

Plant Milks Help Save Our Planet



By Alfred Robert Hogan

Soy milk. Oat milk. Coconut milk. Rice milk. Almond milk. Hemp milk. If you drink these instead of cow's milk, you are helping Mother Earth in a big way! The varied array of plant "milks" available as ethical, green, and healthy alternatives to dairy milks is booming. Other plants used include banana, hazelnut, cashew, peanut, walnut, macadamia, pistachio, sesame, flax, spelt berry, yellow pea, and even kale quinoa. Some experts contend that soy milk and oat milk have the lowest eco impacts.

Plant milks have actually been around for centuries. "Milk" derived from plants dates back to such examples as North African *horchata*, made from tiger nuts, which spread to Iberia by 1000 CE; almond milk in the Mideast Levant region in the 13th century; soy milk in China in the 14th century; and nut milk made for centuries by the Wabanaki Indians and other tribes, in what is now the US Northeast.

In fact, plant milks have long been used in places with a high prevalence of protective lactose intolerance, such as East Asia, where the condition prevails in 90 percent of people.

The Problem with Dairy Milk

Fridays For Future founder Greta Thunberg sets the standard as usual by being an ethical vegan, first and foremost. She and other vegan advocates know well the hidden, grim, unethical realities of the dairy industry. To produce cow's milk, for example, cows must be forcibly impregnated, usually starting at age 2. When calves are born nine months later, they are typically taken away from their mothers within 12 hours to three days, so the milk intended for the calves can be confiscated twice daily—usually by automated milking machines in "milking parlors"—for human use. Meanwhile, mothers and their calves are visibly traumatized by being permanently parted. When the peak milk production of cows passes, typically at about five years, they are unceremoniously shipped off, crammed into trucks, destined to become cheap ground beef and hamburgers. By contrast, cows can naturally live to be 20 to 25 years old.

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Plant milks are better for our planet, better for the animals, and better for you



Actor James Cromwell super-glued his hand to a Starbucks counter to protest the higher price charged for plant milks. Photo: PETA

The noted actor and vegan James Cromwell (who starred in the 1995 pig-centric film “Babe”) wrote about the dairy industry in a *Washington Post* op-ed essay (21 May 2022), after he had glued his hand to a Starbucks counter for a half-hour to protest the coffee chain’s “upcharge” of as much as 80 cents extra for vegan milk. Cromwell stated, “Cows endure heart-breaking and horrifying abuse on dairy farms. These animals aren’t fountains. They aren’t constantly producing milk and hoping some solicitous human will relieve them of it. Like humans and other mammals, cows lactate only after giving birth. Dairy farms forcibly [impregnate] them with a metal rod and make them go through pregnancy and delivery, only to drag their newborns away from them so that the milk meant for their baby can be sold for [coffee] lattes instead. It’s a traumatic experience for both mother and calf. Mother cows often cry out for their missing babies for days, while the terrified infants are commonly shoved into veal crates that don’t even have enough room for the calves to turn around. They suffer no less than humans would if subjected to the same thing.”

Dairy exacts a heavy toll on our planet’s ecosystems and exacerbates global warming, as Greta and James Cromwell both noted. In addition to the high environmental costs, some of which are noted in the chart below, dairy cows produce copious quantities of untreated solid waste, which pollutes water and air. As more people become savvy to the myriad severe downsides to dairy, they will no doubt kick the unnatural dairy habit for good. Plant milks will help that happen faster. Simply put, plant milks are better for our planet, better for the animals, and better for you.

Environmental Impacts of Dairy and Plant-Based Milks, 2013

Type of milk	Greenhouse Gas Emissions Per Liter	Land Use Per Liter	Freshwater Use Per Liter	Eutrophication Per Liter
Dairy milk	3.15 kg	8.95 m ²	628.2 L	10.65 kg
Oat milk	0.90 kg	0.76 m ²	48.24 L	1.62 kg
Soy milk	0.98 kg	0.66 m ²	27.8 L	1.06 kg
Almond milk	0.70 kg	0.5 m ²	371.46 L	1.5 kg
Rice milk	1.18 kg	0.34 m ²	269.81 L	4.69 kg

Source: J. Poore and T. Nemeck, “Reducing food’s environmental impacts through producers and consumers,” *Science* (AAAS), Volume 360 Issue 6392, 1 June 2018

Additional Resources:

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- Switch 4 Good www.switch4good.org
- Plant-Based Foods Association www.plantbasedfoods.org/?s=milk
- Earth's Own (plant milks company in Canada with additional resources)
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- “What Are the Benefits of Almond Milk? Here’s Why You Should Drink It,” *PETA Fact Sheet*, Thursday 28 April 2022, <https://www.peta.org/living/food/almond-milk-benefits/>
- “Which milk is best? Almond, hemp, oat, soy, or cow's milk,” *Clean Green Simple*, XXXX
<https://cleangreensimple.com/article/best-plant-based-milk-brands/>
- Angus Mackintosh, “Plant Milk Set to Take Over Cow’s Milk in Australian Cafes—and Oat Milk Is Coming Out On Top,” *ABC online*, Sunday 22 May 2022,
<https://www.abc.net.au/news/rural/2022-05-22/plant-based-milk-set-to-take-over-cows-milk-in-australian-cafes/101023244>
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