

## **Loma Prieta's Food Guidelines In Accord with United Nations Report** by Kay Bushnell

The Loma Prieta Chapter's decision to serve plant-based food at catered chapter-sponsored events occurred just as the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) released an alarming report, "Livestock's Long Shadow," (<http://www.fao.org/ag/magazine/0612sp1.htm>.) The 400-page publication links the rearing of livestock to today's most serious environmental problems. It calls the livestock sector (beef cattle, pigs, sheep and other animals raised for meat) a "major player" in affecting climate change through greenhouse-gas production, generating "more greenhouse gas emissions as measured in CO2 equivalent — 18 percent — than transport."

In addition, the report concludes that livestock rearing consumes 8 percent of global water use by humans, mainly for irrigation of feed crops, and contaminates water supplies with manure, antibiotics, hormones, chemicals from tanneries, and pesticides from feed crops. Livestock production dominates the land use of our planet, says the FAO. Twenty six percent of the earth's land is used for grazing and a third of all arable land is used to produce feed crops for livestock. Gone are the forests and wildlife from much of the land now utilized for livestock. In Latin America alone, livestock graze on seventy percent of previously rainforested land in the Amazon.

According to the FAO, the United States is leading the world in harmful meat-eating habits by consuming 38.5 million tons of meat per year. Unless eating habits change, the report predicts that global meat production will double by 2050. Henning Steinfeld, Chief of the FAO'S Livestock Information and Policy Branch, says that "urgent action is required to remedy the situation." The message in the report is clear. Humans can do more to reduce global warming emissions by adjusting their meat eating habits than by switching to driving the most fuel-efficient car currently on the market.

The good news is that scientific data in support of a plant-based diet have begun to motivate behavioral change. At the same time, it is disturbing to hear that environmentally harmful eating habits are expanding in some cultures where a large portion of the population has traditionally consumed a mostly plant-based diet.

For example, McDonald's reports that it plans to have 1000 locations operating by the opening of the 2008 Olympic games in Beijing. It describes China as its "number one growth opportunity." Serendipitously for McDonald's, China is also the world's fastest-growing country for automobile ownership. The fast food company recently signed an agreement with Sinopec Corp., China's largest gas station operator, to install drive-through McDonald's at its gas stations, thus linking China's increasing use of automobiles with its growing consumption of meat. Unfortunately, the linkage is likely to compound this fast-developing nation's contributions to global warming.

Another impediment to global dietary sustainability stems from cultural traditions. In some developing countries the ownership of cows or other livestock confers prestige. Yet another obstacle to reducing meat consumption occurs in cultures where serving meat has traditionally raised the status of those who provide it. In America consumption of meat and the taste for it is a longstanding habit. This habit is fueled by powerful special interests that ensure subsidies for animal foods and promote meat and dairy products in corporate-sponsored advertising. Awareness of these cultural and political obstacles and sensitivity in addressing them are required in efforts to encourage sustainable food choices.

As individuals we each can set an example, whether we start by eating one or two meatless meals a week or by deciding to “go plant-based” all at once. In addition to feasting on plant-based foods at our chapter’s events we can base our everyday meals on fresh vegetables, fruits, legumes, grains and nuts. How fortunate we are to live near some of the most productive cropland in the world. Local farmers’ markets are held in most Bay Area communities and offer shoppers an abundance of seasonal vegetables and fruits, many grown organically. We couldn’t be in a better place for making sustainable food choices.

If we like our food super-fresh and seasonal, another option to consider is a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) project. During the growing season a CSA project will deliver fresh, locally grown, organic produce to us each week. CSA members typically pay a modest sum by the week, month, or season for this timesaving delivery service.

One last thought: when it comes time to give to projects that alleviate hunger, it’s worth looking for charities that promote sustainable plant-based programs to feed the hungry and poor.

The resources listed below and in the last column of “Cooking Green” can help to answer questions we may have about sustainable plant-based food choices.

#### **RESOURCES:**

**Are you in charge of providing food for a Chapter event?** Contact the Chapter office at 650-390-8411 or [loma.prieta.chapter@sierraclub.org](mailto:loma.prieta.chapter@sierraclub.org). Help us to increase our list of caterers, menus, and food evaluations from past Chapter events.

**Looking for a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) project?** Visit <http://www.localharvest.org> to find a CSA farm near you (both organic and non-organic) organized by county. Information includes farming practices, delivery costs and arrangements.

**Do you want to take a plant-based cooking class?** Visit [www.bayareaveg.org](http://www.bayareaveg.org) and [www.compassionatecooks.com](http://www.compassionatecooks.com)

**Looking for a recipe from a past issue of the Loma Prietan?**

[www.sierraclub.org/sustainable\\_consumption/recipes](http://www.sierraclub.org/sustainable_consumption/recipes)

**Suggested cookbooks:** Tip: Before purchasing a cookbook scan the recipes. Keep in mind that truly sustainable recipes are 100% plant-based. Some popular cookbooks:

*Vegan Vittles* by Joanne Stepaniak

*The Peaceful Palate* by Jennifer Raymond

*Sweet and Natural* by Meredith McCarty