Plant Based Diet: Good for You, Good for the Environment
by Kay Bushnell

The Sierra Club’s Action Plan 2002 emphasizes eliminating pollution caused by animal factories, which it describes as giant corporate-owned livestock operations that “churn out cattle, hogs, chickens, and turkeys by the thousands and produce staggering amounts of animal waste in the process.” The manure produced by animal factories too often spills into waterways and drinking water, killing aquatic life, sickening people, and spreading diseases.

Livestock agriculture is also associated with waste of water, air pollution, loss of topsoil, destruction of forests and riparian areas, inefficient use of land to grow fodder for livestock, and killing of wildlife that prey upon grazing livestock or compete with them for food.

Few regulations hamper the growth and operation of the politically powerful animal factory industry. California’s Central Valley has 1600 dairies that generate more waste than the entire human population of Texas. Officials of the regional Water Quality Control Board in 1997 said that many of these dairies had never been inspected. A swine factory with a planned annual production of 2.5 million hogs has begun operation in southwest Utah, where pigs may eventually outnumber people in Iron County 65 to 1. Liquid pig manure is stored in 92 open-air cesspits.

Most of the 9 billion animals slaughtered annually in this country for their meat are raised in animal factories. One way to discourage animal factory polluters is to reduce demand for their products. Those who care about the environmental consequences of their food choices have daily opportunities to make a positive difference.

A diet based on a variety of whole plant foods benefits more than the environment. The American Dietetic Association clearly affirms that a plant-based diet of grains, legumes, fruits, vegetables, and nuts is healthful and nutritious, reducing one’s risk for obesity, coronary artery disease, hypertension, diabetes mellitus, and certain cancers.

With repetition new eating habits become routine. Making the transition to a plant-based diet can be surprisingly easy with the help of good recipes, cooking tips, and convenience foods such as meat alternatives and plant-based milks. Plant-based foods have been called the foods of the 21st century. They stand on their own merits for taste, superior nutrition, and environmental friendliness.

More information:
1. Is Piglet Poisoning the Well? Sierra Club, Contact: Ed Hopkins (202) 675-7908, ed.hopkins@sierraclub.org
2. “Meat Factories”, Ken Silverstein, Sierra January/February 1999
3. Corporate Hogs at the Public Trough, Sierra Club, Contact: Ed Hopkins (202) 675-7908, ed.hopkins@sierraclub.org