

Excerpt from “Critical Climate Actions You Can Take Right Now”

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If you're feeling a bit anxious these days, you're not alone. Each week seems to bring a new global crisis—and that's on top of the looming catastrophe we've been worrying about for years: climate change.

The best prescription for anxiety, of course, is action—but when it comes to something as enormous and complex as climate change, it can be difficult to know where to focus your efforts. Do individual lifestyle changes really make a difference, or should you shoot for higher-level climate action, such as pushing governments and companies to transform policies and practices?

Here at the Rainforest Alliance, we believe that to move the needle on the climate crisis, we must do both. Given that just 100 fossil fuel companies are responsible for generating 71 percent of the world's greenhouse gas emissions, applying citizen pressure on governments to enact bold policies and vigorous enforcement is essential.

Using your individual power as a consumer, however, can help push companies to source more sustainably—and that can affect how millions of hectares of land are managed.

So don't rule out everyday actions, but do pair them with grander ones. With that in mind, here are the most critical areas to transform along with our recommendations for actions you can take—on both the micro level and the macro one—to help slow the climate crisis.

1. Reduce Food Waste

A third of the food we cultivate ends up in the garbage. One-third! That's a lot of waste, when you think of all the water, capital, labor, and land that goes into producing food—along with the greenhouse gases generated at every stage and then the methane released when food rots at the dump. All told, food waste is responsible for roughly 8 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions.

Micro action: Maybe this is obvious but stop wasting food! The key is not over-buying, and the key to that is being organized. Plan out your recipes and food needs before you head to the market. In restaurants, consider ordering smaller plates, and don't be shy about taking leftovers home. The UK-based organization Love Food Hate Waste has a plethora of good ideas on “completing,” or ways to eat the complete contents of your fridge before it goes bad.

Macro action: Governments around the world are setting targets, implementing new policies, and creating campaigns aimed at reducing food waste—and these strategies work. Once among Asia's biggest food wasters, South Korea has made great strides in reducing waste through policy. They banned dumping food in landfill, and introduced compulsory food waste recycling using special biodegradable bags. (The cost of the bags encourages home composting.) As a result, individual food waste has been reduced, and 95 percent of South Korea's food waste is recycled. Look for national legislation and

local efforts that you can support with your voting and social media power. If there's nothing local in your area, consider launching an awareness campaign in collaboration with your employer, school, or local market (start small and build).

2. Eat a plant-rich diet

If cattle were their own nation, they would be the world's third-largest emitter of greenhouse gases, according to Project Drawdown. That's why eating a mostly plant-based diet is a critical part of the climate solution. Luckily, a diet rich in vegetables, fruits, whole grains, and beans is good for your body, too. (It's also good for rainforests, which are routinely destroyed to create pasture for livestock agriculture.)

Micro action: Eat more plants. If you need extra incentive, check out this food footprint calculator, which shows you the climate footprint of everything from beer and beef to peas and pasta—all in terms even the most science-phobic can understand. For example: eating beef 3-5 times a week for a year is the equivalent of driving a car 6,618 km (4,112 mi), whereas eating nuts 3-5 times a week for a year is the equivalent of driving 12 km (7 mi).

Macro action: Work to stop government subsidies for the beef industry. Needless to say, when the price of something is lower, people tend to buy more of it. In Europe, the consumption of animal products has increased exponentially over the last 50 years, while prices remain quite low relative to the cost of production—because of subsidies. The US government alone spends \$38 billion each year to subsidize the meat and dairy industries, but only 0.04 percent of that (\$17 million) each year to subsidize fruits and vegetables.

3. Conserve tropical forest

Here's a topic that's near and dear to our hearts. For more than 30 years, the Rainforest Alliance has worked to protect existing forests and restore degraded and deforested land. Our approach is to work with local and Indigenous people to cultivate sustainable livelihoods—those that respect their cultural values, allow them to support their families, and bolster their capacity to protect their land. We also train farmers around the world in sustainable and climate-smart agriculture methods, since conventional farming (especially livestock) often involves clearing forests and depleting soils.

There are so many vital reasons to protect forests, not least of all because they sequester carbon, thereby helping to slow climate change. Project Drawdown estimates that by protecting currently degraded land and allowing natural growth of tropical forests to occur on 161-231 million hectares, 54.5 to 85.1 gigatons of carbon dioxide could be sequestered by 2050.

Micro action: Choose Rainforest Alliance Certified products for those essentials you can't buy locally, such as coffee, bananas, tea, and chocolate. You can also amplify your individual impact by supporting our work to train farming and forest communities in climate-smart agriculture methods and sustainable forest-based enterprise.

Macro action: Support Indigenous and local land rights globally. Not only is this the right thing to do, it is better for climate: Numerous studies show that Indigenous people are the most effective forest guardians, and we need their leadership now more than ever.