

Two ways to tackle livestock's contribution to the climate crisis:

Transition away from industrial meat and dairy  Redirect support to smallholder systems

The Issue

We cannot address climate change without reducing the production and consumption of industrial meat and dairy.



The issue...

Industrial livestock is a major cause of climate change

The global food system accounts for 29 percent of today's global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, say scientists, with meat and dairy responsible for most of it.

Livestock now generate more GHG emissions than all the world's transport combined. Nearly half is in the form of methane, a gas 30 times more effective than carbon dioxide at trapping heat in our atmosphere but quick to disappear once we stop producing it.

80 percent of the current growth of the global meat and dairy industry comes from the expansion of factory farms, hastened by corporate consolidation and vertical integration across the world. In 2015, just five companies (JBS, Tyson, Cargill, National Beef and Marfrig) accounted for 20 percent of the world beef production.

If we did everything currently prescribed to stop climate change (stop extracting and burning fossil fuels, convert to renewable energies, etc.) except cut back on industrial meat, the planet would still be in danger of the 'cataclysmic' warming scenario of 4°C by the end of the century.

The issue...

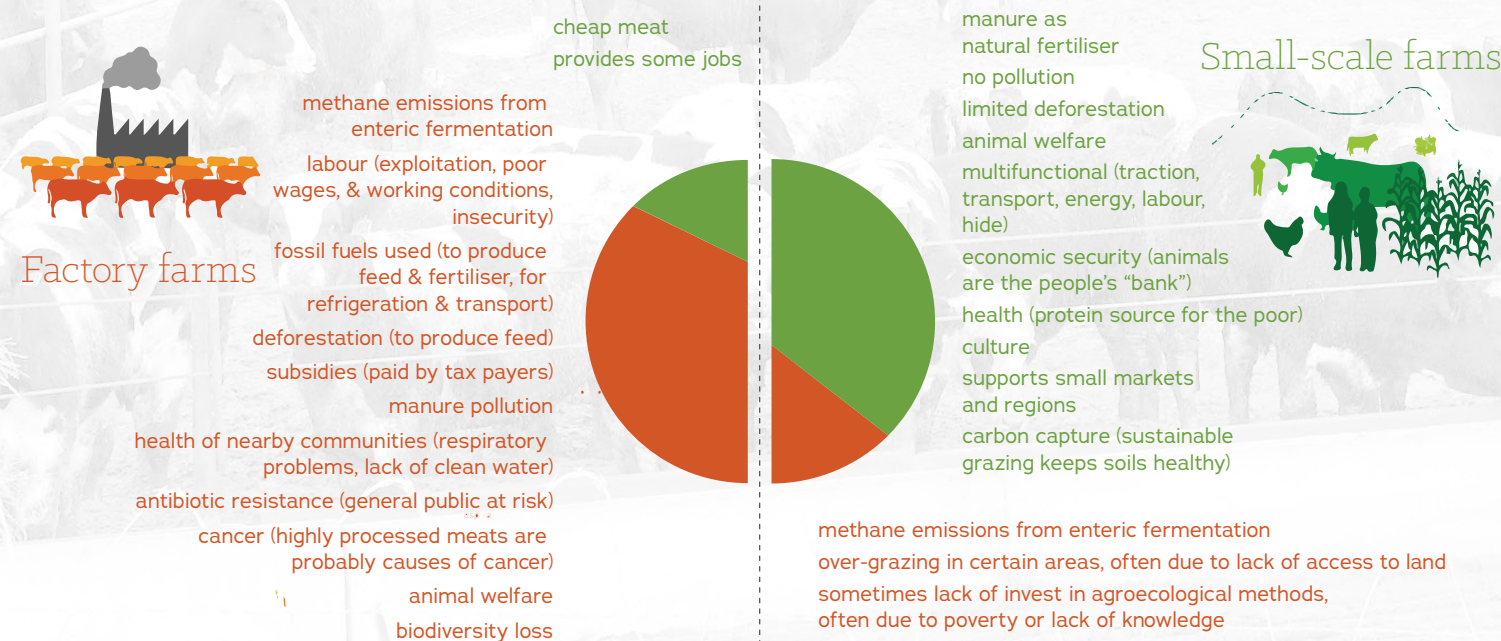
To be clear, the problem is industrial meat and dairy

Industrial livestock production is responsible for massive GHG emissions from fossil fuels, fertilizers, manure and large-scale deforestation and land degradation.

It generates numerous other impacts including environmental pollution, exploitation of workers, destruction of small family farms, abuse of millions of animals and global health emergencies, such as antibiotic resistance and avian flu.

Technological fixes could reduce no more than 30 percent of current livestock emissions, according to the most optimistic FAO scenario. A system change is imperative.

The hoofprint of factory farms vs. agroecological production



The issue...

Consumption must be addressed

The global rise in meat and dairy consumption is projected to grow by 76 and 65 percent respectively by 2050. If not dramatically reduced, this would result in eating up the entire climate emissions budget set for 2050 in the Paris Agreement.

Per capita meat consumption continues to be highest in North America, Brazil and the EU and is growing rapidly in Asia. If countries with excessive per capita consumption limited consumption to the World Health Organisation's recommended level, global GHG emissions would decline by 40 percent.

Most countries in the Global South have low levels of per capita meat and dairy consumption, but their urban middle classes are increasingly adhering to Western style diets, including excessive meat and dairy. Foreign food companies, fast food chains and supermarkets target these countries for growth.

The issue...

And yet, small-scale farmers, herders and pastoralists are often blamed

Corporate lobby groups, scientists and development agencies often paint small-scale livestock holders in poor countries as the climate culprits because of their animals' low "efficiency" in converting calories to meat or milk on a per capita basis

Yet, a narrow focus on efficiency and emissions intensity ignores the multiple benefits of mixed, multifunctional and biodiverse small-scale livestock production systems. These include improving soil health, greater climatic resilience and other positive environmental and public health benefits.

Small-scale meat and dairy production is already well tailored to local food systems that support the moderate meat and dairy consumption levels that the rest of the world must achieve.

For a fully referenced version, visit GRAIN at grain.org and IATP Europe at iatp.org.

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Transition away from industrial meat and dairy ➡ Redirect support to smallholder systems

The Solution

Solutions can only be effective if they address the formidable power of the global meat and dairy complex.



The solution...

Redirect the subsidies

Industrial meat and dairy production is propped up by an enormous amount of taxpayer dollars—around \$53 billion from OECD governments alone in 2013. China and Brazil also channel significant public funds into the growth of their own transnational meat and dairy corporations.

Public subsidies, credits and other fiscal support measures for massive industrial meat and dairy facilities, such as the proposed 20,000 cow farm in Spain, should be inventoried on an annual basis and terminated.

Public funds should instead be directed to support small farmers that use integrated agroecological and pastoral production methods, and to help larger farmers transition towards these practices.

Support should also go to building or rehabilitating local infrastructures (abattoirs, milk and meat processing, roads, sanitation, etc.) that help local livestock and dairy markets thrive.

The solution...

Divest from industrial meat and dairy

Meat and dairy corporations have a vested interest in increasing the consumption and production of industrial meat and dairy and have repeatedly blocked government actions that would undercut demand for their products.

Banks and other institutional investors must account for the true carbon costs and climate risks of their agribusiness investments and divest from companies that harm the climate.

Rather than incentivizing factory farm expansion and the industrial model through carbon credits and carbon offsets, climate funds should be directed towards the greater resilience of agro-pastoral systems by supporting integrated agroecological methods and their proliferation.

Meat and dairy companies and their lobby groups must be prevented from undue influence on decision making in the public interest, including through stricter rules on campaign finance and preventing conflict of interest in government and intergovernmental advisory bodies.

Public-private partnerships to promote large-scale, intensive livestock farming should be eliminated.

The solution...

Stop and rollback so-called free trade and investment deals

Trade and investment agreements, like the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) and the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP), expand markets for the global meat and dairy complex. They enable the dumping of cheap meat, dairy and feed and prevent the use of policies that promote local suppliers, as well as regulations that disincentivize this model. For example:

70 million dairy farms in India face immediate import threats from the RCEP trade deal being negotiated with the dairy powerhouse New Zealand, which exports cheap milk powder;

herders and pastoralists from Senegal to South Africa could lose their livelihoods due to European Partnership Agreements trade deals now being ratified between their governments and the EU, as these will promote dumping of cheap dairy from Europe onto their markets;

the Trade in Services Agreement now being negotiated by 48 countries may prevent governments from taking measures to reduce livestock climate emissions; and

deregulation of food safety, GMO approvals and environmental and public health rules that interfere with corporate profits through the TPP, CETA and TTIP will hamstring future efforts to regulate and reform these industries.

These deals must be stopped and replaced with initiatives that allow communities and countries to grow their local markets in cooperation and mutual support.

The solution...

Reduce meat consumption, eliminate over-consumption

It is crucial to work toward a reduction of industrial meat and dairy, especially red meat, in the hotspots of over consumption such as North America, Europe, Brazil and China. This can be encouraged by revising and promoting national dietary guidelines and giving them the teeth of enforceability.

A key strategy to achieve this is to make industrial meat and dairy more expensive and reflective of their true costs by lifting subsidies, regulating the industry and introducing fiscal measures. However, these measures must be executed in a way that does not penalise lower income consumers or small-scale producers.

Public education programmes and media campaigns are necessary to help people understand what is at stake and encourage collective action. This is not about individual choices but the need for systemic change with a strong role for public and citizen-led initiatives.

Public sector institutions (schools, hospitals, etc.) should proactively cut industrial meat and dairy from their menus and source proteins from short supply chains and small-scale sustainable suppliers. The School District of Oakland in the U.S. has recently tested such a scheme with great success, saving \$42,000 in the process.

The solution...

Support small scale production and local markets

There are over 600 million small-scale farmers and 200 million herders who depend on livestock for their livelihoods and who feed billions of people every day with quality meat, dairy and eggs in a sustainable manner. They urgently need public attention and support!

Policies and programmes should focus on supporting and protecting small scale producers and the local markets that they supply.

Livestock producers should be supported to move to agroecological production methods, including rotational grazing and soil management measures, that help cut greenhouse gas emissions.

We need to invest in community-led projects and initiatives that seek to proliferate such practices and rebuild decentralized food systems.

This fact sheet is based on GRAIN, “Grabbing the bull by the horns: it’s time to cut industrial meat and dairy to save the climate,” January 2017, <https://www.grain.org/e/5639> and IATP research on iatp.org/industrial-meat.

For more information, visit GRAIN at grain.org and IATP Europe at iatp.org.

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