

Dora Simon: "To Beef or Not To Beef: Trade, Meat, and the Environment"

Abstract: The agricultural sector is the second largest contributor to greenhouse gas emissions. How can food consumption choices reduce emissions? I estimate a model of meat demand using purchasing data of meat and other protein rich products from a European retailer. I combine the purchasing data with data on production and transport emissions. In several counterfactual exercises, I analyze the reaction of consumers to some popular, supposedly eco-friendly food consumption policies. Contrary to popular belief, I find that buying local increases emissions by around 5% compared to the status quo. While vegetarianism decreases emissions by around 17%, consuming no beef and cheese yields the highest decrease in emissions of around 34%. My results show that consumer behavior can have a large impact on the emissions of food consumption.