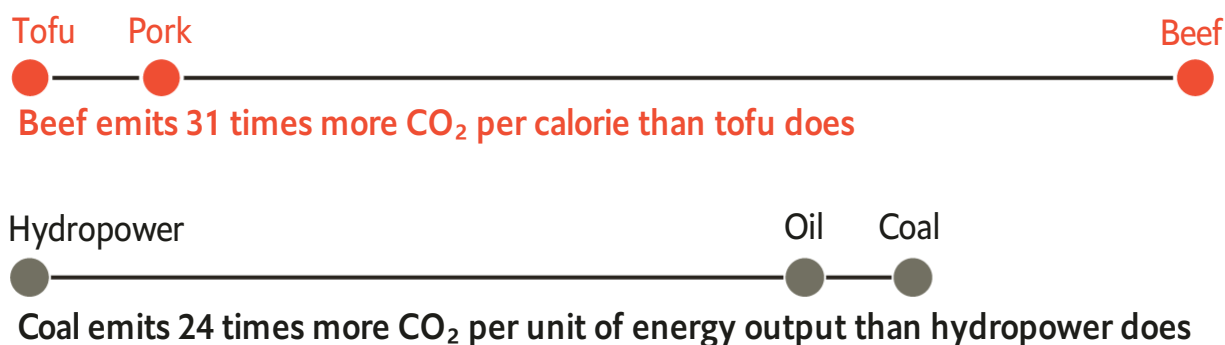


The beef with beef

# Treating beef like coal would make a big dent in greenhouse-gas emissions

Cattle are a surprisingly large producer of greenhouse gases



**F**EW DISHES whet more palates than a juicy cut of beef. One poll in 2014 found that steak was Americans' favourite food. Unfortunately, by cooking so many cows, humans are cooking themselves, too.

## Listen to this story

0:00 / 0:00

## Listen on the go

Get *The Economist* app and play articles, wherever you are

[→ Play in app](#)

The impact of food on greenhouse-gas (GHG) emissions can slip under the radar. In a survey in Britain last year, the share of respondents saying that “producing plants and meat on farms” was a “significant contributor” to climate change was the lowest among ten listed activities. Yet two papers published this year in *Nature Food* find that food, especially beef, creates more GHGs than previously thought. Forgoing steaks may be one of the most efficient ways to reduce your carbon footprint.

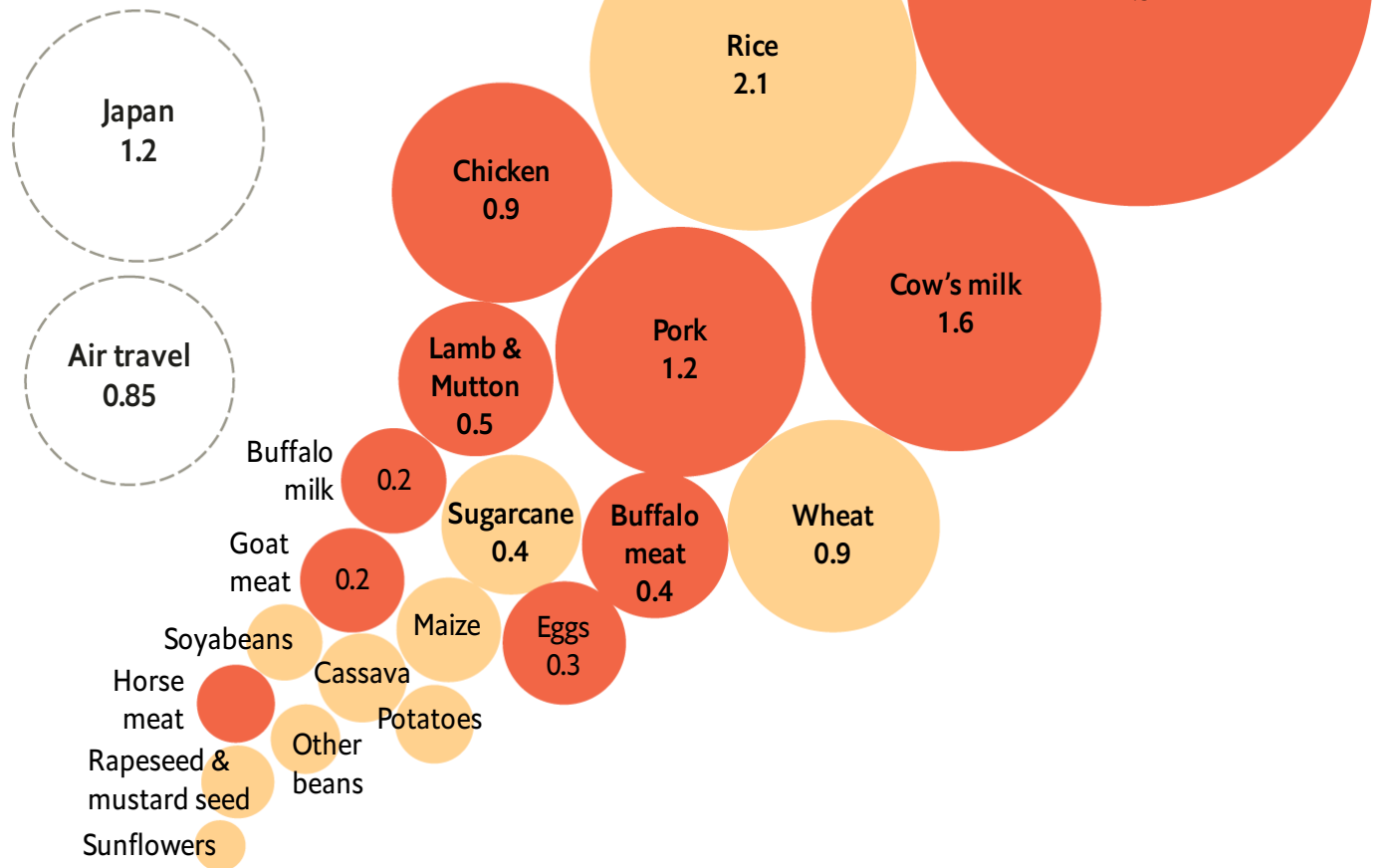
In 2019 the UN’s Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change estimated that the global food system was responsible for 21-37% of GHG emissions. This March researchers from the European Commission and the UN’s Food and Agriculture Office released a study with a central estimate near the top of this range. It attributed 34% of GHGs produced in 2015 to food.

### Annual emissions, CO<sub>2</sub>-equivalent gigatonnes

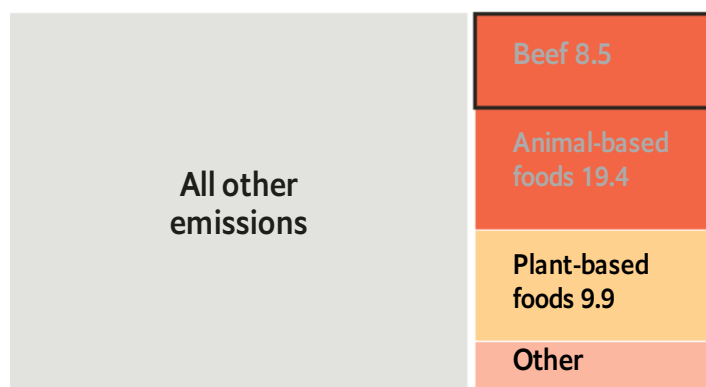
Ten biggest sources in each category, 2010

● Animal-based ● Plant-based

Compared with total emissions from



### Share of global emissions 2015, %



### Emissions from beef production By type, %

