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Down to Humus

A publication of Congregation of the Humility of Mary

"The word 'humble' comes from 'humus' derived from the Latin meaning earth or ground. Humus is matter essential for fertility of the soil. It is integral to the cycle of life; plants need it for growth…Thus it is appropriate that in our mission statement, we commit ourselves to care for the earth itself." -Bernadine Pieper, CHM. Taken from The Humility Woman Booklet, page 3.

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What's Really Driving Global Warming?

Global warming is one of the most pressing challenges of our time, and yet it can feel like an overwhelming and complicated topic. News headlines mention carbon dioxide, methane, fossil fuels and deforestation — but what does it all mean? At its core, the story of global warming is about balance. The Earth has always had a natural system for keeping its climate stable, but human activities over the past 150 years have thrown that system out of balance. Let's take a closer look at what's really driving global warming and why our choices today matter so much for tomorrow.



The Greenhouse Effect: Earth's Blanket

To understand global warming, we first need to understand the greenhouse effect. Imagine Earth wrapped in a blanket. This "blanket" is the atmosphere, which contains gases like carbon dioxide (CO_2), methane (CH_4), nitrous oxide (N_2O) and water vapor. These gases trap some of the heat from the sun, keeping our planet warm enough to support life. Without the greenhouse effect, Earth would be a frozen, lifeless rock. The problem isn't that we have a greenhouse effect — it's that we've thickened the blanket. By burning fossil fuels, cutting down forests and engaging in industrial agriculture, humans have added billions of tons of extra greenhouse gases to the atmosphere. That means more heat gets trapped, pushing global temperatures higher than nature intended (NASA Climate Change).

Fossil Fuels: The Biggest Culprit

The single largest driver of global warming is the burning of fossil fuels — coal, oil and natural gas. These fuels power our cars, generate electricity and heat our homes. When burned, they release carbon dioxide, the most abundant greenhouse gas caused by humans. Since the Industrial Revolution, humans have released more than 1.5 trillion tons of CO_2 into the atmosphere (EPA Climate Change). The result? Global average temperatures have risen by about 2°F (1.1°C) since the late 1800s. That might not sound like much, but in climate terms, it's a dramatic shift — enough to melt glaciers, intensify storms and disrupt ecosystems worldwide (NOAA Climate.gov).

Deforestation: Losing the Planet's Lungs

Trees are often called the "lungs of the Earth" because they absorb carbon dioxide and release oxygen. Forests, especially tropical rainforests like the Amazon, play a vital role in regulating the climate. But every year, millions of acres of forests are cut down for logging, cattle ranching, or farmland.

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When trees are destroyed, not only do we lose their ability to capture carbon, but the carbon stored in them is released back into the atmosphere. Deforestation currently accounts for about 10% of global greenhouse gas emissions (IPCC).

Agriculture & Food Systems

Another key contributor to global warming is how we grow and produce food. Agriculture is responsible for about a quarter of global greenhouse gas emissions. Much of this comes from livestock like cows and sheep, which produce methane during digestion. Methane is especially powerful — it traps heat about 25 times more effectively than carbon dioxide, though it doesn't stay in the atmosphere as long.

Synthetic fertilizers used on crops also release nitrous oxide, another potent greenhouse gas. Combined with deforestation for farmland, the global food system is a major factor in climate change — but it's also an area where innovation and lifestyle changes can make a big difference (Yale Climate Connections).

Industrial & Consumer Choices

Beyond energy, forests and food, our industrial systems also play a role. Manufacturing, cement production and chemical industries all release greenhouse gases. Even the everyday goods we use — from plastics to electronics — carry a carbon footprint from the energy used to produce and transport them.

Our consumer-driven culture means more demand for goods and services, which in turn drives more emissions. That's why experts often emphasize not just energy transitions, but also lifestyle changes like reducing waste, rethinking consumption and supporting sustainable businesses (National Geographic – Climate Change).

Why It Matters Now

The science is clear: human activities are the dominant driver of global warming. The faster we add greenhouse gases to the atmosphere, the hotter the planet gets. And the hotter it gets, the more dangerous the impacts: rising seas swallowing coastlines, heatwaves threatening human health, droughts reducing food security and ecosystems struggling to survive.

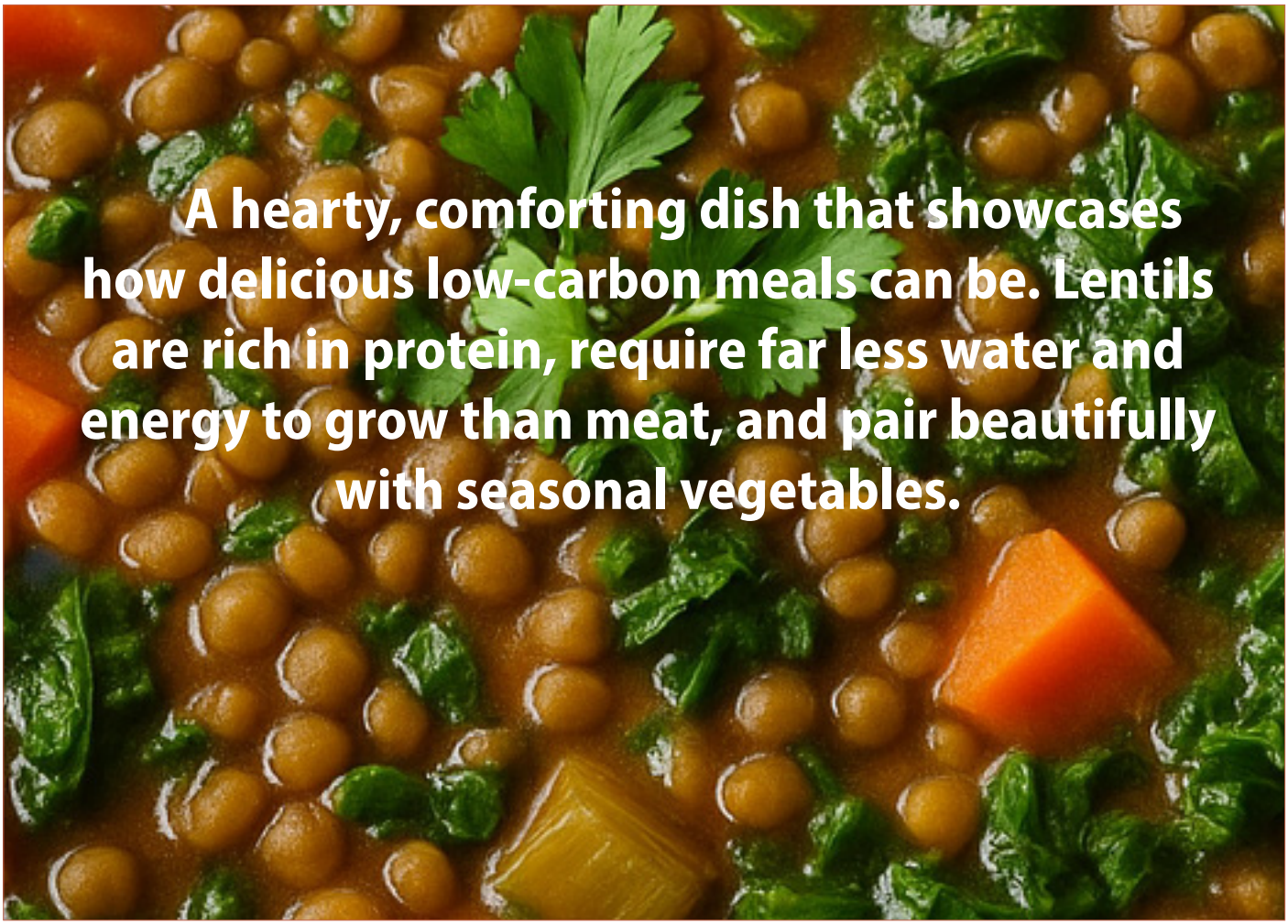
But there's another side to this story — hope. Because humans are driving global warming, we also have the power to slow it down. By shifting away from fossil fuels, protecting and restoring forests, transforming agriculture, and making conscious choices as communities and individuals, we can reshape the future.

A Call to Care

Caring for the Earth means paying attention to the roots of the problem, not just the symptoms. Global warming isn't caused by some distant, uncontrollable force — it's the result of human decisions. That's sobering, but it's also empowering.

The next time you flip on a light, eat a meal or make a purchase, remember that you're connected to this bigger story.

The real driver of global warming is us —and so is the solution



Climate-Friendly Lentil & Vegetable Stew

Ingredients

2 tbsp olive oil
1 onion, diced
2 carrots, chopped
2 celery stalks, chopped
3 garlic cloves, minced
1 tsp smoked paprika
1 tsp cumin
1 cup dry brown or green lentils (rinsed)
1 (14 oz) can diced tomatoes
4 cups vegetable broth
2 cups chopped kale or spinach
Salt & pepper to taste
Fresh parsley or cilantro for garnish

Instructions

Heat olive oil in a large pot over medium heat. Sauté onion, carrots, and celery until softened (5–7 minutes).

Add garlic, paprika, and cumin; cook 1 minute until fragrant.

Stir in lentils, tomatoes, and broth. Bring to a boil, then reduce heat and simmer 25–30 minutes until lentils are tender.

Stir in greens and cook another 5 minutes. Season with salt and pepper.

Garnish with fresh herbs and serve with wholegrain bread.