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Meat Atlas - Facts and figures about the animals we eat

Summary & policy demands

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This summary is based on the contributions made for the Meat Atlas. Full version with graphics and further information can be found under: www.foeeurope.org/meat-atlas.

Introduction

The global system of intensive meat and dairy production is having an increasingly devastating impact on society and the environment – the system is broken. The way we produce and consume meat and dairy needs a radical rethink, in order to curb corporate control over food, to reduce health and environmental impacts and to help citizens move towards a more sustainable diet.

This publication aims to catalyse the debate over the need for better, safer and more sustainable food and farming, and to inspire people to look at their own consumption, and politicians at all levels to take action to support those farmers, processors, retailers and networks who are working to achieve change.

Diet is not just a private matter. Every meal has very real impacts on the lives of people around the world, on the environment, biodiversity and the climate – often forgotten when tucking into a piece of meat. Animal feed accounts for more than 40 per cent of the annual output of wheat, rye, oats and maize, and requires nearly one-third of the world's 14 billion hectares of cultivated land. Seventy per cent of all agricultural land is dedicated to livestock production, and around a quarter of the world's available freshwater.

One kilogram of beef requires 6.5 kilograms of grain, 36 kilograms of roughage, and 15,500 litres of water. This places severe pressure on scarce resources – including the rainforest – and has many hidden costs.

Problems

We eat too much meat. The global demand for meat is growing. Despite stagnation in European and American levels of consumption, the booming economies in Asia and elsewhere will see around an 80 per cent increase in demand for meat and dairy products by 2022.

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations assumes that by 2050, emerging markets will cover only 46 per cent of their caloric intake with grains; another 29 per cent coming from meat, eggs, milk and cheese. If this happens the world's farmers and agricultural firms will have to boost their meat output from 300 million tonnes to 470 million tonnes by 2050.

This increasing demand for meat and dairy will place overwhelming pressure on scarce resources, the planet (livestock is responsible for between 6 and 32 per cent of greenhouse gases) and lead to further intensification of livestock production – with devastating impacts on people, and the planet.

Who controls our meat and dairy? A few international corporations are gaining ever-increasing control over intensive meat and dairy production. Tight profit margins promote economies of scale, which leads to greater production efficiency at a lower cost. The meat sector is

concentrating in two senses: companies are getting bigger through mergers and acquisitions – expanding across borders and across species – and production itself is intensifying, so that more animals are housed together and are processed more quickly. Corporations are taking control of the food chain.

The three largest companies in the meat industry are:

- **JBS**. The world's largest food-processing company, leader in slaughter capacity with a turnover of US$38.7 billion.
- **TysonFood**. The world's largest meat producer and second-largest processor of chicken, beef and pork, with a turnover of US$33.3 billion.
- **Cargill**. Has a 22 per cent share in the US meat market, is the biggest single exporter in Argentina, and has a turnover of US$32.5 billion.

At what cost? Intensive meat and dairy production costs people their health, societies their livelihoods and the environment its integrity. It also brings significant financial costs.

For example, the estimated cost for cleaning up nitrogen pollution every year, mainly from livestock production, was up to 320 billion euro in Europe alone. In China, the costs are estimated at around 3 billion euro a year.

The expansion of large-scale production is devastating small scale producers. Between 1985 and 2005, 70 million small poultry producers disappeared from the sector.

Intensively produced meat is not healthy – through the use of antibiotics and hormones, as well as the overuse of agrochemicals in feed production.

Industrial livestock production uses huge amounts of antibiotics. Although the European Union prohibited antibiotics to promote growth in 2006, this did not lead to a significant decrease in their use on farms. 8,500 tonnes of antimicrobial ingredients were distributed in 25 European countries in 2011.

Glyphosate-resistant soybeans are the world's best-selling GM crops and are used to feed poultry, pigs and cattle in intensive livestock production. Currently about 85 per cent of the worldwide cultivated GM crops are herbicide-resistant. There is currently very little testing for glyphosate by public authorities, despite its widespread use. Glyphosate residues have been found repeatedly in human urine, raising serious concerns about the presence of glyphosate in the human body, as well as questions about exposure to the other chemicals used with glyphosate.

A species poor planet. As a result of intensification, an increasingly narrow variety of breeds are dominating the market: 83 per cent of the milk cattle are from one breed, Holsteins. Sixty per cent of beef cattle are either Angus, Hereford or Simmental, and 75 per cent of pigs on the market comes from three breeds. This threatens biodiversity, and leads to a species poor planet, with the loss of genetic diversity.

Trading away standards. The current EU – US transatlantic trade talks (TTIP) will have a big impact on meat production and consumption in both regions, and worldwide. TTIP could make it much more difficult to address the negative environmental, social and health aspects of industrial animal production. Such an agreement could result in changes in standards on the use of antibiotics in meat production, genetically modified organisms, animal welfare, and other issues.

Solutions

Eating meat does not have to damage the climate and the environment. On the contrary, the appropriate use of agricultural land by animals may even have environmental benefits. Over 40 per cent of the world's land surface is too dry, too steep, too hot or too cold for crops. In such areas, livestock keepers have a strategic advantage: they can use their animals to convert the local vegetation into food and energy. Their production methods have to be suited to local conditions; they require specific livestock breeds and a thorough understanding of the animals' needs and the local situation.

Poverty reduction, gender equality and a healthy diet. Urban and small-scale rural livestock can contribute to all of these, not only in developing countries. Keeping animals is an important source of income for people in many regions of the world.

Keeping livestock can also contribute to gender equality in some regions of the world. If women are successful at raising animals, they can build up their stocks. They may be able to get a loan from a self-help group or microfinance institution, and become independent. They can purchase more animals, invest in a stall or shed, and learn about hygiene and feeding. In southern Africa, 85 per cent of all households keep chickens, and 70 per cent of the chickens belong to women.

Alternatives exist. Many initiatives and certification schemes already demonstrate how meat can be produced that respects environmental and health considerations, and provides appropriate conditions for animals.

One model that secures livelihoods for farmers and increases trust between farmers and consumers by supporting responsible production practices such as extensive, pasture-based animal husbandry is a mechanism called "community-supported agriculture". In community-supported agriculture, a group of people guarantees the purchase of all seasonally available produce from the farmer, i.e. vegetables, meat, dairy products, honey. They also share the risk of dealing with natural processes. They pay in advance, thus helping to finance the production costs along the way.

Change is possible. Some say that meat consumption patterns cannot be changed. But a whole movement of people are now eating less meat or no meat at all. To them it is not a sacrifice; it is part of healthy living and a modern lifestyle.

A small but growing number of people in developed countries are insisting on products that conserve the environment and respect animal welfare. Many people are starting to choose 'flexitarian' diets – eating less and better meat and more plant-based protein. Many civil society organisations and farmers' movements are calling for a different food and agriculture system: one that respects both people and nature, pushing for less meat in Western diets and healthy menus in public institutions such as hospitals and schools. The *Meat Free Mondays* movement has now been established in 29 countries around the world.

Animal welfare concerns are also attracting attention worldwide with organisations calling to not eat animal or increase the welfare status of farm animals.

A combination of individual choices and changes in laws and policies will bring about a change in society's relationship with meat.

Recommendations by Friends of the Earth Europe

The EU institutions should:

- Publicly acknowledge the need for action on meat production and consumption;
- Stop support for industrial livestock production through CAP subsidies (no rural development funds to be used for the construction of new factory farms) and instead support sustainable small scale livestock producers distributing their products in short food supply chains and for the local market;
- Reinforce environmental and food legislation to stop damage from industrial livestock production. This would include the Water Framework Directive, and the EC Action plan against the rising threats from Antimicrobial Resistance and the Ammoniac-Directive.
- Introduce principles for a sustainable EU diet into the new Sustainable Food Strategy, including eating less and better meat and wasting less meat product;
- Use the EU – US trade talks as an opportunity to raise standards and regulate the meat industry. Otherwise, abandon the free trade talks altogether;
- Introduce clear green food procurement standards to ensure that meals paid for by the public purse reflect environmental and health factors, relying on less but better meat and dairy;
- Measure resource use and introduce targets to reduce our demand for land and water connected to the production of animal products;
- Review current and future food product labelling and information provided to ensue transparent and mandatory labelling which is not only easy to understand and relevant, but also ensuring that claims are verifiable. The EU should also provide clear guidance to businesses to implement those, including on what sustainable diets are.

Member state governments should acknowledge the need for urgent action to:

- Set guidelines, targets and policies to achieve more sustainable diets;
- Undertake research to identify the best mechanisms for change;
- Modify official guidelines on healthy eating and environmental behaviour to include the benefits of eating less meat;
- Introduce clear and mandatory standards to ensure that meals paid for by taxpayers in schools, hospitals, care homes, and all government departments reflect environmental and health factors, relying on less but better meat and dairy;
- Oblige farmers to process all manure on their own land.

Citizens should:

- Consider what changes you can make to your and your family's food choices;
- Take small steps and see what works;
- Start to change what you buy and what you cook using some of the websites given in the Meat Atlas.

For more information

The full study is available here:

www.foeeurope.org/meat-atlas

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Friends of the Earth Europe campaigns for sustainable and just societies and for the protection of the environment, unites over 30 national organisations with thousands of local groups and is part of the world's largest grassroots environmental network, Friends of the Earth International.

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