

Foods killing the planet?

Human diet causing 'catastrophic' damage to planet: study

AFP | Paris, France

The way humanity produces and eats food must radically change to avoid millions of deaths and "catastrophic" damage to the planet, according to a landmark study published yesterday.

The key to both goals is a dramatic shift in the global diet -- roughly half as much sugar and red meat, and twice as many vegetables, fruits and nuts, a consortium of three dozen researchers concluded in The Lancet, a medical journal.

"We are in a catastrophic situation," co-author Tim Lang, a professor at the University of London and policy lead for the EAT-Lancet Commission that compiled the 50-page study, told AFP.

Currently, nearly a billion people are hungry and another two billion are eating too much of the wrong foods, causing epidemics of obesity, heart disease and diabetes.

Unhealthy diets account for up to 11 million avoidable premature deaths every year, according to the most recent Global Disease Burden report.

At the same time the global food system is the single largest emitter of greenhouse gases, the biggest

driver of biodiversity loss, and the main cause of deadly algae blooms along coasts and inland waterways.

Agriculture -- which has transformed nearly half the planet's land surface -- also uses up about 70 percent of the global fresh water supply.

"To have any chance of feeding 10 billion people in 2050 within planetary boundaries" -- the limits on Earth's capacity

Currently, nearly a billion people are hungry and another two billion are eating too much of the wrong foods, causing epidemics of obesity, heart disease and diabetes.

to absorb human activity -- "we must adopt a healthy diet, slash food waste, and invest in technologies that reduce environmental impacts," said co-author Johan Rockstrom, director of the Potsdam Institute for Climate Change Impact Research.

Where's the beef?

"It is doable but it will take nothing less than global agricultural revolution," he told AFP.

The cornerstone of "the great food transformation" called for in the study is a template human diet of about 2500 calories per day.

"We are not saying everyone has to eat in the same way," Lang said by phone. "But broadly -- especially in the rich world -- it means a reduction of meat and dairy, and a major increase in plant consumption."

The diet allows for about seven grammes (a quarter of an ounce) of red meat per day, and up to 14. A typical hamburger patty, by comparison, is 125 to 150 grammes.

For most rich nations, and many emerging ones such as China and Brazil, this would represent a drastic five-to-tenfold reduction.

Beef is the main culprit.

Not only do cattle pass massive quantities of planet-warming methane, huge

swathes of carbon-absorbing forests -- mostly in Brazil -- are cut down every year to make room for them.

"For climate, we know that coal is the low-hanging fruit, the dirtiest of fossil fuels," said Rockstrom. "On the food side, the equivalent is grain-fed beef."

It takes at least five kilos of grain to produce a kilo of meat.

And once that steak or lamb chop hits the plate, about 30 percent will wind up in the garbage bin.

Dairy is also limited to about one cup (250 grammes) of whole milk -- or its equivalent in cheese or yoghurt -- per day, and only one or two eggs per week.

Push back

At the same time, the diet calls for a more than 100 percent increase in legumes such as peas and lentils, along with vegetables, fruits and nuts.

Grains are considered to be less healthy sources of nutrients.

"We can no longer feed our population a healthy diet while balancing planetary resources," said The Lancet editor-in-chief Richard Horton.

"For the first time in 200,000 years of human history, we are severely out of sync with the planet and Nature."

The report drew heavy fire from the livestock and dairy industry, and some experts.

"It goes to the extreme to create maximum attention, but we must

be more responsible when making serious dietary recommendation," said Alexander Anton, secretary general of the European Dairy Association, noting that dairy products are "packed" with nutrients and vitamins.

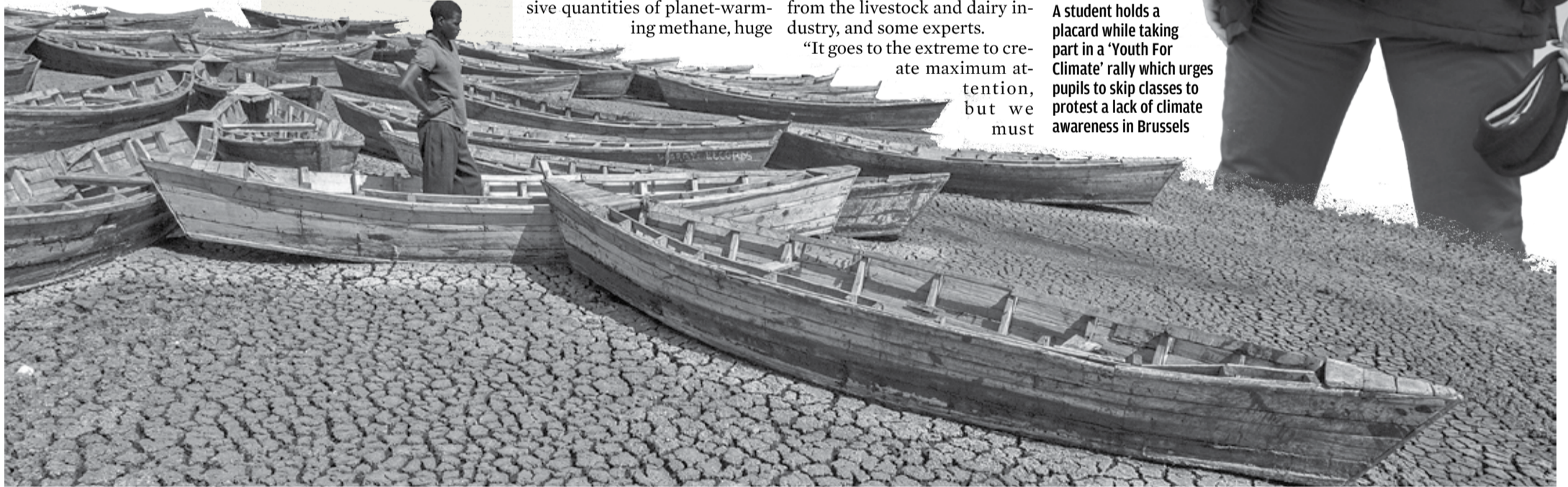
Christopher Snowdon of the Institute of Economic Affairs in London said the report "reveals the full agenda of nanny-state campaigners."

"We expected these attacks," said Lang. But the same food companies pushing back against these findings realise that they may not have a future if they don't adapt", he said.

"The question is: does this come by crisis, or do we start planning for it now?"

Some multinationals responded positively, if cautiously, to the study.

A student holds a placard while taking part in a 'Youth For Climate' rally which urges pupils to skip classes to protest a lack of climate awareness in Brussels



A young Malawian man stands among stationary engineless boats which lie idle at the dried inland Lake Chilwa's Chisi Island harbour in Zomba District, eastern Malawi

Musk to build a tunnel through an Australian mountain

Sydney, Australia
Australia could become a test ground for another of Elon Musk's massive infrastructure projects after the maverick billionaire tweeted a "bargain" price to build a tunnel through a mountain to solve Sydney's traffic woes.

Musk in 2017 made a Twitter pitch -- and followed through with the offer -- to build what was the world's biggest battery in an Australian state to solve its severe energy crisis.

The entrepreneur behind electric carmaker Tesla has most recently turned his sights on tackling city traffic via low-cost tunnels created by his Boring Company, and in December unveiled a sample project near Los Angeles.

So when an Australian pol-

I'm a lawmaker in Sydney, which is choking with traffic. How much to build a 50km tunnel through the Blue Mountains and open up the west of our State?

MP JEREMY BUCKINGHAM
NEW SOUTH WALES STATE

itician tweeted at Musk on Wednesday about the costs of drilling through a mountain range north of Sydney, he responded quickly.

"I'm a lawmaker in Sydney, which is choking with traffic. How much to build a 50km tunnel through the Blue Mountains and open up the west of our State?" asked New South Wales state MP Jeremy Buckingham.

"About \$15M/km for a two way high speed transit, so probably around \$750M plus maybe \$50M/station," Musk replied late Wednesday, with his response liked more than 22,000 times on Twitter.

He has more than 24 million followers on the social media platform.

Another billionaire, Mike Cannon-Brookes, who found-

ed Australian software startup Atlassian, weighed in on the exchange, saying the estimated price tag "sounds like a bargain for Sydney".

The population of the Sydney region has grown by around 25 percent since 2011 to reach 5.4 million, out of a national population of 25 million, and road congestion is a major concern.

There was no indication the exchange of tunnel tweets would lead to any quick action, but it could bring some needed positive publicity for Musk.

Musk has risen to prominence with a series of ambitious ventures, particularly Tesla, but has also drawn plenty of criticism for some volatile behaviour.

He waged a public battle with a rescuer who helped save a group of boys trapped in a cave

in Thailand last year, calling him a "pedo guy" after the Brit slammed his idea of building a mini-submarine to save the children as a public relations stunt.

Meanwhile, riders who have tested out Boring's prototype tunnel -- where cars are lowered by lifts then slotted into tracks and propelled along at high speeds -- have complained of a bumpy journey.

