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The Role Cows, Rice Paddies, and Landfills Play in Global Warming

When people think about global warming, they often picture cars, factories, or power plants. But did you know that cows, rice paddies, and landfills also play a big part? These things all release a powerful greenhouse gas called methane into the air.

Greenhouse gases trap heat in Earth's atmosphere, which causes the planet to warm. Carbon dioxide is the most well-known greenhouse gas, but methane is much stronger. Even though it doesn't stay in the air as long, it traps much more heat while it's there.

Let's start with cows. Cows are farm animals that help produce milk and meat. But their stomachs work differently than ours. When cows digest food, they burp and release methane gas. Because there are millions of cows on farms around the world, all those burps add up to a lot of methane in the atmosphere.

Rice paddies also give off methane. These flooded fields are used to grow rice, a food eaten by billions of people. When the fields are wet for a long time, tiny microbes in the water break down plants and give off methane as they do it. Rice farming is especially common in warm, wet places, which are perfect conditions for methane to form.

Landfills, where trash is buried, are another source. When food scraps and other waste break down deep under the ground without air, they also release methane. That's why it's important to recycle, compost, and throw away less food when possible.

So, while cows, rice paddies, and landfills may seem very different, they all have something in common: they add methane to the air. Scientists and farmers are working on ways to reduce these emissions. Some farmers are changing what cows eat, planting rice in different ways, or collecting methane from landfills to turn it into energy.

By learning how these things affect our planet, we can make better choices to help protect it. Even small actions—like wasting less food—can help slow down global warming.