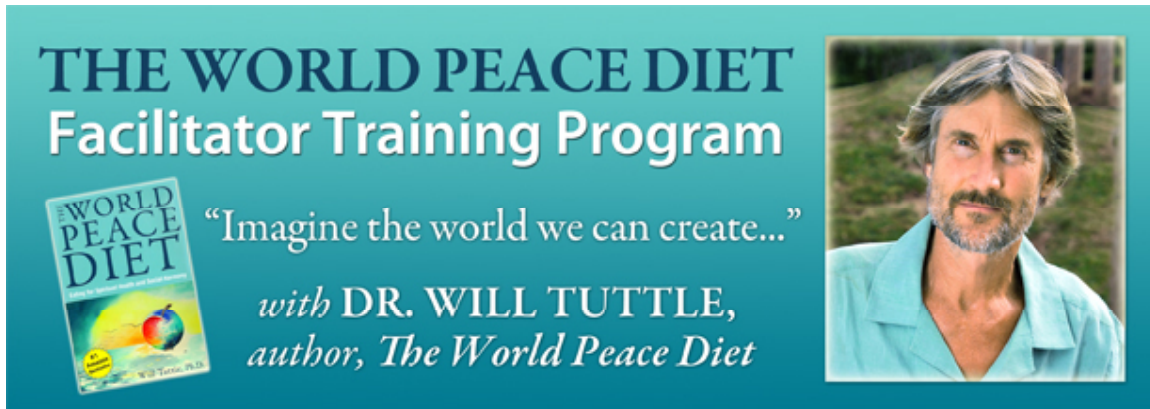




Module Five – Supplemental Reading

Want fries with that budget crisis?

Robert Singer | 02/21/11

<http://www.vegsource.com/news/2011/02/want-fries-with-that-budget-crisis.html>

Instead of cutting jobs and services to solve California's budget crisis, why not eliminate the state water subsidies that allow McDonalds and Colonel Sanders to market burgers and chicken for a dollar? Reducing the consumption of water by the livestock industry would benefit almost every economic facet of the California economy.

A recent analysis done by the Pacific Institute, "More with Less: Agricultural Water Conservation and Efficiency in California - A Special Focus on the Delta," was presented at a briefing to legislators in Sacramento along with recommendations on how farmers can grow more food and use less water. What the report doesn't mention is the dramatic water saving that could be realized by limiting livestock production in California.

Our federal and state governments subsidize the meat industry's water consumption at every stage of the process. Confined Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOs) consume particularly egregious quantities of water.

Cornell economists, David Fields and his associate Robin Hur, have studied the fiscal consequences of water subsidies to the meat industry:

"Reports by the General Accounting Office, the Rand Corporation, and the Water Resources Council have made it clear that irrigation water subsidies to livestock producers are economically counter productive. Every dollar that state governments dole out to livestock producers, in the form of irrigation subsidies, actually costs tax payers over seven dollars in lost wages, higher living costs, and reduced business income.

The 17 Western states receive limited precipitation, yet their water supplies could support an economy and population twice the size of their present ones. But most of the water goes to produce livestock, either directly or indirectly. Thus, current water use practices now threaten to undermine the economies of every state in the region."

You might think that all this water consumption would at least create jobs. But no other industry comes close to the meat industry's paucity of jobs created per gallon of water consumed. Every job created by livestock production in California uses 30 million gallons of water a year, far more than any other industry.

Economist Douglas McDonald estimates that if water subsidies were withdrawn from California livestock producers, the income of the state's other businesses and workers would rise over \$10 billion annually (1987 figures).

Other economists have exposed the cost of water subsidies to the meat industry that are hidden in the state's rising prices for water rights, and thus, housing. Fields and Hur calculate the overall price of subsidizing the California meat industry's water to be \$24 billion (1987 figures).

And if the health of the California economy is not enough to convince us to reduce or eliminate meat from our diet, consider that the beef industry produces millions of tons of carbon dioxide (CO₂) and methane per year--the two major greenhouse gases that together account for more than 90 percent of U.S. greenhouse emissions, substantially contributing to global warming.

Additionally, rainforests are being cut down to both pasture cows and grow soybeans to feed cows. Rainforests have been called the "lungs of the Earth" because they filter our air by absorbing CO₂ while emitting life-supporting oxygen. Many geophysicists have concluded that changing our meat-eating habits to a vegetarian diet would do more to fight global warming than switching from a gas-guzzling SUV to a fuel-efficient hybrid car. Quite simply, you can't be a meat-eating environmentalist.

The editors of World Watch state that "the human appetite for animal flesh is a driving force behind virtually every major category of environmental damage now threatening the human future — deforestation, erosion, fresh water scarcity, air and water pollution, climate change, biodiversity loss, social injustice, the destabilization of communities and the spread of disease." Lee Hall, the legal director for Friends of Animals, is more succinct: "Behind virtually every great environmental complaint there's milk and meat."

And although reducing meat production and consumption will not by itself solve California's budget crisis, it can solve the other California Crisis — WATER. Thanks to less than normal rainfall and a court order protecting the Delta Smelt, we not only hear the call for rationing but also the other "R" word: recycling. The world's supply of fresh water is disappearing at a terrifying rate, and we may soon have be drinking our toilet water. My comment to my water district when the subject of rationing comes up: "I am not willing to drink my toilet water to get a hamburger for a \$1.00."

The amount of water consumed because of America's meat habit is staggering. Over half the total amount of water consumed in the United States goes to irrigate land growing feed for livestock. Enormous additional quantities of water must also be used to wash away the animal's excrement. It would be hard to design a less water-efficient diet than the one we have to come to think of as normal. To produce a day's food for one meat-eater takes more than 4,000 gallons: for a lacto-ovo vegetarian, only 1,200 gallons; for a pure vegetarian, only 300 gallons.

Giving up that hamburger will not only improve the state economy and help defuse the budget crisis, it is the fastest, most effective way to make more water available for all Californians.