

Food and Climate: A Jewish Guide



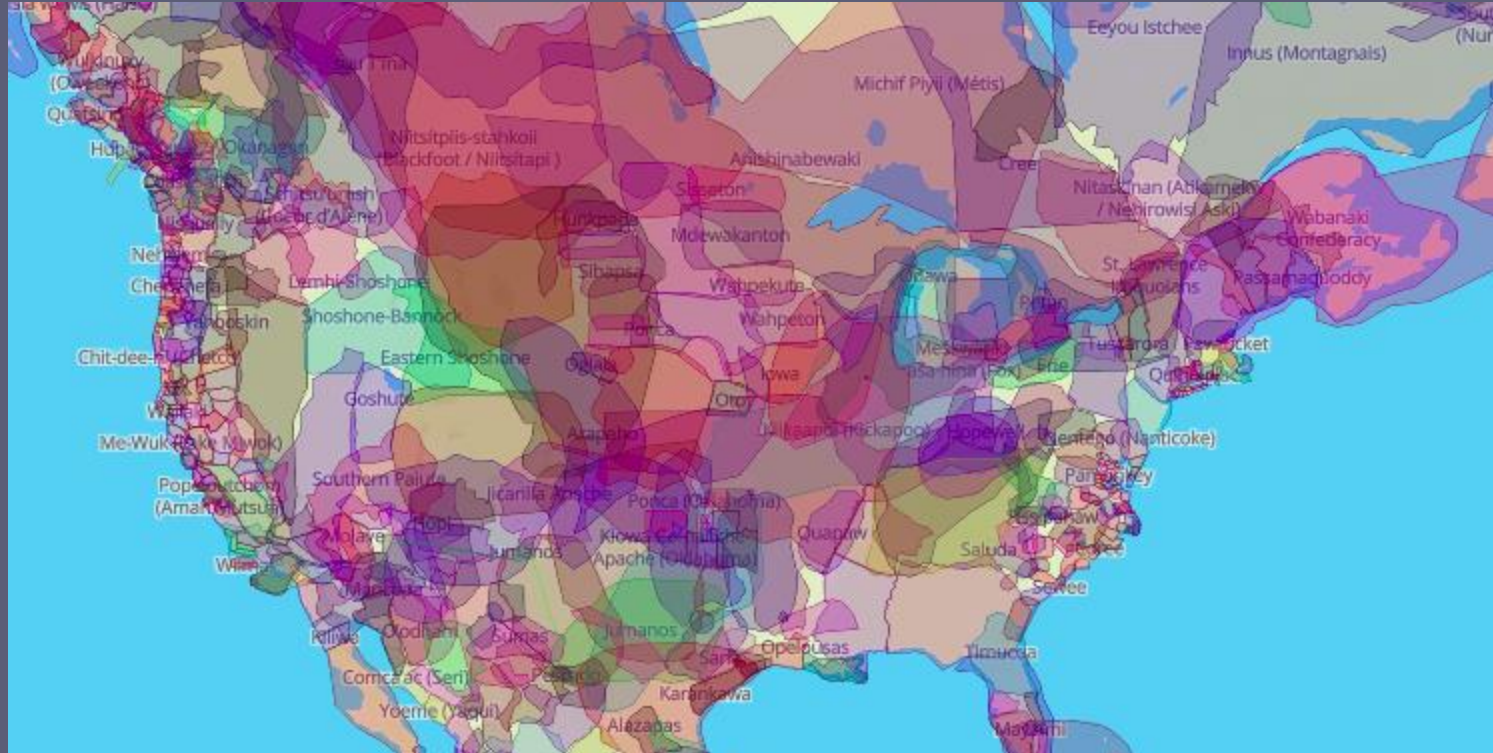
A photograph of four young women sitting in a blue and purple striped hammock outdoors. They are all smiling and looking towards the camera. The background shows a green lawn and trees. The image is semi-transparent, allowing the text to be overlaid.

Welcome!

Please share your name, grade, pronouns, and location in the chat!
If you have any access needs, feel free to message ___!



Land Acknowledgement -- native-land.ca



The Jewish Youth Climate Movement, founded by the largest faith-based environmental organization Hazon in 2019, is a Gen Z-led movement dedicated to combating climate change and environmental injustice from a Jewish lens. Our goal is to make taking collective action towards climate justice a central, defining feature of what it means to be Jewish over the next decade, empowering the next generation of Jewish youth to be leaders in our fight to build a sustainable and equitable world for all.



Why a Jewish Youth Climate Movement?



Climate Change is a Systems Problem



fossil fuel corporations

animal agriculture

food insecurity

consumer waste

classism

racism

It's all connected

carbon
footprint

inequality

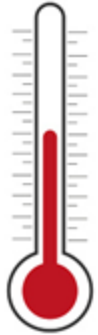
financial institutions
and capitalism



Our food choices have a similar, or often greater, climate impact as our transportation choices.

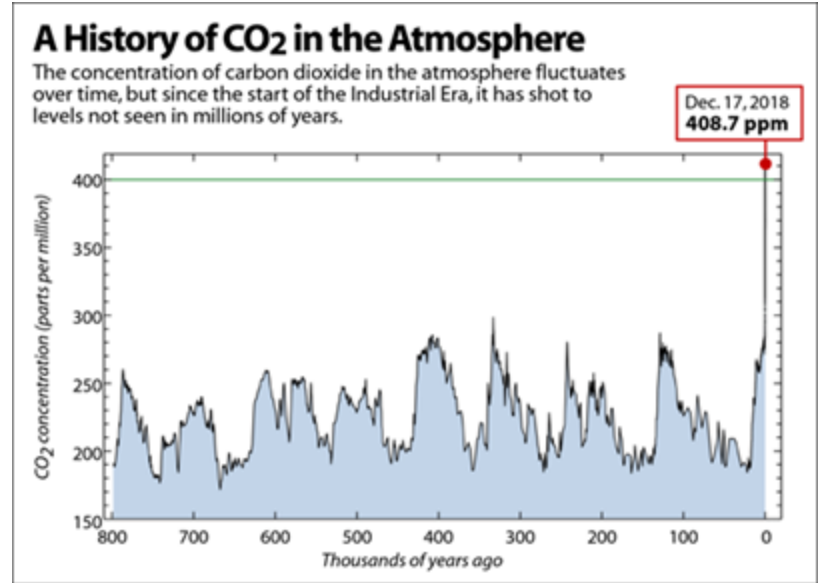
Food and Climate Change

Humans are responsible for
100% of global warming



100%

A few degrees is a BIG deal



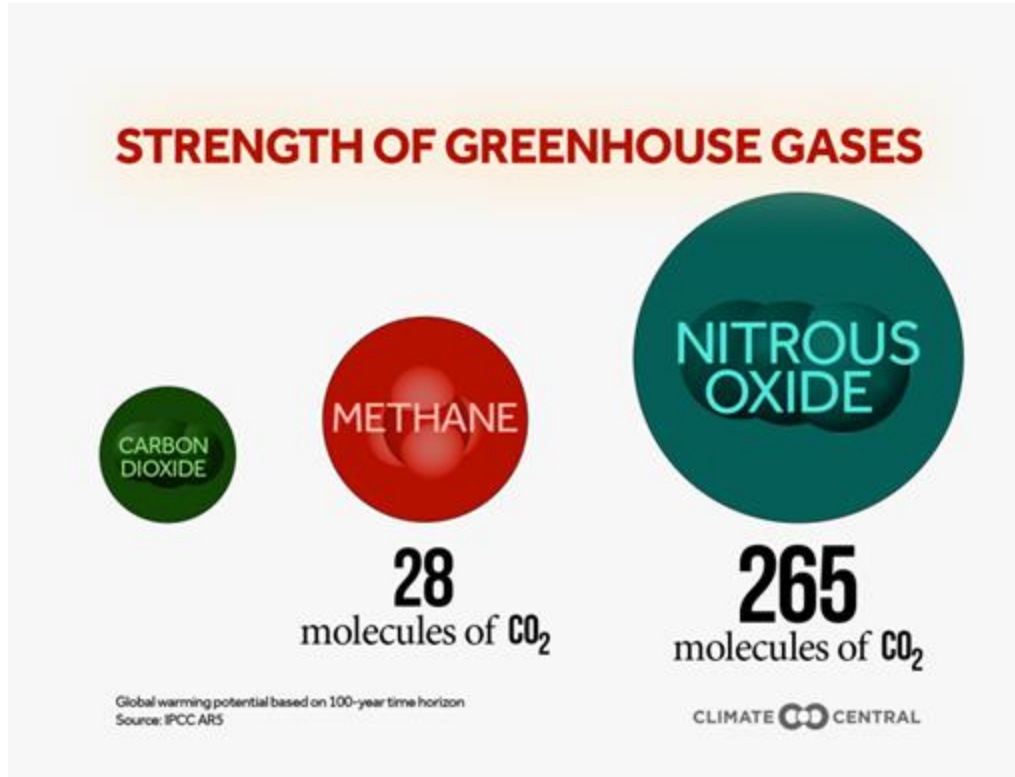
SOURCES: Scripps Institution of Oceanography

InsideClimate News

The concentration of CO₂ in the atmosphere has spiked since the industrial revolution



Continued—



The Facts

- 40% of food in the United States is wasted!
The largest percentage of that waste – 44% – comes from households.
- According to the EPA, food waste has increased by 50% since the 1970s and is now the largest solid waste contributor to landfills.
- More than 30 million tons of food waste ends up in landfills in the United States alone each year where it decomposes without oxygen and emits methane, a greenhouse gas more than 80 times for potent (over twenty years) than carbon dioxide.



Factory Farming

CAFOs

(Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations)

- Extremely brutal for animals
- Lead to dispersal of high amounts of toxic waste

Why is this an Environmental Justice Issue?

- A few large corporations source from many farmers
- Pollutants disproportionately affect low income and black and brown communities
- Industrialized farming disrupts traditional subsistence agriculture, harming many indigenous and rural populations



**This system is unsustainable and
leaves many people behind.**



What privilege do I have (or lack)?

- What is privilege?

A special right, advantage, or immunity granted or available only to a particular person or group

- What are some examples of privilege?

Socioeconomic, white privilege, gender, heterosexual, religious, etc...



So what are we supposed to do?

As children, we are taught about environmentalism from a historically individualistic (and simplistic) lens. We are told to save the planet through:

- Reduce, reuse, recycle
- Composting
- Using reusable water bottles
- Bringing our own bags to the grocery store

These are all wonderful sustainability things that we should strive for; they even bring us joy! But they will not come anywhere near saving the planet.



Collective Action vs. Individual

While these are all great ways to be involved and help out on an individual level, the impact these activities have on a larger scale is very small.

Individual action is important in the influencing of collective action.

What is collective action?

What are some examples?



me



the group

Food Systems Policies

Farm Systems Reform Act: Moratorium on new concentrated animal food operations (a way of factory farming that causes tons of emissions!) and phases out the largest of these operations by 2040

Healthy Future Students & Earth Act: legislation to create a pilot grant program to provide healthy, climate-friendly plant-based meals in American public schools



Taking action in the movement for system change is the single most effective way any one person can mitigate the climate crisis.



Jewish tradition compels us to respond



How is Judaism a land-based and food-based tradition?





The Shmita cycle is a Biblical seven year economic cycle. One year out of seven transforms the economic and environmental world.

The last Shmita cycle began on Rosh HaShanah 5782/September 2021.
It is time for a Jewish communal climate awakening.



Shmita: a Jewish Guide to Climate Justice

“When you enter the land that I assign to you, the land shall observe a sabbath of the LORD. Six years you may sow your field and six years you may prune your vineyard and gather in the yield. But in the seventh year the land shall have a sabbath of complete rest, a sabbath of the LORD: you shall not sow your field or prune your vineyard. You shall not reap the aftergrowth of your harvest or gather the grapes of your untrimmed vines; it shall be a year of complete rest for the land.” -- Leviticus 25:2-5



Shmita: Tzedakah

“Six years you may sow your land and gather in its produce. But in the seventh [year] you shall release it and abandon it; the poor of your people shall eat [it], and what they leave over, the beasts of the field shall eat. So shall you do to your vineyard [and] to your olive tree[s].” — Exodus 23: 10–11



Shmita: Regeneration

“Now if, after all that, you do not hearken to me, I will continue to discipline you, sevenfold, for your sins. I will break your fierce pride! I will give your heavens to be like iron, and your earth like bronze, so that your power will be spent for naught; your land will not give-forth its yield, the trees of the land will not give-forth their fruit... ” — Leviticus 26: 18–20, 34–35



Shmita: Work and Rest

“In order that they should not always be preoccupied with working the soil to provide for their material needs. For in this one year, they would be completely free. The liberation from the yoke of work would give them the opportunity for studying Torah and wisdom. Those who are not students will be occupied with crafts and building and supplying these needs in Eretz Yisrael. Those endowed with special skills will invent new methods in this free time for the benefit of the world.” – *Rabbi Zvi Hirsch Kalischer, Sefer Habrit, Behar (19th Century)*



Shmita: Food & Agriculture Systems

Once the time of Biur [a Shmita time period] has passed (meaning a specific food is no longer found in the wild), this specific food could not be held in private storage. Instead, this food must be made available to the public until it was fully consumed. If you happened to have a large amount of this food in storage, you would be guided to “distribute a quantity sufficient for three meals” to as many people as you can (Rambam 7.3).

How would your sense of food security shift if this was dependent upon community sharing rather than personal storage?



Shmita: Debt and Economic Justice

“Now this is the matter of the Release: he shall release, every possessor of a loan of his hand, what he has lent to his neighbor. He is not to oppress his neighbor or his brother, for the Release of the Lord has been proclaimed!”—Deuteronomy 15:2

“When the produce of the Sabbatical year is sold, it should not be sold by measure, nor by weight, nor by number, so that it will not appear that one is selling produce in the Sabbatical year. Instead, one should sell a small amount by estimation to make it known that [the produce] is ownerless. And the proceeds of the sale should only be used to purchase other food.” —Rambam, Mishne Torah, Hilchot Shmita v’Yovel 6.3



Shmita: Land Practice

“The land is not to be sold in-harness (permanently), for the land is mine; for you are sojourners and resident-settlers with me, throughout all the land of your holdings, you are to allow for redemption of the land. When your brother sinks down in poverty and has to sell some of his holding, his redeemer nearest-in-kin to him is to come and redeem the sold- property of his brother. Now a man- if he has no redeemer, but his hand reaches means and finds enough to redeem with, he is to reckon the years since its sale, returning the surplus to the man to whom he sold it, and it is to return to his holding. But if his hand does not find enough means for returning it, what he sold is to remain in the hand of the one purchasing it, until the Year of Jubilee, it is to go-free in the Jubilee, and it is to return to his holding.” — Leviticus 25: 23–28



What does Shmita mean to you? Discuss.

1. What do the quotes mean?
2. Why is it important to leave the corners of the fields unreaped?
3. What is tzedakah? Why is it important?
4. How does shmita translate to today?
5. Why is rest important?
6. Why should we respect the land?
7. How are individual choices different from collective action? Why are they both important?
8. Is shmita plausible in our world today? Why or why not?
 - a. What can shmita literally look like? How can we translate its tenets in the Torah (leaving the land to rest, open food and resources for all, not wasting resources or making a profit, freeing slaves and forgiving debts) to our modern Jewish and secular world?



Discussion

- How are individual choices different from systemic change to combat the climate crisis? How can they co-exist and reinforce each other? Why and how does Judaism encourage both?
- Is shmita plausible in our world today? How could it transform our understanding of the Jewish community?
- What can shmita literally look like? How can we translate its tenets in the Torah (leaving the land to rest, open food and resources for all, not wasting resources or making a profit, freeing slaves and forgiving debts) to our modern Jewish and secular world?
- Why is it our responsibility as young Jews to urge the leaders in our community to create and begin a climate response plan during the year of shmita?



Key takeaways:

- Climate change is a systemic issue
- The Food System is a big part of it
- Our current food system leaves many underprivileged people behind
- Our Jewish tradition compels us to respond
- Collective action > individual action

And now... Policies!!!



The Healthy Future Students and Earth Act:

Advocating for healthy, climate-friendly food in public schools



Healthy Future Students and Earth Act (HFSE ACT)

- The HFSE Act (H.R.4108) was introduced by Representatives Nydia Velazquez and Jamaal Bowman in July 2021.
- The bill would establish a new pilot grant program to help school districts offer more climate-friendly school lunches.
- It prioritizes funding for low-income school districts and emphasizes culturally appropriate menus.



The image shows the United States Capitol building in Washington, D.C., under a blue sky with light clouds. The building's iconic dome and neoclassical architecture are clearly visible. Overlaid on the center of the image is the text 'Taking Action!' in a large, bold, dark blue font.

Taking Action!

Legislative Lobbying 101

Actions You Can Take

1. Write to or call your US representative and urge them to support or cosponsor the bills that are making big, bold change
2. Write a Letter to the Editor of your local paper expressing your support for the bills
3. Start a petition in support of the bills and get your peers (in school, synagogue, youth groups, etc.) to sign on
4. Meet with your US representative!

PUT YOUR REPRESENTATIVES IN THE CHAT!

<https://www.house.gov/representatives/find-your-representative>

7 Commitments for the 7-Year Shmita Cycle

1. Make a climate crisis and justice **plan**, including plans for education, community engagement, public communications, energy transition, advocacy, and direct action
2. Appoint a climate crisis **coordinator**, committee, organizer, etc. to inform and oversee your institution's climate crisis and justice plan
3. Present regular progress **updates** (through meetings with JYCM or written reports) on your institution's climate crisis and justice plan; foster ongoing collaboration with JYCM and Jewish climate organizations
4. Frequently deliver and participate in climate-related **D'var Torahs, learn-ins, trainings, holiday programming, public messages, childhood classroom education;** for these engagements, draw from **Jewish tradition** and history, **emphasize the systems** of oppression that created the climate crisis, and amplify equity-based solutions
5. Participate in advocacy and **actions** around local and federal climate **policies** and legislation
6. Educate your congregants and community members about the sovereignty of the **peoples indigenous to land** we live on, and build **partnerships with native communities** (and other frontline communities) around pursuing climate justice
7. **Start a JYCM kvutzah** at your institution, or conduct outreach to synagogues and youth groups in your area (and across your network) to recruit youth to build kvutzot; support young Jews in becoming leaders in this intergenerational mobilization for climate justice



Breakouts!

Room 1: Writing a collective letter to your local representatives about the Healthy Future Students and Earth Act (using a template letter that you will edit to talk about how all of you are young Jews who care about climate change).

Room 2: Writing a collective letter to leaders of your synagogue about why as young Jews you care about climate justice and are asking them to sign on to the shmita commitments (adapt the commitments to your community context).



Join the movement:

1. Create a Kvutzah in your community!
2. Follow us on social media (@jewishyouthclimatemovement)
3. Check out our website
(<https://www.jewishyouthclimatemovement.org/>)
4. Join our listserv
(<https://hazon.salsalabs.org/jycmemailsignup/index.html>)
5. Email us at jewishyouthclimatemovement@hazon.org



Take action with us:

- Create a kvutzah (local chapter) in your community
- Get your Jewish communities to sign onto our Shmita Commitments
- Join our upcoming actions: Exodus Alliance — plan an Earth Seder for Pesach!



Thank you for coming!

