indirect, such as water to grow feed crops) is used in food production.⁴ The same report found that belching livestock and the nitrous oxide gases from their decomposing manure and other factors, including the energy needed to store and transport meat, are responsible for 18 percent of greenhouse gas emissions - more than the entire transportation sector.
- There are approximately 65-96 million Americans who claim to eat at least three meatless meals a week and around 5 million Americans who are vegetarian (eat dairy products, but no meat).⁵

The take-home message from these facts is that as citizens of this earth and as citizens of Oklahoma, we can make a significant impact on carbon emissions simply by choosing to eat the food that is grown closest to our homes and by balancing our consumption of meat with nonmeat foods such as vegetables, grains, legumes and fruit.

OKLAHOMA'S FARM CONNECTION

The state of Oklahoma boasts more than 86,000 farms, indicating its citizens have a vested interest in their land. Almost half of those farms are 1 to 99 acres in size, with a yearly income of less than \$10,000, and

nearly 90% of those farms are family-owned and operated.⁶ Oklahoma farmers are ranked first in the production of rye; we're the fifth highest producers in the nation in the production of winter wheat, pecans and grain sorghum; sixth in peanuts, 15th in watermelons and 22nd in peaches, so we have plenty of food resources.⁷ Problem: these foodstuffs do not meet all Oklahomans' nutritional needs, so most of our food travels an average of 1,300 miles before it arrives in our local grocery store. Statistics aside, common sense tells us the less distance our food travels, the fresher it will be and less fossil fuels will be emitted. Solution: buying locally from our Oklahoma farmers' markets helps our local economy, and at the same provides consumers with fresher, more nutritious food.

Your grocery habits can offset these transportation emissions—that's the advantage of purchasing local food products. For instance, food co-ops offers monthly delivery of locally produced, all-natural and/or certified organic food products, including bakery items and farm implements. Members pay a one-time membership fee and then pay only for the items they want: artisan soaps, whole pigs, wheat, honey, jams and of course, vegetables. The advantages to buying from a food co-op are many: local producers receive the majority of the profit; consumers receive fresher products; the monies stay local; community relationships are formed and reinforced; businesses network; and transportation costs and emissions are greatly reduced.

WHAT'S YOUR FOOD FOOTPRINT?

Discover your food footprint by entering "calculate food footprint" in the search bar of your internet browser. From there, you can determine what steps you can take to ensure you are enjoying the best food for your family. For information on local items such as baked goods, seeds, garden implements and of course, jams, vegetables and meats, visit the Oklahoma Food Cooperative at <http://www.oklahomafood.coop/>.

The Kerr Center for Sustainable Agriculture also has a wealth of resources about food for Oklahomans (<http://www.kerrcenter.com/resources/organic-agriculture.htm>). You can also become an "Oklavore" by learning where your local farmers' markets are located and how to incorporate environmentally-conscious food decisions by reading the 2-page brochure at <http://www.kerrcenter.com/pdf/Oklavore-web.pdf>.

1 sarasota.extension.ufl.edu/AG/FoodChoiceCarbon.pdf

2 <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/01/27/business/worldbusiness/27iht-meat.1.9525251.html>

3 <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=89808292>

4 The report, entitled *Livestock's Long Shadow: Environmental Issues and Options* is available at the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations website at <http://www.fao.org/>.

5 The Vegetarian Resource Group at (<http://www.vrg.org/nutshell/market.htm>)

6 <http://www.ers.usda.gov/StateFacts/OK.htm>

7 www.agclassroom.org

DIY Dryer Balls

BY ANNA SMITH

You may never have to buy dryer sheets again and you can reduce energy use by up to 50% with this fun project. Wool dryer balls are easy to make, and can be a unique way to be just a little bit more green.

Start by using an old 100 % wool sweater. If you don't have one in your discard pile, check at the local thrift shop. Cut the sweater apart and cut out all seams. Roll sections lengthways, and cut into one inch strips. In our example, a child's small sweater produced three 9-inch dryer balls.

Make a sachet with your favorite dried scent (we used lavender) and begin wrapping the sweater strips around until it becomes a softball-sized sphere.

Slip the ball into the toe of an old pair of pantyhose and tightly knot. Then wash in hot water, with towels or alone, and run through a drying cycle. Repeat this process 2-3 times before removing from pantyhose in order to felt the wool into a sturdy fabric. Felting is the process by which heat, moisture and pressure are used to open, and combine wool fibers into fabric.

Remove ball from hosiery and wrap in 100% wool or felting yarn. Be creative with your colors and read labels carefully, as cotton or other blends will not felt. One spool should produce 3 dryer balls.

Place back inside panty hose, knot, and repeat the hot water wash and dry cycle 2-3 times to solidify final dryer ball. Remove from hosiery and you are done! Your balls will continue to felt with each further load.



Use 3-4 dryer balls in each load of laundry to soften fabric, remove static cling, cut drying time in half, and smell wonderful!