

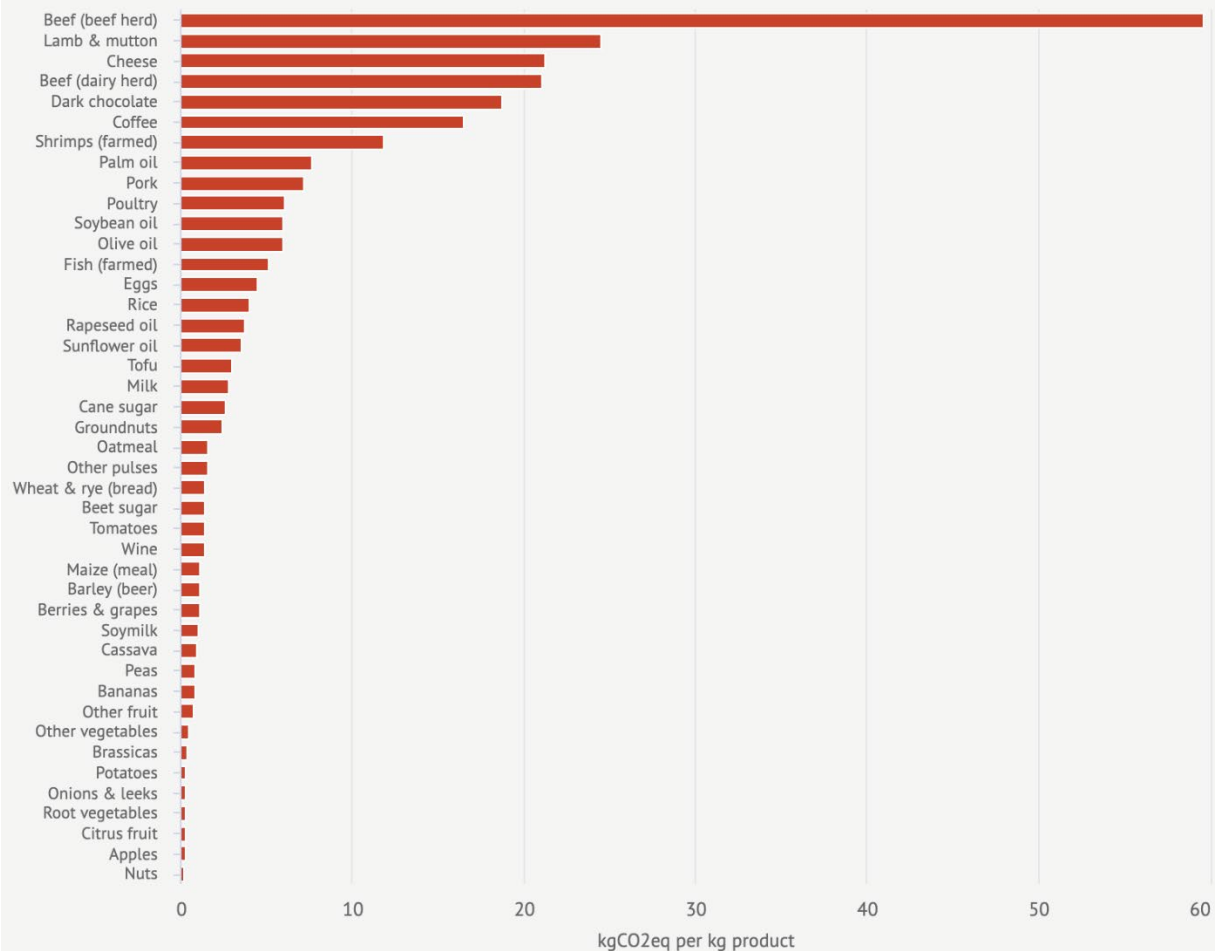
## **Eating a Healthy Diet Is Good for You and the Environment** by Walt Wojcik, a GROW Commissioner

While still working as a neurologist, I advised my patients to cut down and, if possible, avoid eating beef, lamb, and pork (all of these meats are from mammals, like us humans). Usually these conversations revolved around my patient having had a stroke or trying to minimize the risk of getting a future stroke. A change in diet was one of many strategies discussed. At the beginning of my medical career, medical scientists understood that humans had difficulty in breaking down mammalian fat. The fats found in avian species like chicken and turkey are more easily digested, while the fats from fish are even more digestible. Plant-based fats are also very healthy for humans to eat. The human body can eliminate ingested mammalian fat in various ways, but when fat is deposited along the inner arterial blood vessel wall, such deposits become a major contributing factor leading to strokes and heart attacks. Heart attacks are the leading cause of death in the USA, while ischemic strokes are the fourth most common cause of death.

More recently, medical science is now learning that our meaty mammalian diet including foods like dairy products (milk, cheese) and to some degree eggs from chickens, are related to obesity, diabetes, coronary artery (heart) disease, and strokes (1). Thus, a vegetarian diet is better than the usual American diet containing meat, but a vegan diet (plant based diet only, i.e. no dairy products or eggs) is now thought to be the best diet for humans. Such a diet can provide you with a longer and healthier life by up to 10 years (2).

In addition, the process of producing red meat is becoming an import factor in creating carbon dioxide and greenhouse gases that lead to global warming - see chart showing the carbon footprint of various foods taken from reference 3. "The food-supply chain is responsible for approximately 23% of all human-related greenhouse gas emissions, and (also) uses approximately 70% of the planet's consumptive freshwater withdrawals and nearly 40% of global land" (4, 5). To make matters worse, the food industry created foods that are now known to be unhealthy. **For example, healthy plant based foods include: whole grains, beans, nuts, fruits and vegetables. Whereas, foods that are unhealthy include: ultra-processed foods, refined grains, fruit juices, and foods with added sugar.** Lastly, a recent report documents that a plant based diet is 16% cheaper and more nutritious than the usual American diet containing meat (6).

## Animal-based foods tend to have a larger carbon footprint



Thus, GROW is providing both vegetarian and vegan recipes for you to try. For nearly twenty years, my wife and I have been vegetarian, but now we are trying more vegan recipes. I understand that changing your diet to plant based foods may not be easy. To ease into this change, consider eating meatless meals on 1 to 3 days of the week. As a physician, I wish you a long and healthy life on a clean Earth and a better life from eating a plant based diet.

## References

1. Barnard, *Good Medicine* Vol 33, No 1, p 6-9, 2024.
2. Shad Clark, <https://thehumaneleague.org/article/plant-based-life-expectancy> May 2022
3. <https://search.app/V4ybYq3NLbkYP4cA9> Interactive: What is the climate impact of eating meat and dairy? | Carbon Brief. Adapted from Dr. Hannah Ritchie/Our World in Data (2020)
4. Musius et. al. *Lancet Planet Health* Vol 6, p e892-900, 2022,
5. Poore et al. *Science* 360 p 987-92, 2018.
6. Kahleova et. al *Good Medicine* Vol 33, No 1, p 7, 2024.

## Recipe of the Month

This month's meatless meal works great for breakfast, lunch, or dinner! A hearty, but light meal perfect to weave into your weekly rotation. Adding at least one meatless meal a week adds yummy alternatives to your diet, and also makes huge positive impacts on our environment.

Have a plant-based recipe you'd like to share with the community? Send it to [GROW@westchester-il.gov](mailto:GROW@westchester-il.gov) for consideration for future newsletters.

### **Spinach and Leek Frittata**

makes about 4-6 servings

#### **Ingredients**

2 tablespoons of olive oil  
1 medium leek, roughly chopped (white and light green parts only)  
2 cloves of minced garlic  
½ teaspoon paprika  
2 cups of chopped spinach  
6 eggs, beaten  
¼ teaspoon salt  
3 ounces of Muenster cheese (grated or diced)  
Black pepper (add to your taste)

#### **Instructions**

- Add leek and garlic to hot oil in a medium broiler-safe skillet and saute over medium heat for 2-3 minutes until leeks are translucent. Add paprika and spinach, stirring until spinach has wilted.
- In a medium-sized bowl, mix salt, eggs, and cheese, before adding to skillet. Then gently mix all ingredients in skillet. Cover skillet and cook over low heat for 8-9 minutes until egg mixture has set.
- Place skillet under broiler for 2-3 minutes, until top browned and eggs completely cooked.
- Cool the frittata for a few minutes, slice and then serve with a sprinkle of freshly ground black pepper to taste.

Credit: Diet for a Small Planet (2021), by Frances Moore Lappe

Submitted by Walt Wojcik, GROW

## Quote of the Month

"To produce a pound of steak, which provides us with 500 calories of food energy, takes 20,000 calories of fossil fuel, expended mainly in producing the crops fed to livestock."

Credit: Diet for a Small Planet, Francis Moore Lappe, 2021