

My Experience at a Food · Faith · Climate Workshop



I am far from an expert on climate change.

I wouldn't consider myself to be an expert on anything at this point of my life. I'm 21 years old, from a small town, attending a small college, trying to balance the life of a student-athlete as best I can. I like to think I know what climate change is, what causes it, and what we need to do to end it, but maybe that is why it has become such a big issue. If all of us think that just driving our cars to work/class a few less times a month, turning off lights, or spending a little less time in the shower is the best bet at cutting down on carbon emissions, we could definitely benefit from attending one of the [Iowa Interfaith Power and Light](#) (IIPPL) organization's events.

My 3 years at Central College have taught me a lot, and one of the things I have learned is that I can make much more of an impact in the world than I thought. In the two hours I spent at the Iowa Interfaith Power & Light event, Food · Faith · Climate: Connecting the Dots (FFC), I learned quite a bit. FFC taught me some of the ways that my actions and habits, specifically my food practices, had been impacting the environment. One thought that stuck with me, that can be applied to a type of market, is the idea that we vote everyday with our dollars. Each meal that we put on the table is our way of telling the food producers what we want.

“How we eat largely determines how we use the world.” – Wendell Berry

I found this quote among the materials given to each attendee, and found it thought provoking enough to include here. Nearly everything that we do as a species revolves around growing, obtaining, selling or buying food! The market for food for the skyrocketing population of our planet has been decided, thanks to our “votes,” that profits are more important than the preservation of our world. In 1807, William Wordsworth published “The World Is Too Much With Us”:

The world is too much with us, late and soon,
Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers;
Little we see in Nature that is ours;
We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon!

Wordsworth saw, over 200 years ago, the carelessness that we all had towards the environment. He recognizes that we no longer see a connection with the natural world. The fourth line makes me ask: what have we done to “give our hearts away” as if our hearts are a morally distasteful, or sleazy (sordid) gift (boon)?

I'd like to think that Wordsworth wanted his readers to ask themselves what connection they have to nature, and why we are wasting our “powers.” Our powers can be interpreted as the time, effort, or money that we invest in something, and he claims that we are wasting it on goods and material things. We are “voting” for the wrong things. The FFC workshop showed me why and how a simple thing such as a hamburger, or a pop tart, can be disproportionately contributing to climate change. The path that each of these foods took from pasture to plate

was traced, and the amount of greenhouse gas emissions generated from this path shown and compared to similar meals. I thought that seeing how much effort it took for each of these foods to reach my dinner plate was eye-opening. We were encouraged to either grow our own produce, or to support local farmers by buying from a local farmer's market. This ensures that the foods we are eating at each meal are as climate-friendly as possible.

One very simple way to cut down on foods with a more negative impact on the climate is to consider taking part in Meatless Mondays! I know that not long ago, I would have thought that not eating meat for a day was ridiculous. I'd heard of fellow students on campus advocating for others to join them in committing to beginning their week without meat. I think my issue was simply: Why? What will that change? I am a person who needs to know why I am doing something before I do it. I donate blood every chance I get because I know it can save lives. I'm on the bone marrow registry because I've know of people who have needed a marrow transplant. Anything that I can easily do to change my own or someone else's life for the better, I am willing to do. After learning the positive impact that Meatless Mondays can have, I am convinced that a small, small sacrifice on my part can hopefully start changing the food industry for the better. To learn more about this movement, you can visit the [Meatless Monday site here](#).

I thought that it was interesting splitting up into groups by our faith so that each of us could review our faith's statements on climate change, and then talked about them as a group. I thought that learning how every religion, and each denomination was similar in their commitment to fight climate change and to protect our home was very important. At the end of the day, we are all a part of this planet, no matter our religion or denomination, and if we aren't protecting it, we are only hurting it more.

Overall, I thought that the coolest part of the FFC event was that it wasn't just an hour of them preaching to us about how we had been living or about how we needed to change, and they weren't trying to push anything on us. All they needed to do was teach us. They showed me how I can directly, and easily, reduce my carbon footprint in ways that I didn't know before. I had no idea how much power I truly had, purely with what I put on my plate each and everyday. Meatless Monday to me sounded like a waste of my time before being taught otherwise by the Iowa Interfaith Power and Light. I learned the Lutheran statement on climate change, and realized that my own religion is calling to me to make whatever changes I can to preserve this world we live on. Even cooler than all of this, is that you can make a difference in your life too.

I would strongly encourage all of my readers to visit the [I IPL website](#) and learn a little more about their mission, their history, and about how you can start voting for a better food system. There, you can register for their upcoming events, or contact Programs and Outreach Coordinator [Sarah Paulos](#) (programs@iowaipl.org) and set up an event near you.

I still am no expert on climate change, but I now feel like an expert on changing the climate for the better through my own actions. I urge everyone reading to also make the choice to reduce their carbon footprint at the dinner table, and fortunately, the ethical choice is also the pleasurable one!

Some quick tips from the EWG's *Meat Eater's Guide to Climate Change + Health* for reducing your carbon footprint include:

- If everyone in the US skipped meat and cheese one day a week, it would equate to climate benefits of taking 7.6 millions cars off the road over the same period.
- Climate-friendly sources of protein include:
 - Eggs, milk, nuts and beans
- Fresh and local foods are beneficial for your planet, community and health!
- LIMIT, not completely cut out, energy intensive foods such as:
 - Lamb, pork, cheese and beef
- [More from the EWG here!](#)

Also visit the [Behind The Brands website](#) to learn more about what more the 10 largest food companies in the world can do to support farmers, communities, and our planet. Take action and tell your favorite companies what needs to change.

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