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Science

Coming soon: the global warming diet

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By Helene Labriet-Gross

San Francisco - A soon-to-be-published weight-loss book helps dieters reduce not just their intake of calories, but the negative impact of their food consumption choices on the environment.

In their new Global Warming Diet, American chef Laura Stec and climate change expert Eugene Cordero posit that it is not sufficient that a good meal be presentable and delectable - it must also be environmentally friendly.

"One of the most positive effects you can have on the environment begins on your dinner plate" - particularly in reducing one's carbon footprint, the authors maintain in promotional literature plugging their book.

The book, to be published next year, advocates "eating more local, more organic, adding more seasonal food, using less packaging, buying in bulk, growing your own food," Stec said.

While former United States vice president Al Gore's bestselling book and Oscar-winning documentary An Inconvenient Truth awakened Americans to the impending environmental crisis caused by global warming, it did not deal with the impact from food consumption choices - a huge oversight, according to the authors.

They said it takes 5,5kg of grain and about 9 500 litres of water to make just a half a kilogram of hamburger.

"When growing meat, you have to feed the cows," said Cordero.

"In the United States, we feed them corn, and corn is a very carbon-intensive crop to grow, because it's growing in a manner that requires a large amount of fertilisation because the land is nearly given no time to recover," the environment professor said.

A 1999 study by the Union of Concerned Scientists also found that eating too much beef and poultry and non-organic fruits and vegetables were the most harmful activities a consumer could engage in, with the exception of driving a gasoline-powered car.

The book advocates the use of sustainable agriculture and local family farming; eating more plant-based foods; reducing food waste through composting; limits on bulky packaging; and the use of fewer pesticides.

Stec and Cordero also rail against the ubiquitous plastic shopping bags, 30 billion of which are used each year in the United States, to say nothing of the 10 billion paper bags it takes some 14 million trees to make.

Only about one percent of Americans bring their own bags to the store when making their food purchases, they note.

And the environmentally conscious dieter also will buy foods in season, Stec said.

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"If you want to eat cherries in December, or tomatoes, they will be flown over from Australia," she said.

"We are not asking anything that is too crazy. We are asking to return to our roots, when we were paying more attention to our food, when we enjoyed food and spent a little time preparing it," she said. - Sapa-AFP

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