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Local News

Saturday, February 18, 2023

Stonington resident tries to eat with the climate in mind



Doug Rice grates carrots he purchased from a local farm for carrot cake at his home in Stonington Tuesday, December 20, 2022. Rice volunteers and collects food and donations for the New London Community Meal Center and focuses on eating sustainably in his home. (Sarah Gordon/The Day)

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December 29, 2022 2:37 pm

By **Bridget Shirvell**

Stonington —Pay attention while driving along Briar Patch Road, and you'll spy a food donation bin. Doug Rice set it outside his driveway to collect food for the New London Community Meal Center years ago.

"I have a bin at the top of our driveway for donations. I wanted to make it easier for people to donate if they have a bag of extra groceries and didn't want to drive to New London," Rice said.

Since semi-retiring and moving to southeastern Connecticut six years ago, the artist has cooked at the center two days a week, helping to prepare the 175 to 200 hot and nutritious meals that are prepared while also working to secure the ingredients he and other volunteers use to create those meals. Over the years, in addition to the driveway donation bin, Rice has forged connections with local restaurants and farms, getting many to donate food to the center regularly.

Creating those connections was a natural extension of Rice's own eating philosophy.

"I don't think of myself as a model of sustainability. I travel regionally for shows and to visit my mom and my daughter and due to my travel, my carbon footprint is higher than it could be, but I really try to get food local," Rice said. "I owned a construction company and as a builder, I wanted to see how everything was made so I went to the quarries and the factories. Now that I cook at the New London Community Meal Center I'm the same way with the food, I went to see how it's made."

It's no secret that food production significantly contributes to climate change. The most recent and comprehensive look at the



food system's overall role in the climate crisis suggests that the global food system is responsible for a third of all yearly global greenhouse gas emissions. The analysis, which includes not just agriculture but also packaging, transportation, and even agriculture-driven deforestation, was compiled by experts from the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), NASA's Goddard Institute for Space Studies, New York University, and Columbia University and published in Environmental Research Letters.

On an individual level, according to numerous studies on U.S. households, food accounts for anywhere from 10 to 30 percent of a household's total carbon footprint. Eating with the planet in mind is one of the most impactful things a person can do to mitigate the climate crisis. And no, you don't have to become a vegetarian or vegan, but you probably should eat less red meat and consider where it's coming from.

Knowing your food

Rice likes to see how the food he consumes is made, visiting local farms, orchards, oyster and kelp farms, and even seeing how meat is processed.

"I get grass-fed meat locally from JW Beef" in Stonington, said Rice, who is in the middle of working on a series of paintings on meat. "I went to his meat processing place as part of learning about where our food comes from, and I'm trying to educate people on it through my art."

According to the April 2022 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report, the scientific group that monitors and assesses the science of climate change, adopting a diet rich in grains, vegetables, and nuts, with moderate amounts of poultry and fish could have nearly as low of a carbon footprint as a vegetarian or vegan diet.

While Rice gets much of his fruit and vegetables from local community-supported agriculture programs and farmers' markets, he also grows blackberries, blueberries, sweet potatoes, potatoes, tomatoes, jalapenos, and more in multiple gardens at his home. Rice has also planted about 20 trees around his property.

Growing your food, no matter how small the garden, helps reduce greenhouse gas emissions from burning fossil fuels because that produce is walked to your kitchen instead of driven and doesn't require any plastic packaging. Gardening also provides hands-on lessons in resilience and adaptation, useful skills for living in a changing climate and is a way to reconnect with food and appreciate the people who regularly produce it. Plus, a myriad of studies show that people who garden eat more vegetables.

Gardening also tends to make people more aware of food waste. After all, when you see the work that goes into growing a potato, you don't want it to end up in the trash. According to the United Nations, a third of all food produced each year ends up in the trash. It would be easy to think the vast majority of this wasted food happens in restaurants, grocery stores, or even on farms, but in reality, the single largest source of food waste is residential homes. All that food waste is responsible for at least 6 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions.

When he has surplus produce, dried or canned goods, Rice tries to donate it to the New London Community Meal Center or the Pawcatuck Neighborhood Center.

No matter how well-prepared anyone is, though, there will still be some food waste. Rice composts what he can as another tool for reducing emissions. That's because composting is an aerobic process and does not produce methane, a greenhouse gas that organic materials emit when they decompose in oxygen-starved landfills. And then he can use that compost in the gardens, where he estimates in the past year he grew about a pound of potatoes and ended up with so many hot peppers that he gave away 36 pints of them.

"It's not a huge thing," he said, "but it's trying to live the best life we can."

5 tips for eating climate-friendly food

1. The most impactful single dietary change most can make to reduce the carbon footprint of their food is to reduce their meat and dairy consumption. Can you eat vegetarian one day a week? What about three? Or be a weekday vegetarian?
2. Eat a wide variety of foods. While some of us could happily eat salmon almost every day, when we choose to eat a variety of foods, we create demand for greater diversity of crops and are less reliant on a few ingredients helping to promote and preserve agricultural biodiversity.
3. Eat fewer ready-to-eat items. Do you know how the fresh, better-for-you food is typically on the outer perimeter of the supermarket? It's the same with better for the planet food. The less processed food you eat, whether ready-to-eat items, snacks or frozen meals, the lower your carbon footprint.



4. Reduce your food waste. Shop your fridge and pantry before going to the store or supermarket. Meal planning can also help to reduce food waste and composting can lower the carbon emissions of any wasted food.

5. Shop local. Buying local food when you can reduces food miles, which, while a small part of food emissions are still emissions. Plus, buying local helps the local economy and promotes biodiversity.

What changes - big or small - have you made to reduce your carbon footprint? Post in the comments of this article on theday.com or send an email to t.cotter@theday.com.

You can read all the articles [here](#).

READER COMMENTS

JOHN W BILL SHEEHAN December 30, 2022 at 17:02

[Report](#)

Mr. Foley is correct. There are few, if any, local government meetings this week. The above article is certainly more useful than the latest from the twice impeached former president.

Joseph B De La Cruz December 30, 2022 at 11:59

[Report](#)

Great article! Thank you for making a difference Doug.

Michael Foley December 30, 2022 at 11:38

[Report](#)

I suppose writing preachy feature stories is more fun than covering boring local Town Hall meetings or real events. Maybe there's just not much going on this week.

STEPHEN noneya December 30, 2022 at 09:55

[Report](#)

@Joanne Philbrick- I agree, and today's paper is a pretty much duplicate of yesterday's, maybe everyone got the week off?

George Tryon December 30, 2022 at 09:13

[Report](#)

Here are a few suggestions that have worked well in my life passed down from my parents who both went through hard times and managed to feed, clothe and shelter their large family. Some of the things they did was:

- 1) Dad's garden was the best. It yielded green beans, carrots, radishes, cucumbers, squashes, peas, beets, cabbage and potatoes.
- 2) Mom canned fruits and vegetables during the fall harvest.
- 3) Hand me down clothes were a norm. She -was a clever woman who made sure our clothes were clean and mended.
- 4) Mom made our school lunches. She wrapped the sandwiches in waxed paper, included was a piece of fruit and a sweet treat. All were then placed in a "lunch box"
- 4) Mom made meals that went a long way. Stews, soups, chilis, sauce and pasta, mac and cheese, meatloaf, open face sandwiches made from Sunday's roast beef or chicken.

My parents never complained about the things they couldn't afford. They made due with what they had.

I thank them for the examples they set.

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Here's some ideas that I found helpful:

Stretch a meal two different ways — chicken stew one day, chicken pot pie the next. Roast beef one day and open face sandwiches the next.

Prepare whole healthy meals instead of buying pre-packaged, chemically loaded foods.

Make a weekly menu, then make up a grocery list with the ingredients needed to prepare weekly meals.

Go through the pantry to make sure you aren't duplicating groceries that are not needed.

Buy the quantity needed to prepare meals – it's easy to buy a "little extra", but that usually ends up in the compost.

Know what the expiration dates are so you prepare meals within that time frame.

Don't throw out the leftovers but instead reheat, freeze or create another meal from the leftovers.



Salads, vegetables and less meat is a healthier way to eat.

Buying organic products grown locally rather than mass produced produce and meats.

Use reusable grocery bags

Instead of buying small bottles of water, think about a water cooler. You can also buy a water purifiers for tap water and fill up those reusable water bottles. If you have well water, even better.

LYNN SCHRODER December 30, 2022 at 07:07

Report

I value this type of content in my local newspaper. Thank you!

Joanne Philbrick December 29, 2022 at 18:22

Report

If the DAY wants me to continue with my paid digital subscription, you are going to have to come up with better news content. This is like the housing "crisis" all over again. There is real news out there. Dig a little deeper, please.

Paul NUNES December 29, 2022 at 17:09

Report

I'll go along with this carbon foot print nonsense as soon as China and India make some real strides.

I already try to buy local as much as possible.

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Editor's note: The Connecticut General Assembly website says the legislature "is considered to be part-time." The National



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