

A Muslim's Guide to Food & Climate Change



Kamran Shezad

An Introduction to Food & Climate Change

The Quran teaches us to not only enjoy the food Allah has provided for us but also to make sure we are not spreading 'corruption' on earth through our food habits. Despite this warning, there is growing evidence that the planet is being affected by our eating behaviours. Our demand for food, especially meat products, is damaging our planet as livestock is one of the biggest contributors to climate change.

Our eating habits and the way we produce, package and transport food around the world has a huge impact on the environment and is one of the leading causes of climate change. It is also a significant contributor to deforestation, biodiversity loss and declining water tables.

The biggest problem we face is the way meat is produced. Livestock uses approx. 70% of global agricultural land and contributes to 15% of global greenhouse gas emissions. It is also estimated that about five to seven kilograms of grain and 8000 litres of water is required to produce one kilogram of beef. The process is demanding on our planet's resources and requires a huge amount of energy and water to produce, process, and transport.

The Caliph Umar Ibn Al-Khattab (ra) warned against the excessive consumption of meat, advising people to "beware of meat - it has addictiveness like the addictiveness of wine." The Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) himself opted for a more balanced diet, eating dates, figs, grapes and other fruits and vegetables on a regular basis and only eating meat occasionally. Using the prophet's eating habits as an example, you can make changes to your own eating habits and help fight against climate change.

"Eat and drink from the provision of Allah, and do commit abuse on the earth, spreading corruption."

Surah Al Baqarah
(The Cow) 2:60

"The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: The son of Adam does not fill any vessel worse than his stomach. It is sufficient for the son of Adam to eat a few mouthfuls, to keep him going. If he must do that (fill his stomach), then let him fill one third with food, one third with drink and one third with air."

(Hadith – Tirmidhi)

What Can You Do?

1. Reduce the amount of meat you eat

By reducing the amount of meat you eat, you can have a tangible effect on the intensive farming of these animals –when we eat less meat, the demand for the product lowers and thus suppliers are less inclined to factory farm. This not only spares many animals from terrible conditions of factory farming but also lessens the amount of greenhouse gases emitted.

The Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) did not forbid the consumption of meat but himself lived on a relatively plant based diet. His diet consisted of dates, figs, grapes, milk, honey, olive oil, vinegar, watermelon, barley, pumpkin, squash and any other vegetables that were available



“A tailor invited the Messenger of Allah (PBUH) to a meal which he had prepared. Anas said: I went along with the Messenger of Allah (PBUH) and ate a meal of barley bread and soup containing pumpkin and dried sliced meat. Anas said: I saw the Messenger of Allah (PBUH) going after the pumpkin round the dish, so I have always liked pumpkins since that day.”

Hadith - Sahih Bukhari

Furthermore, the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) has warned about the dangers of consuming red meat to human health:

The Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) said
“The milk of the cattle contains healing, its fat is a medicine and its meat causes sickness”

(Tabrani)

2. Increase the amount of fruit and vegetables you eat

The production of plant-based foods generally causes fewer greenhouse gas emissions and eating more vegetable-based foods instead of meats decreases one's negative impact on the environment.

The Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) did not forbid the consumption of meat; indeed, he ate and appreciated it himself. However, meat does not appear to have been a daily or regular staple of his diet. Rather, he lived on a relatively plant-based diet, which included dates, figs, grapes, milk, honey, olive oil, vinegar, watermelon, barley, pumpkin, squash and other vegetables that were available. Authentic narrations also describe periods when his household went several days without eating meat, reflecting a simple and modest approach to food. His example therefore points towards moderation, gratitude, simplicity and avoiding extravagance in our consumption.

The Holy Quran says:

“ And the earth He has put down (laid) for the creatures. Therein are fruits, date palms producing sheathed fruit-stalks (enclosing dates). And also corn, with (its) leaves and stalks for fodder and sweet-scented plants. Then which of the blessings of your Lord will you both (jinn and men) deny? ”

Surah Ar Rahman (The Merciful) 55:10-16

There are significant health benefits to consuming a variety of fruit and vegetables every day.

- Fruit and vegetables are a good source of vitamins and minerals, including folate, vitamin C and potassium.
- They're an excellent source of dietary fibre, which can help to maintain a healthy gut and prevent constipation and other digestion problems. A diet high in fibre can also reduce your risk of bowel cancer.
- They can help to reduce your risk of heart disease, stroke and some types of cancer.

3. Fast like the Prophet (pbuh)

One of the benefits of fasting is that you reduce the burden on the planet to regularly provide food to fill your stomach. The Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) would fast twice a week:

Aishah (may Allah be pleased with her) said:

“The Prophet (peace be upon him) was keen to fast on Mondays and Thursdays”

(Tirmidhi)

Fasting was ordained upon Muslims over 1400 years ago but now scientists are agreeing that fasting can help prevent health problems such as high cholesterol, heart disease and obesity.

Apart from the month of Ramadan, and on Mondays and Thursdays, the Prophet (pbuh) would also fast on the 6 days of Shawwal, the white moon fasts, the day of Arafah and the days of Ashura.

One needs to bear in mind that, for it to be beneficial to the environment, fasting needs to lead to a reduction in your food consumption.

Imagine the positive impact we would make on the planet if 2 billion Muslims across globe followed the Sunnah and fasted on all the same days as Prophet Muhammad (pbuh).

4. Reduce the amount of food you waste

It may be surprising to some to discover that the average household wastes a staggering 30% of food that is bought. Food waste contributes to greenhouse gas emissions and wastes the water and other resources it takes to grow the food.

5. Avoid buying too much

One of the simplest ways to avoid food waste as a consumer is to buy less. A packed fridge may look appealing, but it may lead to food waste if the household cannot eat all of the food.

6. Think twice before throwing food away

Do not to throw out foods that are slightly past their prime, many fruit/vegetables may slightly soften when they are just past ripe. They still may make excellent additions to soups, smoothies, or baked dishes. ‘Best before’ dates can be misleading — if produce still appears fresh and usable, it is usually fine to eat it.



“Eat and drink but waste not by excess, for Allah does not love the wasters”

Surah Al Araf
(The Heights) 7:31



7. Make a shopping list

Buying foods that are already in the home can ultimately become another source of waste. Taking an inventory of the food in the house and making a grocery list before going to the store might help avoid purchasing unnecessary foods and cut back on potential waste.

8. Organise your kitchen

Organizing the fridge and pantry can help you keep track of what you have at home and help them to identify foods that are ready to eat. 'First in, First out' is a useful way to organize food at home. Placing newly bought foods at the back of the cupboard or fridge will encourage people to use the food in the front row first, which will ensure freshness and reduce waste.

9. Freeze extras

Freezing foods can help preserve them for later use and prevent them from spoiling. Many fresh fruits and vegetables keep well when frozen, extending their shelf life and reducing waste.

10. Eat leftovers

As part of a meal plan to reduce waste, choose 1 or 2 days each week to eat any leftovers they may have stored in the fridge or freezer. This will help reduce waste from individual meals and keeps the fridge tidy.

11. Try out food preservation methods

Properly jarring or pickling foods can help to extend shelf life and avoid spoilage. If you accidentally buy too much of a particular food, preserving the food in this way can prevent it from spoiling and being thrown away. Examples include turning apples into applesauce or cucumbers into pickles.

12. Prioritise local goods and eat in season

Consider buying local products rather than foods imported from far away – shipping our food from long distances contributes towards air and water pollution.

“He it is who produced gardens with trellises and without, and dates, and tilth with produce of all kinds and olives and pomegranates, similar and different, eat of their fruit in season”

Surah Al Anam (The Cattle) 6:141

13. Growing food in your own garden

We can reduce food miles and eat more vegetables by growing certain foods in our own gardens. By using green space in our garden, we are in firm control of what goes on our plants and into the soil, thus allowing us to reduce the volume of harmful chemicals polluting the environment. This also means that fruit and vegetables are more easily accessible to us.

14. Reduce food packaging

Always think of the environmental cost of the food you eat. Avoid foods that are packaged in materials that are damaging to the environment. Instead of buying heavily packaged 'meal deals' from the convenience store, make your snacks at home and use sustainable packaging. Such snacks are better for your health and the health of our planet.

“No human ever filled a vessel worse than the stomach...But if it must be, then one third for his food, one third for his drink and one third for his breath.”

Sunan Ibn Majah

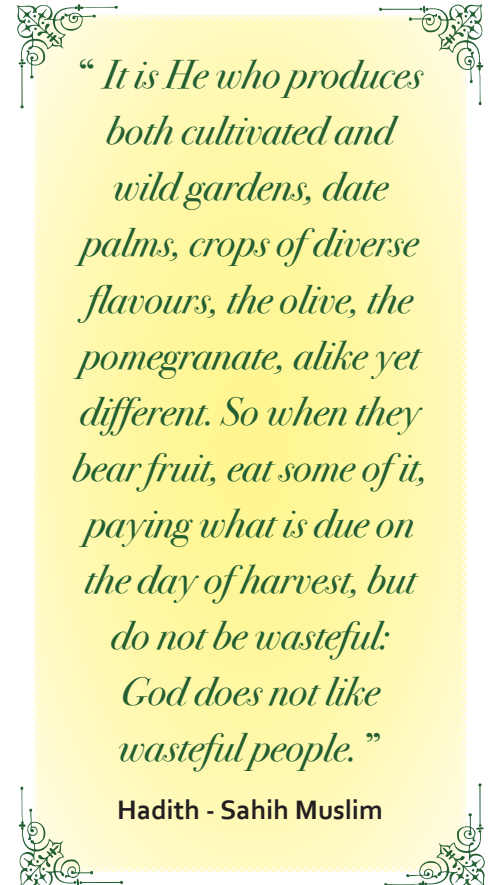
Campaigning For Action on *Food & Climate Change*

We all need to take responsibility for the way we consume our food and it is important to take action in our own lives. Many of us contribute towards climate change and so we all hold some responsibility, and some power. However, individual action is not enough on its own, climate change is a systemic global issue and we need collective action by our government and councils to take a lead role in tackling climate change.

Consider getting involved in campaigning for food justice:

- Decide which topic you would like to champion
- Lobby your local politician on food justice – locally, nationally and globally
- Dedicate your social media to educating others and to make a call for action
- Join a local environmental campaigning groups in your area

Even though the scale of climate change can seem overwhelming, there are lots of reasons for hope. Individuals and community groups around the world are taking a stance – from school children going on strike, to building our own clean, affordable community energy systems, passing climate emergency council motions and generally creating greener, fairer communities. For the sake of Allah (swt) and His Messenger, we can all come together and encourage our leaders to create the big systemic changes that we need.



“
...and whatever good you do,
Allah knows it”

Surah Al Baqarah (The Cow) 2:197





Kamran Shezad

@ClimateKam