A RECIPE FOR CLIMATE DISASTER

How Food Outlets Dish Out Climate-Intensive Cuisine

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Recipe outlets have a powerful influence on what people buy, what they eat, and which ingredients end up in grocery carts. When the recipes are beef-heavy dishes, this influence comes with a steep environmental footprint. Beef consumption in the United States is four times the global average and is the leading food driving agricultural greenhouse gases along with deforestation, water use, and species extinction.

Nearly one-third (31%) of Americans report that they care about environmental sustainability when purchasing food and beverages.[1] By considering the climate impacts of their recipes posted on social media, recipe outlets can meet audience demand and shift toward climate-friendly cooking.

The average American diet contains more protein than is recommended by the Dietary Guidelines for Americans.[2] [3] [4] In addition, there is strong evidence linking beef to health problems such as heart disease[5] and colorectal cancer.[6] Yet popular food media outlets continue to promote beef recipes, partnering with the beef industry to start new trends like "beef-cuterie boards"[7] or promoting indulgent recipes like Brisket Tacos that require 4.5 pounds of beef for a single dish.[8]

To demonstrate trends in recipe posts and their potential climate impact, we analyzed beef recipe promotion across 10 of the top U.S. food media and recipe outlets, selected from *Muck Rack's Top 20 Food & Beverage Magazines* list. We evaluated a 30-day period of social media recipe promotion on the social media platform Instagram, avoiding major U.S. grilling holidays and seasonal peaks in beef promotion.

Key findings:

- The annual footprint of the beef recipes from top U.S. food outlets adds up to 145 million metric tons of CO_2 — more than Belgium and nearly as much as the Netherlands emits in a year.[9]
- If each Instagram follower of Dotdash Meredith brands *Allrecipes* and *Food & Wine* cooked the beef recipes posted by these brands during the analysis month each month for a year, the annual emissions would top 5,000 times the entire 2023 operational footprint of all 40-plus Dotdash Meredith companies.[10]

The impact of promoting climate-intensive recipes that are digested daily by millions of households weakens U.S. efforts to scale back on food and agriculture-related emissions.

Recommendations:

To align recipe content with climate-friendly diets and meet the growing demand for more sustainable foods, recipe outlets should:

- Stop promoting beef across all platforms, including a commitment not to publish new beef recipes and decline beef-industry promotion and partnerships.
- Provide climate-friendly replacements for archived beef content by offering a plant-based protein substitute and label these alternatives as lower-impact options.
- Increase the share and visibility of plant-based recipes by committing to making at least 25% of all posted recipes plant-based and marked as climate-friendly options.

Recipe outlets in the United States have both the opportunity and responsibility to promote climate-friendly recipes. Eliminating beef recipes and reducing the visibility of one of the most climate-intensive foods would be a powerful first step.

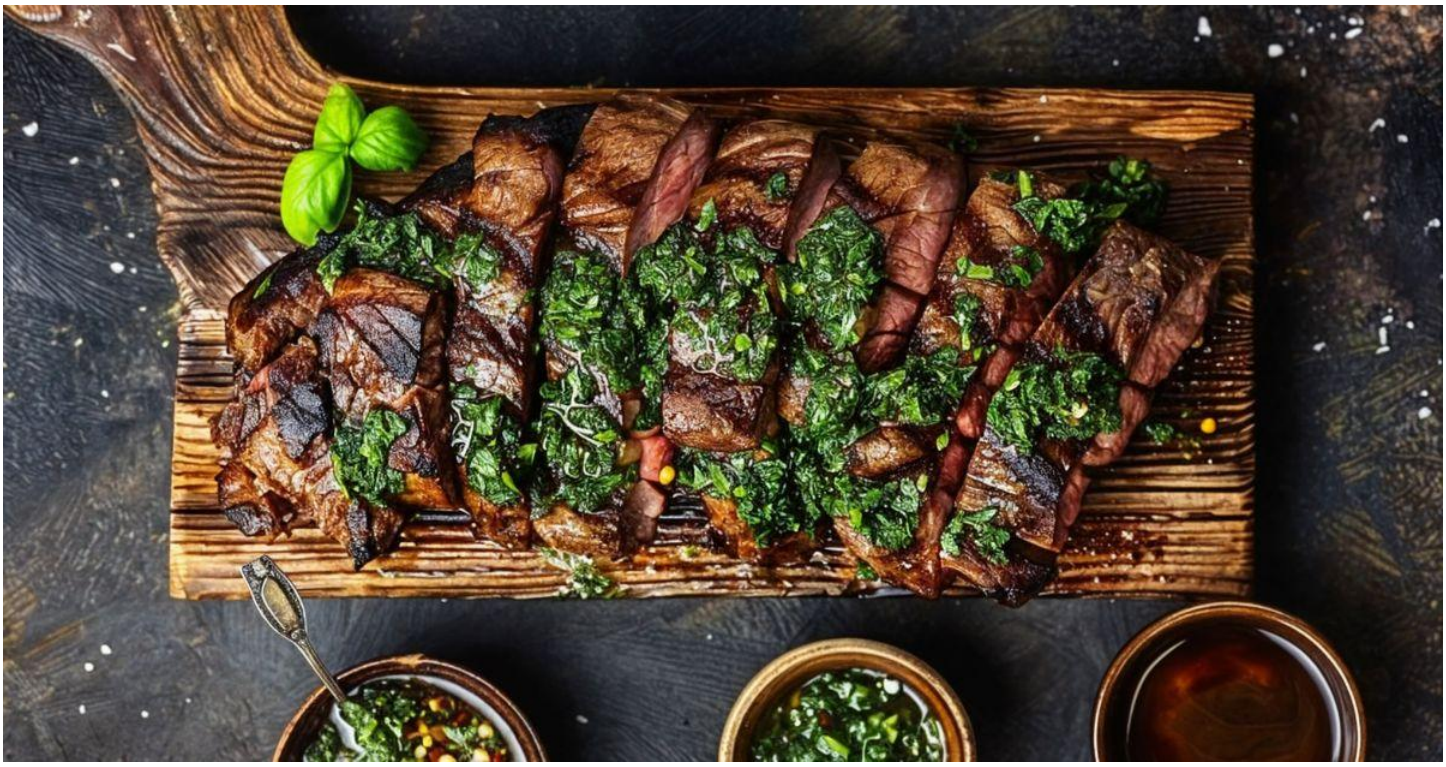
INTRODUCTION

Amidst uncertainty about the economic future, more people have turned to cooking at home, increasing the power of online recipe content. What was once casual browsing is now a daily decision-making tool that guides household purchases. Recipe outlets have a powerful influence on what people buy, make, and eat. When the recipes are beef-heavy dishes, this influence comes with a steep environmental footprint.

Within health and climate communities, data has shown that beef plays too big a role in the average American diet, which contains more protein than is recommended by the Dietary Guidelines for Americans.[11] [12] [13] The 2025 Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee recognized that the healthiest dietary patterns are characterized by higher intakes of vegetables, fruits, legumes, and nuts and lower intakes of red and processed meats (which have been linked with cardiovascular disease and colorectal cancer). [14] [15] [16] The Advisory Committee recommended that Americans eat more beans, peas, and lentils and less red and processed meat.

Meanwhile the 2024 IFIC Food and Health Survey found that 31% of Americans say environmental sustainability influences their food and beverage purchases,[17] while another survey found that nearly 40% of Americans want to reduce beef consumption.[18]

Yet America's most popular food media outlets continue to promote beef recipes across their platforms. Whether partnering with the beef industry to push new trends like "beef-cuterie boards"[19] or promoting indulgent recipes like Brisket Tacos that require 4.5 pounds of beef for a single dish,[20] U.S. food outlets are disregarding the health and climate consequences of the foods they promote.



The impact of promoting climate-intensive recipes to millions of households weakens national efforts to scale back on food-related emissions. Addressing the outsized emissions in the United States requires a combination of policy changes as well as individual actions and dietary shifts. These individual actions are influenced by several factors, including cultural narratives about food on social media. Many food outlets recognize their role as powerful media companies and acknowledge the climate crisis on their sites, despite clashing with the actual food they promote.

As the reach and power of influence of recipe outlets continues to grow, so does the urgency for editorial responsibility. These platforms are uniquely positioned to guide eating habits in a more sustainable direction — but only if they align their content with current scientific understanding of the climate impact of food and agriculture.

CONTRADICTING CLIMATE POSITIONS

Food media outlets vary widely in how they acknowledge the climate impact of the recipes they share. One noteworthy example outside this report is *Epicurious*, which announced its decision to stop publishing beef recipes on its platform in 2021, citing sustainability as the primary motivation.[21] In its public statement, *Epicurious* emphasized that while no ingredient is perfect, "cutting out just a single ingredient — beef — can have an outsize impact on making a person's cooking more environmentally friendly" and highlighted that "cows are 20 times less efficient to raise than beans." Framing this choice as "not anti-beef but pro-planet," *Epicurious* stated the decision was about "not giving airtime to one of the world's worst climate offenders."[22]

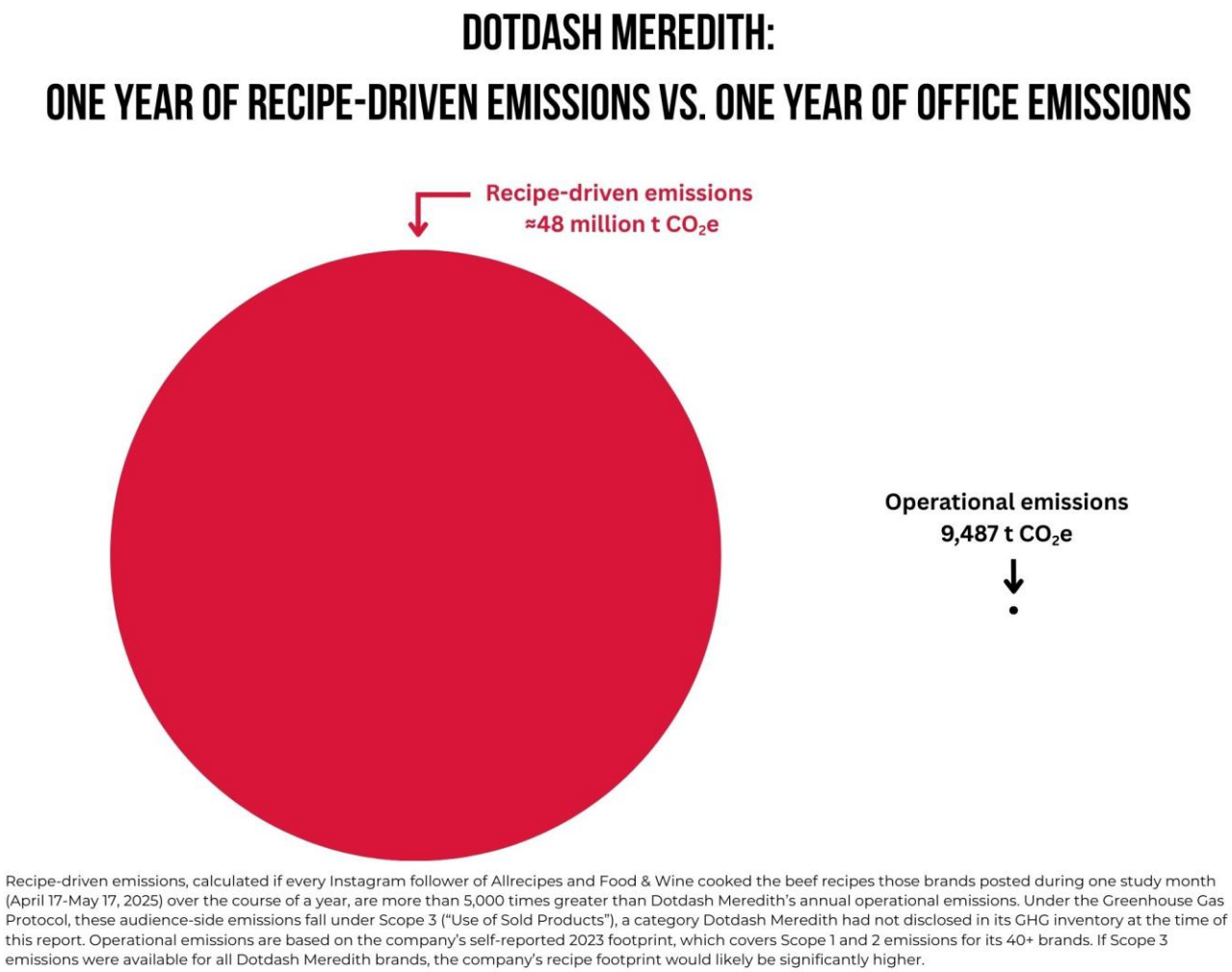
Epicurious's step away from beef demonstrated a willingness to take responsibility for the influence it has on public consumption and the climate. Such leadership is especially important at a time when the climate crisis demands bold action.

At the time of writing, however, none of the outlets analyzed in this report have publicly committed to stop publishing beef recipes.[23]

Many of the outlets in this report have published articles on the climate crisis. Some even refer to the outsized impact of beef. Yet these outlets continue to promote beef dishes on their platforms. *Allrecipes*, for example, published an article that listed six ways to make menus better for the environment; the second most important action was cutting back on beef, described as "by far the single-largest contributor to climate pollution associated with the food we eat."[24] Yet the platform published over three times more beef recipes than any other outlet during the one-month period analyzed in our report.

Dotdash Meredith is the parent company of *Allrecipes*, *Food & Wine*, and *Real Simple*, along with dozens more brands not studied in this report. Dotdash Meredith was named to *Newsweek's* list of America's Most Responsible Companies[25] and highlights 100% LED lighting, automated HVAC, paper reduction efforts, and recycling as evidence of climate leadership.[26] Dotdash Meredith's entire 2023 operational footprint was 9,487 t CO_2e.[27]

Yet if every Instagram follower of *Allrecipes* and *Food & Wine* — representing just two of Dotdash Meredith's 40+ brands — prepared the beef recipes posted in just one month, the resulting annualized emissions would be 48 million t CO_2e, more than 5,000 times greater than the entire company's operational emissions. Even at a more conservative estimate of just 1% of followers cooking the beef recipes, the company's recipe footprint from these two brands would still be more than 50 times greater than Dotdash's operational footprint for its 40+ brands.



In its content, *Food Network* has addressed the importance of "flexitarianism" or eating primarily plant-based foods and less or smaller portions of meat to eat more sustainably.[28] Yet during the one-month period studied in this report, the *Food Network* shared a recipe for Brisket Tacos that required a whopping 4.5 pounds of beef for that single dish alone.[29]

Similarly *Food Network's* parent company, Warner Bros. Discovery, has made commitments to reducing its climate impact. One way it can do this as a media company, it notes, is through telling stories that "inspire" audiences.[30] *Food Network* can help carry out this mission by sharing stories along with more climate-friendly recipes.

Other outlets like *Taste of Home* and *Cook's Illustrated* ranked near the top in both impact and frequency of posting beef recipes but make no mention of beef's impact on climate change in their content. Instead they lean into culinary nostalgia and indulgence, largely avoiding any engagement with the growing environmental discourse around food — despite the clear implications of promoting high-impact ingredients at scale.

THE COST OF PROMOTING BEEF

- The annual footprint of the beef recipes from top U.S. food outlets adds up to 145 million metric tons of CO_2 — more than Belgium emits in a year and nearly as much as the Netherlands.[31]
- If every Instagram follower of Dotdash Meredith brands *Allrecipes* and *Food & Wine* cooked the beef recipes promoted by these brands once a month, the resulting annual emissions would top 5,000 times the entire 2023 operational footprint of all 40-plus Dotdash Meredith companies.[32]

**Dotdash Meredith is one of the largest U.S. digital media companies, parent to more than 40 brands including Allrecipes, Food & Wine, and Real Simple. This comparison reflects the climate impact of recipe content from only the two Dotdash Meredith brands—All Recipes and Food & Wine—that promoted beef during the analysis month versus the operational emissions of all 40-plus brands and offices combined.*

METHODOLOGY

This analysis examined beef recipe promotion across 10 of the top U.S. food media and recipe outlets, selected from *Muck Rack's Top 20 Food & Beverage Magazines* list. The top ten outlets were chosen in order of their ranking, excluding Pioneer Woman due to its irregular Instagram posting patterns during the study period that prevented consistent analysis.

Instagram was chosen as the platform for this analysis because it provided a consistent and practical way to track recipes shared within a specific time frame across all outlets. Data was collected for the most recent feasible 30-day period, spanning April 17 to May 17, 2025, and avoided major U.S. grilling holidays, reducing seasonal peaks that could skew results.

For each outlet, only recipe posts were counted in the dataset totals. Drink recipes were excluded, while desserts and dips were included. If dessert recipes had been excluded, the percentage of beef recipes would have been even higher across most outlets.

Some outlets are primarily lifestyle brands with infrequent recipe posting, such as *Good Housekeeping* and *Real Simple*. For example, *Real Simple* posted only two recipe-related posts during the study period, neither of which included beef. *Good Housekeeping*

posted a single recipe-related Instagram post, which was a roundup of 50 recipes, six of which included beef. Recipe roundup posts like this were excluded from total recipe counts due to the difficulty of assessing individual reach or engagement for each featured recipe.

Beef recipe weights were recorded directly from recipe ingredient lists in pounds. Total greenhouse gas emissions were calculated by converting pounds of beef to kilograms (dividing total pounds by 2.205), then multiplying by the outlet's number of Instagram followers. That number was multiplied by standard emissions factors for beef production from Poore & Nemecek (99.48 kgCO_2e per kilogram),[33] values sourced via Our World in Data,[34] to calculate the potential monthly beef-related greenhouse gas emissions for each outlet. To estimate annual impacts, monthly results were annualized under the assumption that posting patterns remain similar throughout the year (i.e. the same amount of beef recipes would be posted each month, cooked once a month by every follower for a year). Because data was collected outside peak grilling season, these estimates are likely conservative.

The modeled swap for black beans in the Food Network's brisket taco's recipe uses standard emissions factor for "other pulses" from Poore & Nemecek,[35] values sourced via Our World in Data.[36]

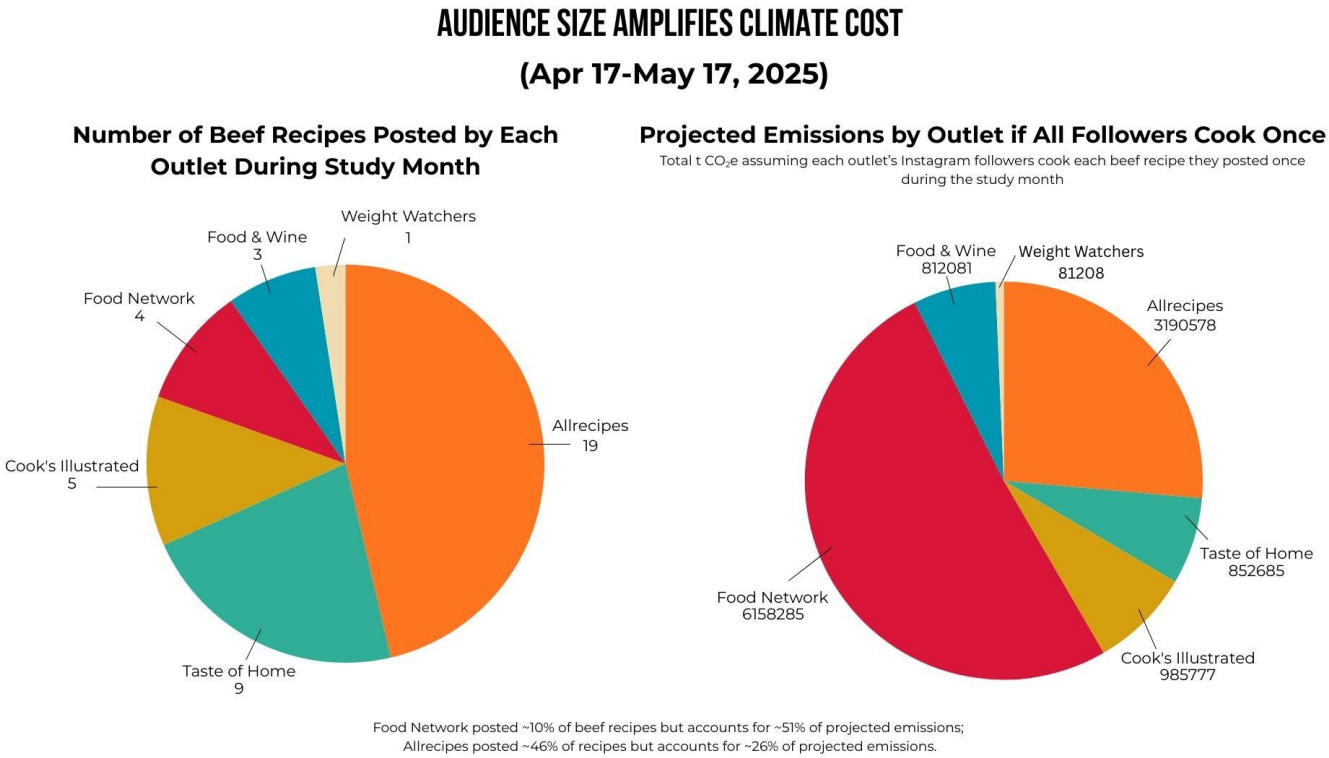
ANALYSIS

To establish the potential impact of promoting climate-intensive foods like beef, our analysis examined social media posts of 10 of the top U.S. food media and recipe outlets, based on Muck Rack's ranking of most influential food and beverage magazines.[37] These outlets collectively shape millions of consumer food choices and reflect the dominant narrative in recipe media. Instagram was chosen as the platform for this analysis because it provided a consistent and reliable way to track recipe posts across outlets during the study period.

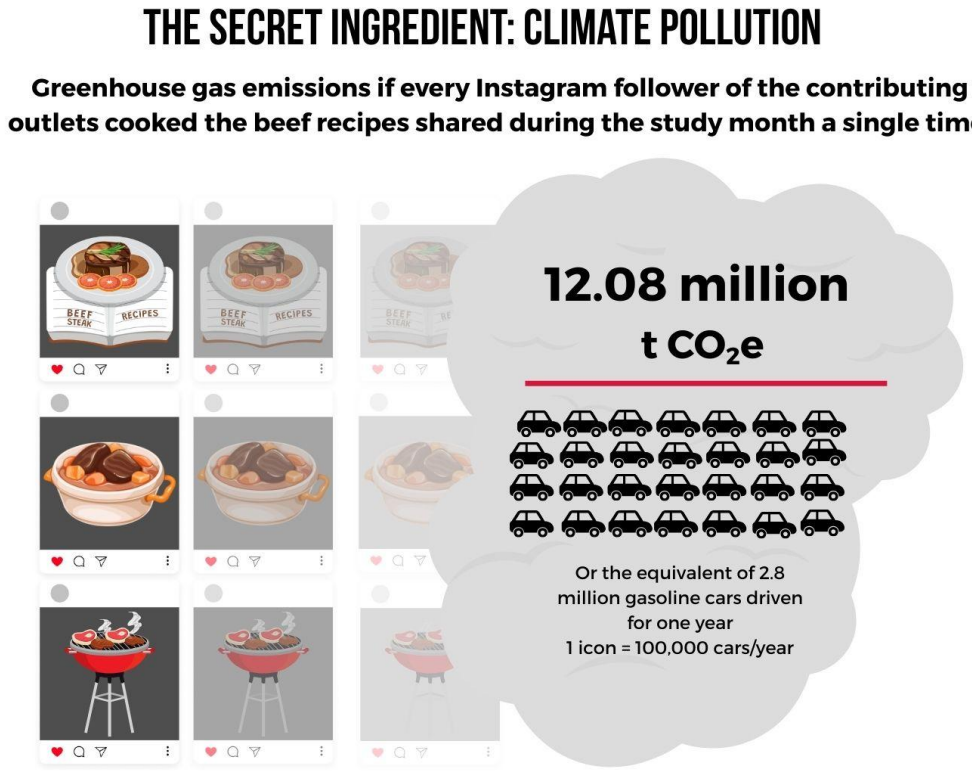
Outlets analyzed:

- Allrecipes
- Food Network
- Good Housekeeping
- Taste of Home
- Food and Wine
- Real Simple
- Prevention
- Bon Appetit
- Weight Watchers
- Cook's Illustrated

Across the six outlets that actively promoted beef between April 17 and May 17, 2025, a total of 38 beef recipes were posted on Instagram, requiring over 57 pounds of beef to prepare each recipe a single time.



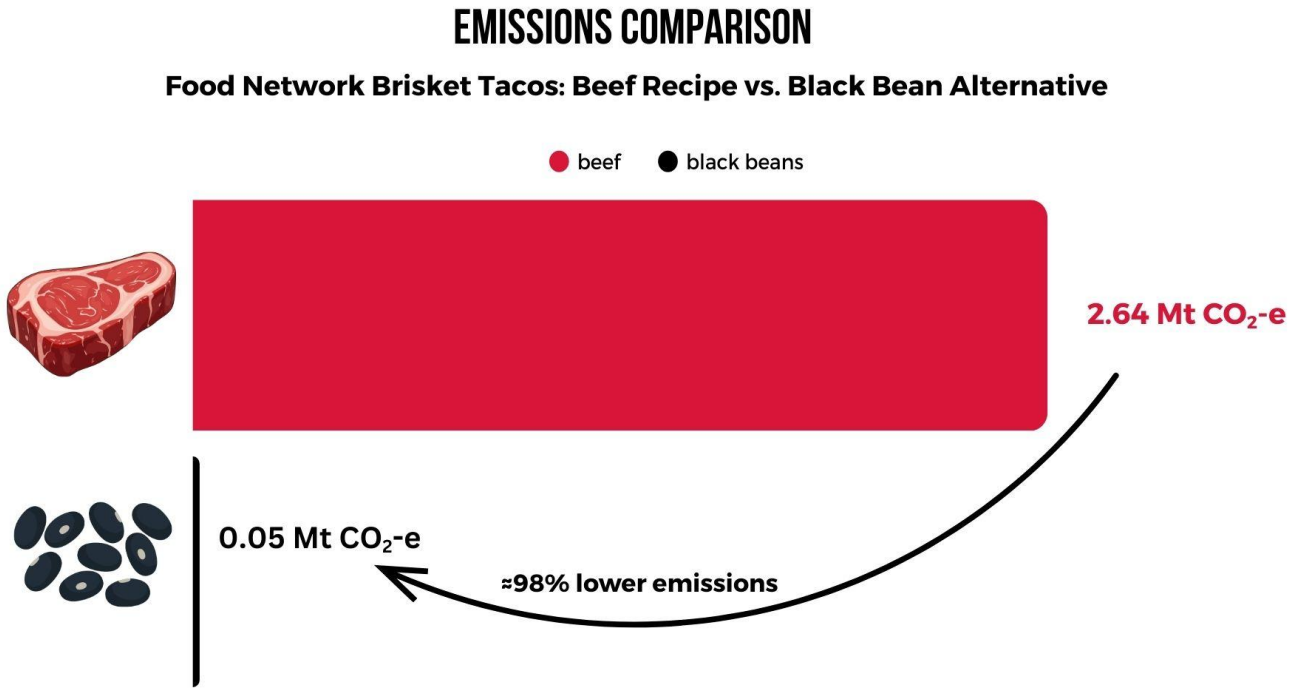
If all followers made the beef recipes shared just for that month alone, the resulting emissions would total 12.08 million metric tons, or the equivalent of 2.8 million gasoline powered cars driven for one year.



Allrecipes posted the most beef recipes, with 19 for the month, totaling more than 20 pounds of beef. It promoted beef roughly four times a week, and 15% of its total recipes for the month included beef, a surprising volume considering the outlet's prior acknowledgment of beef's environmental impacts. If all of its Instagram followers made the beef recipes shared just that month, the resulting emissions would total 3.19 million metric tons of greenhouse gases, or the equivalent of 744,084 gas-powered cars driven for one year.

Food Network had the largest Instagram following in the dataset at 13 million and posted four beef recipes for the month. Yet it also promoted recipes that collectively required the third-highest amount of beef, at 10.5 pounds. Several recipes were large-format dishes requiring multiple pounds of beef per recipe, most notably a brisket taco recipe that required 4.5 pounds. They ranked middle of the road when it came to frequency and percentage of total beef recipes for the month but remained high impact due to quantity of beef required for the recipes they did share. If all of their followers made the beef recipes they shared for that month alone, it would result in 6.16 million metric tons of greenhouse gas emissions, the highest GHG impact of all outlets analyzed due to their larger following.

If Food Network's brisket tacos recipe replaced the recommended 4.5 pounds of beef with 4.5 pounds of cooked black beans, it would result in a greater than 98% reduction in GHG emissions.



Food Network's recipe uses beef brisket. The black-bean version is an alternative shown for comparison to illustrate potential emissions savings. Assumes every Food Network Instagram follower cooks the recipe once; emissions factors from Poore & Nemecek (2018).

Taste of Home and *Cook's Illustrated* followed next in impact. Each posted six and five beef recipes, respectively, with beef accounting for over 8% of their total recipe content. *Cook's Illustrated* recipes were especially beef-heavy, including indulgent dishes like skirt steak and prime rib and totaling 11.5 pounds over the month.

Notably, on May 14, *Taste of Home* also ran a paid partnership post with the Beef Checkoff Program, promoting "Beef-Cuterie Boards" as a beef-centered take on the charcuterie board trend. While no formal recipe was included and the post wasn't counted in the recipe data, this industry-driven marketing initiative highlights how beef promotion extends beyond traditional editorial content. This kind of branded partnership suggests that the beef industry sees outlets like *Taste of Home* as influential platforms for shaping food culture, using lifestyle content to not only reinforce beef as a culturally desirable and normalized option, but increase its consumption.

Food & Wine and *Weight Watchers* fell on the lower end of beef promotion. *Food & Wine* shared three beef recipes totaling 4.5 pounds — accounting for 3.8% of its total 79 recipes shared during the one-month period. While *Weight Watchers* posted just one beef recipe requiring one pound of beef for the month, that single post accounted for a significant 10% of the outlet's total recipe content.

Three outlets — *Good Housekeeping, Prevention,* and *Real Simple* — stood out for their irregular recipe posting and broader lifestyle focus. *Prevention* and *Real Simple* did not post any beef recipes.

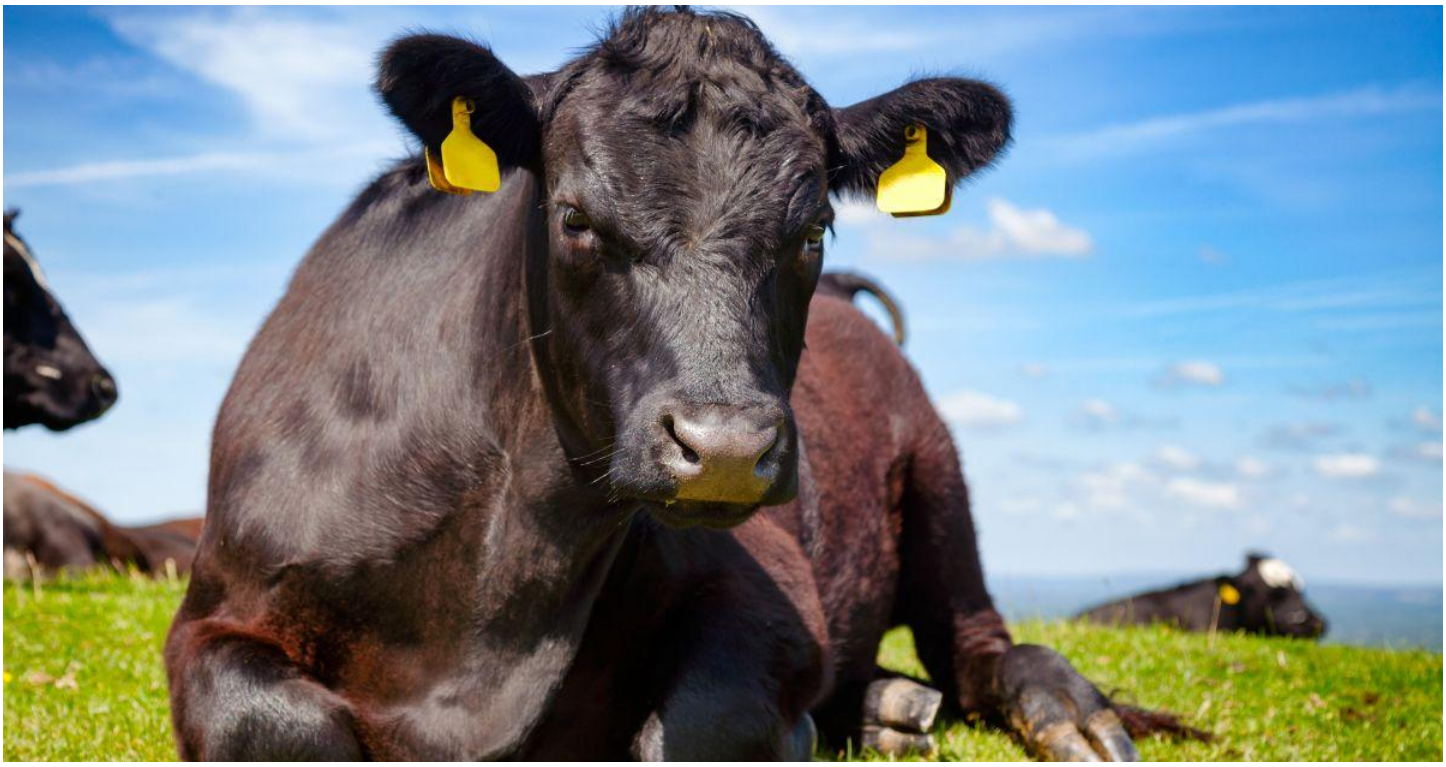
Good Housekeeping had only a single recipe-related post during the month, which was a roundup of 50 recipes, six of which included beef. While this post was excluded from the total recipe count due to the difficulty of assessing individual reach and impact, it's significant that beef accounted for 12% of the featured recipes in that recipe roundup post.

As the sister brand to *Epicurious*, which publicly committed to stop publishing beef recipes in 2021, *Bon Appetit* appears, at least in this snapshot, to be moving in a similar direction.

BUILDING A HEALTHIER PLATE FOR THE PLANET

Beyond its greenhouse gas footprint, beef production is also a leading driver of deforestation, habitat loss, biodiversity loss, and intensive water use and pollution. More than one-third of all land in the contiguous United States is used for livestock grazing,

most of it for cattle, an allocation that has cleared vast amounts of forest and destroyed native ecosystems.[38] This large-scale land conversion carries its own climate costs while simultaneously threatening wildlife. Native species are displaced as their habitats shrink, and many are lethally "managed" by USDA Wildlife Services when they are perceived to threaten cattle operations.[39] As a result the land use required for beef production has a dual toll: eroding natural carbon sinks and directly reducing wildlife populations that are already under pressure. (See Appendix 1, How Beef Drives Climate Change.)



Compared to almost every other form of food we can dish up, cattle products like beef and dairy use more water than most foods — including almonds and grapes, which are often criticized in the media for their water use. U.S. beef production uses 21.2 trillion gallons of water annually.[40] From a global perspective, beef cattle are the largest users of water in the entire animal agriculture industry.

But it's not just the thirsty feed crops that drain our landscapes dry. Beef production is also a major contributor to water pollution. Cattle excrete about 120 pounds of manure per cow each day, and runoff from this waste, along with the fertilizers used to grow cattle feed, enters rivers and lakes which triggers algal blooms that pollute drinking water and kill marine life.[41]

Reducing beef consumption is one of the most important actions individuals and the institutions that influence what we eat — including recipe outlets and food service providers — can take to protect water, wildlife and ecosystems.

RECOMMENDATIONS

By considering the climate impacts of their posted recipes, recipe outlets can positively influence both what people are cooking and the health of our planet. As cultural influencers, recipe outlets have the responsibility to encourage more climate friendly food choices. It's time for recipe outlets to offer recipes that help support a thriving planet rather than facilitate the acceleration of climate catastrophe.

To align recipe content with climate-friendly diets and meet the growing demand for more sustainable foods, recipe outlets should:

1. Stop promoting beef across all platforms
    - Publish no new beef recipes.
    - Do not resurface, repost or feature archived beef recipes on homepages, newsletters, or social channels.
    - Decline Beef Checkoff and other beef-industry partnerships.
2. Provide climate-friendly replacements for archived beef content
    - For each high-traffic beef recipe that remains in the archive, offer a plant-based protein substitute or link to an alternative plant-based recipe.
    - Label these alternatives clearly as lower-impact options.
3. Increase the share and visibility of plant-based recipes
    - Commit to ensuring at least 25% of all posted recipes are plant-based.
    - Tag, index, and promote these recipes as climate-friendly across platforms to ensure discoverability.

Because major U.S. food media outlets inspire and influence millions of home cooks, they are uniquely positioned to influence people to choose lower impact foods and help normalize climate-friendly eating on a scale that could make a meaningful difference. Eliminating beef recipes and reducing the visibility of one of the most climate-intensive foods would be a powerful first step.

APPENDIX 1

How Beef Drives Climate Change

Beef is the leading food source of greenhouse gas emissions, deforestation and land use and, along with dairy, is one of the most water-intensive foods to produce.[42] Cattle drive the climate crisis through three major forms of greenhouse gases. Carbon dioxide emissions come from the massive amount of land needed to sustain America's overconsumption of beef. The production of beef is the leading source of deforestation and related carbon emissions globally. Deforestation is a major contributor to greenhouse gas emissions (GHG), second only to the burning of fossil fuels.[43] In addition, deforestation is the largest driver of biodiversity loss and species decline, primarily from the agricultural resources used to raise cattle.

Two other forms of greenhouse gases are related to cattle production. Through natural digestion processes, cattle emit methane with a warming effect in the atmosphere about 80 times more powerful than carbon dioxide over a 20-year time frame.[44] In addition, nitrous oxide (from manure and fertilizers) is the most significant ozone depleting substance in the atmosphere, with a global warming potential nearly 300 times greater than carbon over a 20-year time frame.[45]

Dietary shifts are essential for climate and ecological stability. Americans consume four times the global average in beef.[46] This overconsumption of the world's most climate-intensive food threatens climate goals. Studies show that even if fossil fuel emissions are eliminated, if we fail to reduce food system emissions it would be impossible to limit warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius.[47] As we pass the 1.5-degree target outlined in the Paris Agreement on climate change, there will be an increase in heatwaves, droughts, and wildfires.

Reducing beef is vital to achieving the targets outlined in the UN Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris Agreement.[48] The EAT-Lancet Commission urges individuals in wealthier countries like the United States to sharply reduce red meat and dairy consumption to curb emissions and protect biodiversity.[49]

APPENDIX 2

Data

Outlet	IG followers	Monthly website visitors	# of beef recipes shared on IG (4/17-517)	Pounds of beef needed to prepare recipes	Percentage of beef recipes	GHG emissions for one month of recipes (metric tons CO2e)
Allrecipes	3.4 M	128.9M	19	20.8	15%	3.19 M
Good Housekeeping †	1.1M	33.2M	--	--	--	--
Taste of Home	2.1M	20.4M	6	9	8.6%	852,685
Cook's Illustrated	1.9M	3M	5	11.5	8.5%	985,777
Food Network	13M	36.5M	4	10.5	6.5%	6.16 M
Food & Wine	4M	17.6M	3	4.5	3.8%	812,081
Bon Appetit†	4.9M	7.1M	--	--	--	--
Weight Watchers	1.8M	3.7M	1	1	10%	81,208
Real Simple	11.6M	11.6M	0	0	0	0
Prevention	9.2M	9.2M	0	0	0	0

† Observed beef content existed but was excluded from aggregate totals. *Good Housekeeping*'s six beef dishes appeared only inside one 50-recipe roundup post, making individual reach and impact difficult to estimate. *Bon Appétit*'s item was a chef demonstration video (not a formal recipe) and was therefore excluded.

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