

## GOT MILK? By Si Frumkin

Once in a while, in the most unexpected places, I come across a familiar smell that brings back memories. A familiar perfume of a long ago girlfriend, a restaurant's open door that reminds me of a familiar dish I haven't tasted in ages, the smell of chocolate or coffee – always a pleasure.

And then there are memories of smells that are less pleasant. There is formaldehyde that lingered in my nostrils for hours after dissecting and examining this or that specimen in the comparative anatomy lab course at college. We began with large grasshoppers and advanced to catfish, frogs, lobsters and eventually cats. The lab was always on Friday afternoons. I often had a date that evening and so I scrubbed and scrubbed in the shower, splashed aftershave all over me, but still worried that the smell of formaldehyde and decay would linger.

Another smell I remember wasn't part of the official curriculum. It was methane – at least as unpleasant a smell as formaldehyde – produced in a ritual that probably was observed by teenage boys since the discovery of fire. It involved quickly lighting a match when someone felt the need to, how shall I say it, to break wind, to release an accumulation of intestinal gas. The subject would bend over and expel a quantity of methane fumes from his posterior – either silently or, preferably, with sound effects – so that the lit match could ignite it and, voila, a pretty blue flame lasting a few seconds accompanied by cheers and applause of all the guys. Girls didn't usually participate in this particular ritual; the few that



happened to be there made disgusted faces or sounds.

At this point you are probably asking yourself what reason I could possibly have for recalling foolish episodes of my youth. Don't we all have more serious concerns, like, for example, the threat of Global Warming? Yes, we do and I consider it my duty to write about the most recent disclosure of its major cause. It is a clear and present danger that signals the end of humanity as we know it and,

most certainly, the end of methane gas combustibility experimentations by young male adults.

The deadly danger that faces all of us has been revealed: it is flatulence! It is, putting it bluntly, farting by cows. So far, this authoritative study deals only with cattle but we can certainly assume that it pertains to all earthly creatures that digest food and eventually expel what cannot be digested as manure and, yes, methane, carbon dioxide and ammonia.



Here are the tragic facts. They are the main thesis of a United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization study entitled “Livestock’s Long Shadow”. It is a serious and scholarly study; its conclusions are supported by the World Bank, the E.U. and various European and U.S. governmental bodies. The study exposes methane as the most serious threat - the gas that so amused generations of boys. It is produced by cattle flatulence and manure and is 23 times as warming as the carbon dioxide that is produced by human activities. In addition to methane, cattle also produce 65% of the world’s nitrous oxide, a greenhouse gas with a 296 times greater potential to cause global warming. Animals are also responsible for 65% of human activity related ammonia that is blamed for acid rain – think of that when you next see a doggie lifting his hind leg at a tree.

The cow menace is enormous. Earth is home to 1.4 billion cattle, each producing 500 liters of methane a day and accounting for 14% of all emissions of the gas. (In Scotland where agriculture is more concentrated than in most countries, cows produce 46% of all methane emissions!) The report anticipates that by 2050 world’s meat production will reach 465 million tons annually - more than double that of 1999/2001- and milk output will also double to 1043 million tons.

To sum up, cows produce more global warming pollution than all human transportation – all the cars, trains, ships, planes, snowmobiles and motorized rickshaws combined.

And the report doesn't take into account the methane and manure produced by humans – including teenage boys – as well as dogs, cats, elephants and all the rest of the living, breathing and stinking-up the atmosphere beings.

There is, however, some good news as well – also from the U.N. The U.N. Intergovernmental Climate Change Research organization has recently reduced its estimate of human effect on climate change by 25% and cut in half its estimate of maximum rise in sea levels caused by climate change – from 34" in 100 years to just 17". This will give us plenty of time to move away from the newly created seashores to new beaches a mile or so away.

So what is there to do? Should we eliminate all cows? Take immediate steps to produce giant corks and train cow cork insertion specialists? Require that all cows be equipped with catalytic converters in their exhausts and mandate bi-monthly compliance inspections? Outlaw and severely punish farting? And what to do about Scotland? Is it really doomed?

Meanwhile when you see a cute calf or look with sympathy at a seemingly harmless cow – remember that they are the cunning enemy that harbors the seed of the inevitable destruction of our beloved planet.