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Opinion

Changing diet can help save the Earth

Cambridge market is a great source of fruit and vegetables.
Picture: Tom Bragg



When the world seems full of intractable problems, from climate change to Brexit, it is reassuring to know that the solution is often well under way without us noticing.

In the UK, one of the most hopeful trends in the fight against climate change has been about what we choose to eat. About 21 per cent of us say we are flexitarian. In other words, being mostly vegetarian, but occasionally eating meat or fish. One in 12 of us say we will be tucking into an entirely vegan or vegetarian Christmas meal this year.

This is an astonishing and really encouraging trend.

It is good news because nearly a sixth of the world's emissions of greenhouse gases are due to livestock. Forests are cut down to grow animal feeds or create grazing land. Ruminants, such as

cattle and sheep, produce lots of strong greenhouse gases both from the methane produced by the bacteria in their stomachs, and from their dung. Although chickens and pigs are less damaging than cattle and sheep, you only have to be downwind of a big industrial chicken shed for a moment to realise this isn't a good place to be.

A recent study showed that if meat and dairy production and consumption halved in the EU, and the missing calories were replaced by cereals, our health would improve (we would be eating the recommended amount of saturated fat and protein), there would be 25 per cent more space for nature, and greenhouse gas emissions from agriculture would drop by 25-40 per cent. We could also spend the money we saved on eating better, supporting animal welfare and buying healthier, tastier food.

The flexitarians are clearly onto a good thing: eating less but better meat and dairy, and more plants is clearly sensible.

Cambridge has to be one of the best places in the country to eat more plants. We're right next door to the Fens, which grow 37 per cent of all the vegetables produced in England. We have the wonderful Cambridge market selling fresh, cheap, local fruit and vegetables seven days a week.

Although going fully vegan seems pretty daunting, because it involves giving up all meat, dairy, fish and eggs, a group of us from Cambridge Carbon Footprint are giving it a go. We're taking part in 'Veganuary' and going vegan for the month of January to raise money to help CCF's work to fight climate change.

If you'd like to help, do join us, or do sponsor us at [justgiving.com/campaign/vegan4ccf](https://www.justgiving.com/campaign/vegan4ccf).