This article in the new issue of Scientific American has an important discussion of the ways in which animal-based food production contributes significantly to greenhouse gas emissions.

From the article:

> Most of us are aware that our cars, our coal-generated electric power and even our cement factories adversely affect the environment. Until recently, however, the foods we eat had gotten a pass in the discussion. Yet according to a 2006 report by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), our diets and, specifically, the meat in them cause more greenhouse gases carbon dioxide (CO_2), methane, nitrous oxide, and the like to spew into the atmosphere than either transportation or industry. (Greenhouse gases trap solar energy, thereby warming the earth's surface. Because gases vary in greenhouse potency, every greenhouse gas is usually expressed as an amount of CO_2 with the same global-warming potential.)
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> The FAO report found that current production levels of meat contribute between 14 and 22 percent of the 36 billion tons of "CO_2-equivalent" greenhouse gases the world produces every year. It turns out that producing half a pound of hamburger for someone's lunch a patty of meat the size of two decks of cards releases as much greenhouse gas into the atmosphere as driving a 3,000-pound car nearly 10 miles.

The article acknowledges that all foods we consume have a carbon footprint – and that production and transportation of some fruits and vegetables is responsible for a lot of carbon emissions too. But it makes the case that beef production in particular is far worse, especially because of methane emissions from the animals. GHG mitigation policy should take into account the contribution of the food production sector, and animal -based agriculture in particular, to GHG emissions.