Humans are remarkable problem solvers. Before the industrial revolution, one of the largest health concerns in the world was malnutrition, and meat was still very much considered a luxury. Now, thanks to advances in technology and agriculture, the majority of the people in developed countries like the United States have more than enough to eat, and meat or other proteins such as soy are readily available and affordable. Many argue that this is not a positive development and humans will continue to consume themselves and the planet into an early grave.\(^1\) These beliefs, however, underestimate -- or completely ignore -- human ingenuity, innovation, and most importantly, hunger.

Despite the population of the world growing by over 2 billion since 1990\(^2\), overall protein-energy malnutrition deaths have decreased by 71.83\%\(^3\). The same technology which has dramatically increased crop yields has also greatly reduced the number of acres needed to produce more food. This increase in efficiency and productivity has resulted in far more environmentally friendly practices which are implemented worldwide as countries develop.\(^4\) Cattle producers are also beginning to understand the practical benefits of holistic livestock and wildlife management.\(^5\) Although most would consider this innovation good news, humanity in addition to its ingenuity has the uncanny ability to highlight the worst of it.

In the last few months, media outlets, celebrities, and concerned citizens around the world have been in an uproar regarding portions of Amazon Rainforest allegedly being cleared in Brazil due to cattle pasture and soy farm expansion.\(^6\) Meat and dairy consumption, in general, have been credited with extreme environmental decay.\(^7\) Agricultural activities like the production of soy, a plant high in protein and vitamins, have similarly been blamed.\(^8\) The Amazon “crisis” provides a perfect snapshot of the campaign against producing protein-rich foods including meat and soy.

The good news is that as data begin to become available, a clearer picture begins to emerge. The land burning in the Amazon is mostly land that has already been cleared of undisturbed rainforest, many of the pictures shared on social media are from decades ago, and there is no science to suggest that the Amazon provides 20\% of the world’s oxygen.\(^9\) In fact, the cattle pastures which are being maintained on the cleared land can also be an effective tool for carbon

sequestration. Nevertheless, the crusade to slow or completely cease meat production to “save the earth” is still in full swing.

It is easy for many to criticize countries like Brazil or Ghana and misconstrue their efforts to feed their citizens as efforts to destroy the planet. Those living and eating in developed nations can afford to supplement their diets with alternative foods not readily available in less developed nations. When citizens in these less developed nations get access to meat, they experience both financial and physiological benefits. Matt Ridley, a British journalist and author affirms that denying this opportunity of living healthier and more prosperous lives to the many people who are vegetarians through poverty rather than choice would be grotesque.

“It is very difficult for humans to thrive on a purely plant-based diet. Unless they are affluent and have access to balanced nutrition, vegan children become deficient in iron and vitamin A, stunted in growth and delayed in brain development. A study in rural Kenya found that eating eggs made children grow five per cent faster. This is why globally, as living standards rise, meat and dairy consumption is increasing twice as fast as population.” – Matt Ridley

Countries must be permitted, and even encouraged, to develop in order to implement the advancements which allow for the dramatic increase in agricultural efficiency and yield. Caring for the environment comes second to most people who are suffering from malnutrition. Only after the hunger for protein has been satiated, will humanity become as good at planting trees as it is at feeding people.

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