

Think local, seasonal and organic to keep family and planet safe

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Last Updated: 03rd December 2016 01:49 AM | A+ A A- |

California was in the news this week as it took its fight against global warming to the farm! Greenhouse gases produced by dairy cows and other livestock will soon be under the scanner as the 'Methane Law' was passed in the State.

The new law aims to reduce methane emissions from dairies and livestock operations to 40% below 2013 levels by 2030. This is going to be implemented by developing regulations, which will soon be enforced. So how does the food and dairy industry impact global warming and climate change exactly?

Globally, food accounts for 48% of the environmental impacts on land and 70% on water resources. This covers dairy, meat and other processed food all of which are increasing rapidly as countries develop and the incomes rise. A sustainable food cycle involves distribution, transportation, preservation and of course organic farming.

Large scale industrial agriculture impacts land and environment through declining water tables, chemical leaching, chemical runoff, soil erosion, land degradation, loss in biodiversity, and other ecological concerns. A more sustainable means of acquiring food is to purchase locally and seasonally grown fruits and vegetables. Doing so minimizes the carbon footprint by optimizing transport and stimulating the local economy.



Push cart with vegetables

Local, small-scale farming operations typically utilise more sustainable methods of agriculture than conventional industrial farming systems. Decreased tillage, nutrient cycling, fostered biodiversity and reduced chemical pesticide and fertilizer applications all contribute positively to the environment.

These vegetables and fruits are also grown and harvested within their suitable growing season. Thus, seasonal food farming does not require energy intensive greenhouse production, extensive irrigation, plastic packaging and long-distance transport from importing non-regional foods.

Local, seasonal produce is typically fresher, unprocessed and therefore proves to be more nutritious. It won't require chemicals for preservation or plastic wrapping which is usually the case for long-distance shipping and handling of produce.

Organic farming is a rapidly emerging trend in the sustainable food industry. As per the definition of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) — “organic farming is a system which avoids or largely excludes the use of synthetic inputs (such as fertilisers, pesticides, hormones, feed additives etc) and to the maximum extent feasible rely upon crop rotations, crop residues, animal manures, off-farm organic waste and biological system of nutrient mobilisation and plant protection”.

It is described as an ecological production management system that promotes and enhances biodiversity, biological cycles, and biological activity in the soil. Techniques such as crop rotation, compost, green manure and biological pest control all are part of the organic farming framework. While it can be argued that farming in India has historically been organic

— it is safe to say that a majority of the produce in the country today contains some form of manufactured fertilizers, pesticides and that most dairy contains growth hormones in it.

We must be aware of where our food comes from, how its grown and harvested. When it comes to eating healthy and keeping the planet safe — think local, seasonal and organic for your home — fruits, vegetables, dairy and everything we consume!