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New Zealand beef and lamb among the most carbon efficient in the world

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New research has confirmed the carbon footprint of New Zealand beef and lamb is amongst the lowest in the world.

The comprehensive study by AgResearch has found that a kilo of New Zealand sheep meat has a carbon footprint of just under 15 kilograms (kgs) of CO2 equivalent emissions per kilo.

Meanwhile, the carbon footprint of New Zealand beef is just under 22kgsâ?? making the countryâ??s red meat among the most efficient in the world.

The researchers, which compared New Zealandâ??s on-farm emissions to a range of countriesâ?? footprints across the globe, concluded that when New Zealand beef or sheep meat is exported, the total carbon footprint is lower or very similar to domestically-produced red meat in those nations.

This is because New Zealand is so efficient at the farm level, which represents about 90-95% of the total carbon footprint. New Zealandâ??s on-farm footprint was about half the average of the other countries compared in the study.

Based on the research, an analysis by B+LNZ and MIA shows eating red meat 2-3 times a week over the course of an entire year is just under the carbon footprint of a single passengerâ??s return flight from Auckland to Christchurch.

The Life Cycle Assessment (LCA) study was commissioned by Beef + Lamb New Zealand and the Meat Industry Association of New Zealand (MIA).

As the world's second-biggest exporter of lamb and one of the largest beef exporters, sustainable farming is a critical part of the countryâ??s red meat sector strategy.

The LCA was calculated using the standard GWP100 approach for converting methane to carbon dioxide equivalent to enable valid international comparisons.

AgResearch scientists also measured the carbon footprint of New Zealand beef and sheep meat using an emerging approach known as GWP*, which determines a carbon footprint based on a productâ??s actual contribution to the warming of the planet over a period of time rather than the total emissions.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has found that the traditional GWP100 method overstates the impact of methane when this gas is not increasing, as is the case in New Zealand.

Over the last 20 years, New Zealand sheep meat has not added any additional warming. Absolute greenhouse emissions from New Zealand sheep and beef farming have decreased by 30 per cent since 1990.