

*This newsletter focuses on the results of some recent research performed by Soil Ecology Group at the Lancaster Environment Centre.*

## First, carbon footprints... now you can calculate your 'nitrogen footprint'



Scientists at Lancaster, Virginia and Oxford universities have produced a web-based tool that allows anyone living in the UK to see their own 'nitrogen footprint'.

The N-Calculator tool calculates the likely effect of an individual's food and travel on the environment in terms of nitrogen pollution. First developed in the US, the tool has been updated and adapted for UK users by Dr Carly Stevens and Sarah Dale from the Lancaster Environment Centre at Lancaster University.

Nitrogen pollution is already a major environmental problem that is causing significant damage to air and water quality across the UK. Nitrogen runoff from farms and man-made effluents are largely responsible for algal blooms that affect river systems, whilst atmospheric nitrogen pollution is leading to significant losses of biodiversity.

The researchers used publicly available data such as national atmospheric data, national land use and farm statistics, to make the calculations. The N-Calculator website also makes recommendations for how to lessen your 'nitrogen footprint'. Lifestyle choices affect your nitrogen footprint: reducing your nitrogen footprint means cutting back on road and air travel, choosing renewable energy and, most importantly, altering the balance of the foods contained in your diet.

"Unlike your carbon footprint, what you eat is the most important factor determining your nitrogen footprint," says Dr Stevens. "By altering the amount and type of food that you eat, you can make a big difference to your impact on the environment."

For example, the researchers have calculated that beef generates twice as much nitrogen as pork, and almost three times as much as chicken or fish. The difference in nitrogen levels occurs because of the amount of nitrogen that is lost during production and food processing cycles.

It is hoped that the tool will lead to more people choosing sustainable ways of living. To use it for yourself, go to:

<http://www.n-print.org/>



For more details about the reports above or about Ecology, Conservation and Environmental Biology courses on offer at Lancaster University please contact the Biology Admissions Staff,

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