

How Does Eating Meat Affect Your Water Footprint?

<https://www.onegreenplanet.org/animalsandnature/how-does-eating-meat-impact-your-water-footprint/>

You care about the world's precious water resources: you turn off the faucet when you're brushing your teeth and you definitely don't take twenty-minute long showers. While these acts, along with the use of appliances that save water like toilets and shower heads, are fantastic ways to conserve water ... if you really want to make a difference with water conservation, then there is a bigger piece of the puzzle to consider.

Every food and beverage product we consume: from soda to pineapples to cheese crackers and pork chops, etc. requires water for its production. Obviously, fruits and veggies need water. That's a given, but surprisingly, there is another group of foods that is the biggest water guzzler of them all and that is animal products. Meat, dairy, and eggs require more water to "produce" than any other food out there.

So exactly how does eating these products increase your water footprint? Here's the scoop!

The Average Family

According to the United States Environmental Protection Agency, an average family of four uses about 400 gallons of water a day for various indoor activities, including taking showers, washing dishes, doing laundry and flushing the toilet. This statistic, however, doesn't even begin to take into consideration how our food consumption affects our water footprint. If each member of this hypothetical family of four ate a cheeseburger for dinner, the household's water consumption that day would shoot up to over 7000 gallons, depending on the size of the burgers, the amount of cheese, etc. Why is this?

Water Consumption in Animal Agriculture

The very fact that animals raised for food are alive means they are going to consume water, either directly or through their food. Think about how much you eat and then think about a cow's appetite. They eat a lot – and we eat a lot of animals!

Farmed animals eat 70 percent of the grains and cereals grown in the United States and those grains have to be watered to grow! In fact, it takes 100 calories of grain to produce three calories worth of beef. And it requires 1,799 gallons of water to produce one pound of meat. To put that into perspective, an average U.S. swimming pool contains 22,500 gallons of water. A swimming pool worth of water would produce 12 pounds of beef. Let's say one 1,000-pound steer yields 610 pounds of beef. That means a swimming pool worth of water is required to produce just two percent of that steer's beef. Or to produce all 610 pounds of beef, 49 swimming pools worth of water or over one million gallons.

According to the American Meat Institute itself, in 2012 America produced 26 billion pounds of beef. So, it took roughly 65 trillion gallons of water to produce beef in 2012. And that is just beef.

How Animal Agriculture Affects Your Overall Water Footprint

So, what does all this mean in terms of an individual's water footprint? Unsurprisingly, our food and beverages make up about half of our personal water footprints. Fortunately, each one of us can make a huge impact by simply rethinking our diet.

Just imagine if everyone cut their meat consumption by one-third. If you eat one-third less meat, then you use one-third less water. We could go even further and cut our meat consumption in half and the impact would be that much greater. The truth is, whether you decide to eat less meat or you abstain from it all together, we all can make a big difference on our individual water footprint with the power of our forks and knives.

As the leading organization at the forefront of the conscious consumerism movement, it is One Green Planet's view that our food choices have the power to heal our broken food system, give species a fighting chance for survival, and pave the way for a truly sustainable future.

By choosing to eat more plant-based foods, you can drastically cut your carbon footprint, save precious water supplies and help ensure that vital crop resources are fed to people, rather than livestock. With the wealth of available plant-based options available, it has never been easier to eat with the planet in mind.