Industrial-Style Agriculture Contributes to Climate Change

The rise of industrial farming coincided with the rise of industrialization. It was hoped that this industrialization would help us feed the world. We have increased food production, but we’ve also increased waste. And people are still hungry. One out of seven families in the United States is food insecure.

In addition, the greenhouse emissions of industrializing agriculture—whether through the use of petroleum fertilizers, excessive water pumping or the use of fossil fuels for vehicles and trucking to the globalized market—are undermining our ability to feed the world. With a rise in large storms, droughts, floods, land grabs for the sake of biofuels and more industrialized agriculture, the most vulnerable among us have new threats to secure food and housing.

The industrial raising of cattle is greenhouse gas intensive. According to the Union of Concerned Scientists, cattle raising generates much higher quantities of global warming emissions (45 kilograms to 643 kg C0₂ per kg) than alternatives such as poultry (10 kg to 30 kg per C0₂ per kg) and dairy (28 kg to 43 kg C0₂ per kg) and accounts for a miniscule fraction of humanity’s food (less than 5 percent). Most of the difference is from methane emissions from the cow’s digestion process. Methane is a strong heat-trapping gas—25 times as potent per molecule than C0₂.