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**Paly is home to many environmental activists who use
their passion to advocate for important change**

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For as long as she could remember, senior Natalia Cossio has been an environmentalist. Her mom instilled in her the importance of environmental conservation by seeking to reduce her ecological footprint, activity by activity. Throughout the years, her environmentalism has grown in many ways.

An integral part of Cossio's love for the environment and her continued support of it has stemmed from her simple enjoyment of the world surrounding us all.

"I like to spend time outside in different environments, biking and swimming and whatnot," Cossio said.

This enjoyment has propelled her to make significant lifestyle changes.

"My diet has changed...I also simply buy less stuff, including packages that have to travel far," Cossio said. "I try to do things that overall reduce my footprint on the environment."

Engaging with the environment has helped junior Gabriela Hakeman develop a greater sense of appreciation for it. When she was younger, she never took part in outdoor activities and instead took nature's beauty for granted.

"I've learned to appreciate little things like going on walks, seeing the flowers blooming in spring, seeing all this new growth and finding beauty in something that I thought was ordinary," Hakeman said.

Spending time at home during the pandemic helped Hakeman realize how individual actions have the ability to collectively create big change, no matter how small the actions may seem.

"During quarantine, I realized we all had the power to choose not to drive places and the impact it had on the environment," Hakeman said. "[We are] within reach of goals to achieve net-zero carbon emissions [because of] the power of each individual coming together and affecting the entire world."

AP Environmental Science teacher Nicole Loomis echoes this belief that knowledge and awareness are essential to helping to preserve the environment.

"The more you know about the environment, the more you realize that we rely on it for our continued existence," Loomis said. "Our choices make a big difference, so be aware of the impact that you have on the world."

Cossio is a vegetarian and works for Markegard Family Grass-Fed, a ranch based in the San Mateo, Sonoma and Marin counties that practices regenerative agriculture and meat practices. For many like Cossio, environmental activism is campaigning for more environmentally-friendly agricultural and eating practices.

Transitioning to a plant-based lifestyle is an easy way to reduce your carbon footprint and benefit the environment. Junior

Morgan Greenlaw emphasizes how little adjustments over time create a lasting impact, which is critical for enduring change.

"Just having one meal a day, or one day a week being fully plant-based, and working up from there [helps]," Greenlaw said. "A lot of people are put off by the idea of being vegan because they think it should be an all or nothing thing. And that's definitely not the case, because every choice we make has an impact."

As an environmentalist, Cossio is also concerned

about how little effort is being put into real change.

"We can harm [the environment] faster than we can grow it back," Cossio said. "It's important to preserve [the environment] because it can't always

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Nicole Loomis, AP Environmental Science teacher

just grow back."

Senior Rowan Erickson was inspired to advocate for the environment because of her mom, who promotes sustainable living and is passionate about climate change. Erickson's realization of the urgency of climate change has motivated her to make changes.

"In eleven years, [when] we cannot come back from climate change, our world is doomed," Erickson said. "We have such little time to fix all the problems that humanity has made before our world turns to pieces."

Erickson's advocacy has led her to research how climate change affects different communities, with a focus on local communities.

"Climate change disproportionately affects low-income communities and the burden that they take on compared to wealthy communities and white communities is unjust," Erickson said. "In Palo Alto, we're not affected as greatly as East Palo Alto. The bay water is rising, so they're way more susceptible to flooding."

If we continue to contribute to rising sea levels, up to two-thirds of East Palo Alto, and portions of northeast Palo Alto would become victims of regular flooding. By 2050, that two-thirds would be affected by every high tide the bay brings.

For anyone looking to preserve the environment, Greenlaw recommends starting small. Over time, the smallest transitions someone begins to make

will result in widespread change. Starting small, combined with a multitude of followers, generates real effects on curbing our climate crisis in the other direction. The fight is not over yet to stop further damage.

"Every choice has an impact," Greenlaw said. "Every individual can make an impact, [so] it's better to have many people doing a little bit than a few people doing a lot."

"I've learned to [find] beauty in something that I thought was ordinary."

Gabriela Hakeman, 11