

Climate change talks should focus on food despite resistance - Obama

Although food production is the second leading driver of greenhouse gas emissions after energy production, efforts to tackle climate change have largely focused on the latter, former US President Barack Obama says.



Former US President Barack Obama gave climate action a high priority during his administration. Image: Steve Jurvetson, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0

Climate change discussions should focus more on food production and cutting food waste, but a lack of knowledge is fuelling public resistance, former US President Barack Obama wrote in a major British newspaper on Friday.

Obama said although food production is the second leading driver of greenhouse gas emissions after energy production, efforts to tackle climate change have largely focused on the latter.



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“People naturally understand that big smokestacks have pollution in them – they understand air pollution, so they can easily make the connection between energy production and greenhouse gases,” he wrote in the Guardian newspaper.

“Most people aren’t as familiar with the impact of cows and methane.”

Obama, who made climate change a top priority during his eight-year presidency, warned that no country would escape its effects.

He said limiting the impact of food production on climate change would require innovation from scientists and entrepreneurs as well as funding from companies and states.

We have to create a food culture that encourages a demand for healthier, more sustainable food.

Barack Obama, former US President

Developing smarter agriculture will include creating better seeds as well as crops that grow with less water and crops that grow in harsher climates, he added.

Mobile technologies that give farmers more agricultural data – including satellite imagery and weather forecasting – will also help them know when, where and what to plant.



“All these things can ... help us ensure that, in producing the food that we need to feed the billions of people on this planet, we’re not destroying the planet in the process,” he wrote.

Earlier this month, Obama said the actions of ordinary people, not politicians, were key to fighting global warming.

In a similar vein, he wrote that part of the effort in reducing climate change had to include wasting less food.

“We have to create a food culture that encourages a demand for healthier, more sustainable food,” he added.

But he admitted food was a “very emotional issue” and people were resistant to the idea of governments telling them what to eat.

Agriculture generates a fifth of the world’s greenhouse gas emissions, according to the UN Food and Agriculture Organization.

Obama’s successor, President Donald Trump, doubts climate change is man-made and vowed during his election campaign to “cancel” the 2015 Paris Agreement to combat climate change.

He has postponed a planned decision on whether the United States will stay in or leave the accord until after a G7 summit of wealthy countries this weekend.

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