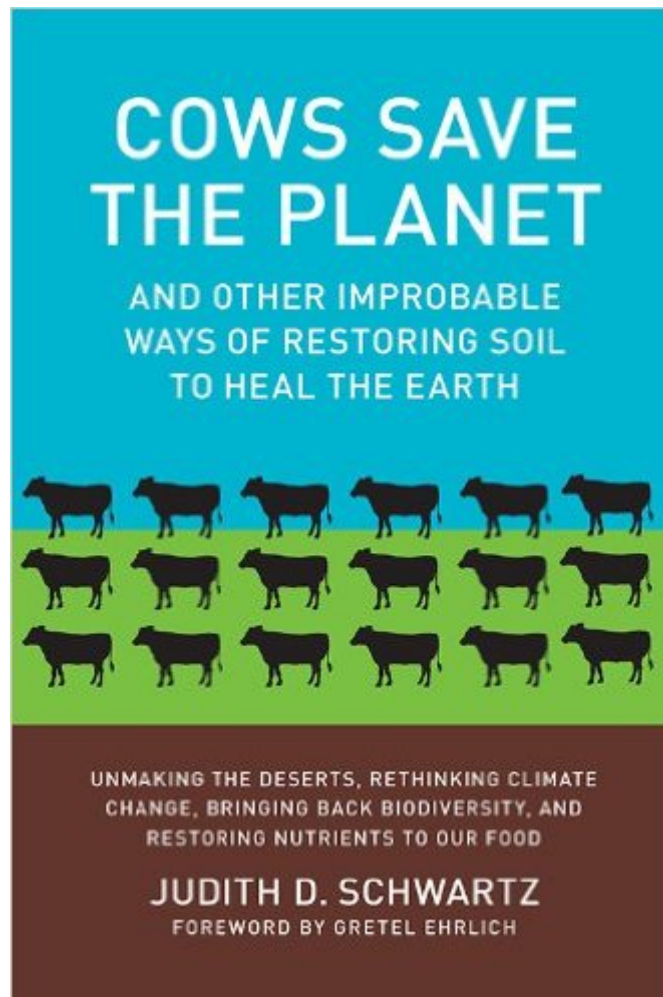


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Cows Save The Planet: And Other Improbable Ways Of Restoring Soil To Heal The Earth



Synopsis

In *Cows Save the Planet*, journalist Judith D. Schwartz looks at soil as a crucible for our many overlapping environmental, economic, and social crises. Schwartz reveals that for many of these problems—climate change, desertification, biodiversity loss, droughts, floods, wildfires, rural poverty, malnutrition, and obesity—there are positive, alternative scenarios to the degradation and devastation we face. In each case, our ability to turn these crises into opportunities depends on how we treat the soil. Drawing on the work of thinkers and doers, renegade scientists and institutional whistleblowers from around the world, Schwartz challenges much of the conventional thinking about global warming and other problems. For example, land can suffer from undergrazing as well as overgrazing, since certain landscapes, such as grasslands, require the disturbance from livestock to thrive. Regarding climate, when we focus on carbon dioxide, we neglect the central role of water in soil—“green water”—in temperature regulation. And much of the carbon dioxide that burdens the atmosphere is not the result of fuel emissions, but from agriculture; returning carbon to the soil not only reduces carbon dioxide levels but also enhances soil fertility. *Cows Save the Planet* is at once a primer on soil’s pivotal role in our ecology and economy, a call to action, and an antidote to the despair that environmental news so often leaves us with.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I ran across this book and, given the bad rap cows "meat animals in general" have been getting lately, I picked it up and read it. It's an interesting little book and I recommend that anyone interested in the environment or good nutrition or global climate change should read it. It's really about restoring the earth's soils "with a little help from grazing animals. In a chapter entitled "Ground Zero for Carbon Dioxide Reduction Is the Ground," she cites some startling studies describing the relationship between soils and global climate change. According to Rattan Lal of Ohio State University, " . . . the soil could offset about one-third of the human-generated emissions annually absorbed in the atmosphere." She goes on to say that "We've lost an estimated 50 to 80 percent carbon in our soils over the last 150 years." In a chapter called "Beyond Eat Your Vegetables," Schwartz reveals the lack of nutrition in our soils and how that translates into less nourishing food. She quotes nutrition and agriculture educator, "Some nutritionists estimate that the food we eat today has just 30 percent of the nourishment of what our grandparents ate as children. The major reason," says Sait, "is declining soil quality . . ." " . . . the major portion of farm income is now expended on the inputs required to maintain production as soil function fails. An enormous industry . . . depends on us not finding solutions to the problems in agriculture," Schwartz writes. These problems generate enormous income for manufacture of synthetic fertilizers, herbicides, insecticides and fungicides, toxins that sterilize the soil, she continues. And how do cows get into this discussion?

The idea that animals such as cows might actually be good for not just the soil but for the grasses they feed on may seem a bit strange at first. But because grasses and grasslands (and pastures) have experienced millions of years of grazing animals they have not only learned to live with them but to thrive. Schwartz explains how this works and why healthy grasslands, farms and pastures can serve as carbon sinks while feeding the seven million plus people on the planet. There is a crisis in food production and in fresh water availability that is upon us today. Soils are being depleted many times faster than they are being built, and water tables are falling precipitously. Schwartz interviewed people who demonstrate on their own farms that this doesn't have to continue. It was long thought (and before reading this book I believed it) that it typically took hundreds of years to build an inch or two of topsoil. However by using methods explained in this book farmers all over the world are building inches of topsoil in a year or less! One technique is "pasture cropping." Essentially

what you do is plant your seeds into an unplowed field that already has native grasses growing in it. The idea is that by keeping the field cover you retain the soil, the carbon in the soil, and the moisture while promoting and maintain a healthy soil ecology. Crops yields may fall a bit at first but over the long run you gain by keeping your fields covered all year round. So what this book is about is soil rehabilitation. The stakes are huge. Healthy soil serves to sequester carbon and keep it out of the atmosphere. Healthy soil retains moisture and very significantly contains nutrients for not only healthy plant growth but for healthy foods for us.

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