**Climate Change, Sustainability, and Individual Moral Choices:**

*In September 2017,* [*Sam Kass*](https://www.carnegiecouncil.org/people/sam-kass) *led a talk at Carnegie Council for Ethics in International Affairs entitled “*[*From the White House to the World: Food, Health, and Climate Change*](https://www.carnegiecouncil.org/studio/multimedia/20170907-from-whitehouse-to-world-with-sam-kass)*.” Kass is the founder of food technology company TROVE and was White House chef and senior policy advisor for nutrition for the Obama administration from 2009 to 2014. His talk inspired this lesson on what we as individuals can do to help the environment and mitigate the effects of climate change.* ***The following excerpt has been modified for the classroom.***

Food is really one of these fundamental issues when it comes to climate, and it gets almost no attention. I think it is something that has to change if we really actually want to solve this challenge, both solve it and deal with it. Food and agriculture is the number two emitter of greenhouse gas emissions, about 25 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions. The estimates vary; that's a conservative estimate.

…[Food and agriculture emissions come] from a number of different things. We lose a lot of carbon from the soil, which goes up into the air. It has been driven a lot by animal agriculture—particularly beef—and fertilizers. There are lots of steps along the way. The feed for cattle takes a lot of energy and releases a lot of carbon into the air. Then there is methane from both the animals and food waste. Food waste is another key component of this…

…If we don't solve food when it comes to climate, we're never going to reach our [carbon emissions] targets.

**What can we do?**  
…I think in the end there are two big things: There is how we are producing, but then there is also what we are producing…The reality is if we really want to change how ag[riculture] is impacting the environment, we have to change what we're eating. We can't keep eating giant steaks.

… It turns out the healthiest diet and the most climate-smart diet are pretty much the same thing. It's a diverse diet based on plants, with some protein, but not too much. We're eating more vegetables, more fruit, more legumes—legumes are very important—and some protein, but lower down on the food chain…

Chicken is one of the best things from a climate perspective we can eat…Turkey is right there with it. Pork is not as good, but better than beef. Beef and lamb are actually two of the biggest culprits…[F]ish is amazing, except obviously we have some real problems with our oceans. We're over-fishing, we've depleted a lot of the stocks, and climate change is going to impact our oceans in ways we don't realize.

…Look, I'm always going to have a steak once in a while. The question is, are we eating a steak every day, every couple of days? I love a pork chop. I'm a chef. I love food, I love to eat, and I'm going to continue to eat those things. We just have to make sure that *most* meals we're eating is a meal that actually is climate-smart, and I think that is what's going to have to change in our culture.

**Sam Kass shows simple ways to protect the environment. How can you help, too?**

1. Find three ways that you as an individual can help to keep our planet clean and mitigate the effects of climate change. Explain how each of these things help to make a difference.
2. When it comes to the environment and climate change, do you think a "leader" has to have a massive following? Or can it just be an ordinary person within the community? Explain.