

OPINION:**Don't Throw Agriculture Under the Food Truck***Innovative farming practices and technology make it part of the climate change solution*

By Dr. Don Buckingham

It is said that Albert Einstein once opined that everything should be as simple as it can be, but not simpler.

And Mark Twain is credited with saying that you should never let the truth get in the way of a good story.

But when you get into the midst of an election campaign, or engage on social media or want to capture a slogan for a bumper sticker, two things inevitably happen: matters get oversimplified, and the full truth is the first casualty.

This is a particular problem when talking about agriculture in the context of the climate change discussion. Globally, agriculture has been blamed as a major contributor to the planet's warming climate.

In the United Nations' Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's (IPCC) recent Special Report on Climate Change and Land (SRCCL), also known as the *Special Report on Climate Change, Desertification, Land Degradation, Sustainable Land Management, Food Security and Greenhouse Gas Fluxes in Terrestrial Ecosystems*, it states that farming around the world contributes 23% of global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions.

Similarly, the recent EAT Lancet Report argues that a plant-based diet will save the planet because cutting out meat will reduce the GHGs from livestock production.

These sound like convincing arguments.

Unfortunately, they are also a significant over-simplification of agriculture's role in climate change that are not, particularly in the Canadian case, supported by facts. For example, the 23% of the global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions reported by the IPCC report includes activities beyond just agricultural production, such as forestry and other land uses.

In its new report [*Efficient Agriculture as a GHG Solutions Provider*](#), the Canadian Agricultural Policy Institute (CAPI) describes how current agricultural practices are improving Canada's environmental footprint and can help agriculture be a "solutions-provider" for climate change.

Canada only contributes between 1.5 to 1.7% to global GHGs. Since our agriculture emissions account for about 8.4 % of the Canadian total, less than 0.2% of the world's GHG emissions come from Canadian agriculture.

Second, Canadian agriculture is super-efficient in terms of producing food with a modest environmental footprint. For example, Canada is in the top 10% of the most GHG-efficient livestock producers in the world.

This effort has seen emissions from Canadian livestock production drop by 11% since 2000, and soil organic carbon sequestered in Canadian soils increase by 40%.

These improvements have been achieved through basic changes like zero-tillage, crop rotations, cover crops and 4R fertilizer application. Canadian farmers have adopted more advanced innovations too, like new livestock genetics, increased feed efficiencies for beef and dairy cattle, precision agriculture allowing variable rate applications of fertilizers and crop protection products and improved plant genetics that produce higher yields with similar or lower levels of inputs.

There has been an increased awareness of the role of soil health in improving both crop and animal yields and in reducing agriculture's impact on the environment. As well, in improving environmental outcomes, one must keep in mind agriculture's important role in enhancing biodiversity, improving water, soil and air quality and the role that livestock plays in maintaining natural spaces and species.

The rise in the number of farmers practicing regenerative agriculture is a sign of further improvements to come.

And we are continuing to innovate to become more efficient in production, processing and waste reduction.

Rather than Canada reducing our food production and depending on the world for our food, the world would benefit from coming to Canada for efficiently produced, safe and nutritious food.

This also sets us to be global leaders in agricultural environmental initiatives. By sharing with the world the technologies and best practices that have helped Canadian farms operate more efficiently, we can help other countries reduce their emissions.

So when it comes to throwing agriculture under the bus — or the food truck for that matter — let's not oversimplify. Agriculture and food production is essential for our country and for the world. Canadian agriculture not only produces safe, nutritious and affordable food, it is also part of the solution for dealing with some very difficult global issues like climate change, the preservation of biodiversity and natural landscapes and managing the health of our soil, water and air.

So before you stop eating meat or you retweet that tweet that proposes that food production is the baddie in the climate change dialogue, consider that such responses might be just a little too simplistic.

If you look at the facts, Canadian agriculture today is a high-tech industry that takes seriously its role in providing solutions to environmental challenges while meeting basic human needs.

It's that simple, but no simpler.

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