

REDUCING MEAT CONSUMPTION – THE CASE FOR URGENT REFORM

Massive growth in meat production

In the second half of the 20th Century, worldwide meat production increased roughly fivefold and meat consumption has soared in countries that are rapidly industrialising, such as China. Livestock production has become the world's largest user of agricultural land.

The farm animal population has expanded dramatically to meet demand. Today, the growing human population - already in excess of 6 billion - shares the planet and its resources at any one time with nearly 1 billion pigs, 1.3 billion cattle, 1.8 billion sheep and goats and 15.4 billion chickens. As the intensive poultry industry (in particular) spreads

to and within many areas of the world, there are already twice as many chickens as there are humans on earth to eat them. Consumption of dairy produce, eggs and seafood has also increased rapidly.





Before the 1990s, the vast majority of animal products were consumed in rich countries, yet in the last decade many in developing nations have also adopted what was once known as the Western diet. All indications are that this trend will continue apace for the foreseeable future, encouraged by governments and large-scale international agricultural interests.

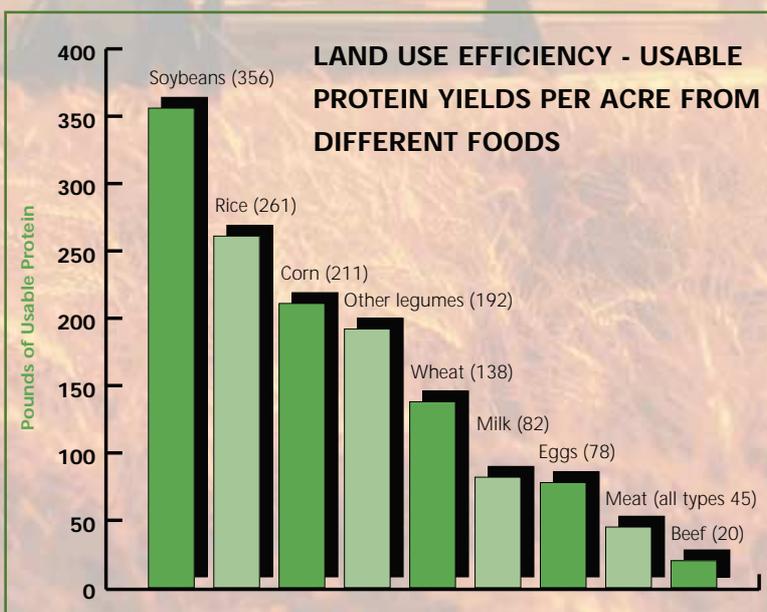
Current food and farming policies are unsustainable

The scale of this expansion is unsustainable and will reduce the future prospects of healthily feeding an expanding human population. The main problems can be summarised as follows:

Human Health

In the developed world, inappropriate diet is increasingly accepted as a cause of ill-health and morbidity. Meat, meat products and dairy foods make up the greatest percentage of saturated fat intake and there is now general consensus among nutritionists that this contributes significantly to several diseases which have reached epidemic proportions.

All informed opinion stresses the desirability of reduced consumption of animal products and increased intake of fibre-rich carbohydrates, fresh fruit and vegetables in order to minimise risk of heart disease, mature onset diabetes, obesity and (possibly) some cancers.



Feeding Farm Animals or People?

Rather than adding to our capacity to feed the world's human population, putting animal products at the centre of food policy diminishes the possibility of doing so. Apart from animals who feed predominantly on pasture where it is difficult to grow crops, and others who feed on scraps and waste products as part of rotational mixed farming, farm animals utilise considerably more food calories than they produce in the form of meat. Meat is the most resource-costly form of food because livestock waste most of the energy and protein value of their feed in digestion and bodily maintenance. Rather than using vast areas of land to grow crops for animal feed, more food can be obtained by using land to grow crops for direct human consumption.

Source: USDA; FAO/WHO/UNICEF Protein Advisory Group.

"If present trends of meat-eating continue, then by 2050 the world's livestock will be consuming as much as 4 billion people do: an increase equivalent to the total world population of around 1970, when many were doubting whether such human numbers could be fed at all."

Colin Tudge, zoologist, author of 'So Shall We Reap' (Penguin 2003)

Water Scarcity

Lack of water is now recognised as the greatest single threat to food security and in particular to yields from arable farms. Each calorie of meat takes far more water to produce than a calorie of grain, so one of the simplest ways to increase the ratio of food produced to water consumed is to reduce dependence upon meat.

Environmental Impact

The unsustainably large livestock population is having a devastating environmental impact. Often overlooked as a contributor to global warming, livestock herds account for 10 per cent of all greenhouse gases, including approximately 25 per cent of emissions of methane - considered to be among the most potent.

A further major problem is created by the sheer volume of waste produced by the farm animal population, estimated at thirteen billion tonnes every year. Combined with the excessive use of fertilisers to grow their feed, this causes high levels of ammonia and nitrate pollution of land, water and air.

Other ecological problems are specific to individual areas. Among the most spectacular have been rainforest destruction in Central and South America in order to rear cattle for the hamburger trade or grow soya for animal feed, and desertification from overgrazing in parts of Africa.

The Welfare of Farmed Animals

The massive increase in meat production would not have been possible without the development of industrialised methods of farming, which have ignored the rights and needs of animals by depriving them of the opportunity for exercise, fresh air and social interaction. Selective breeding for unnaturally rapid growth has created numerous endemic health problems, particularly from leg deformities and heart weakness.

“The explosion in meat consumption is paralleled by the global expansion of industrial ‘factory farming’ of animals. Apart from their environmental impact, such farming systems are based upon the triple insults of selective breeding for high yield, isolation or overcrowding and gross restriction of the animals’ natural behaviour.”

Joyce D’Silva, CIWF Trust

Since 1997, the EU has recognised farm animals as **sentient beings**, capable of suffering and feeling pain. It should, therefore, be incumbent upon policy makers to outlaw methods of production which, by their very nature, severely compromise basic welfare standards. Reducing the number of animals bred, reared and slaughtered will facilitate the adoption of more welfare-friendly extensive methods.

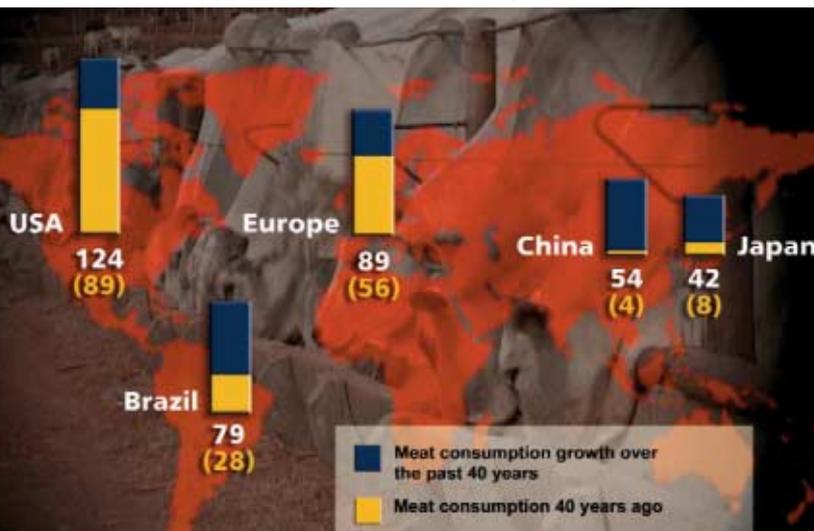


Intensively farmed pigs in South Africa

The threat to global food security

Whether on grounds of human health, sustainable use of resources, environmental protection or animal welfare, it is imperative that the human population decreases its dependence upon animal products. Yet according to a November 2001 report by the World Bank, *Livestock Development - Implications for Rural Poverty, the Environment, and Global Food Security*:

Meat consumption - kilograms per person per annum - growth over the last 40 years



‘total global meat demand is expected to grow from 209 million tons in 1997 to 327 million tons in 2020 (56%). Over the same period global milk consumption is expected to increase from about 422 million tons to 648 million tons (54%).’

It is anticipated that most of this increase will come from animals kept in intensive farms, the majority of them in the developing world.

The authors of *Livestock Development* acknowledge that this projected expansion ‘could severely affect global food security, the natural resource base, and rural equity’. (‘Global food security’ is defined by them as ‘the individual’s access to enough food to maintain a healthy and active life’.)

Source: FAO.

The planet-saving alternative

Historically there seems to have been a direct correlation between rising affluence and increased consumption of animal produce. **Yet rather than accepting that the current trend towards a high-meat diet is inescapable, an alternative approach is essential.** Unless we begin to rely less upon animal products in the human diet we will place an intolerable strain upon the earth's resources, with potentially disastrous consequences for human health and hunger, the natural environment and animals' needs.

Compassion in World Farming Trust is aiming its campaign for a reduction in meat consumption at both decision makers and individuals in the developed world. Moving towards a more plant-based diet in the developed world - however belatedly - is probably also the best way of promoting sustainable food policy in developing nations.

How can change be achieved?

There are two principal ways in which change in food policy can be achieved:

- **Firstly, through the power of individuals to inspire progress by the actions they take as consumers and/or as active citizens and campaigners.**

Many people have reduced their consumption of meat (particularly red meat) or made a decision only to eat organic or free-range produce. The vegetarian population in Western countries has grown significantly. Our campaign encourages more people to support these initiatives. Our campaign web site www.eatlessmeat.org aims to assist with such changes.

- **Secondly, by the decisions of policy makers.**

CIWF Trust aims to gain acceptance of the need for radical reform at the political level, suggesting measures that will promote food policies that are healthier, more humane and sustainable. For the sake of people, animals and the planet, meat must now become an urgent political issue. **As an initial step, we recommend that governments in the developed world pursue a target of 15 per cent reduction in meat consumption by the year 2020.** This should be viewed as a moderate response to the latest findings on healthy and sustainable food production methods from many respected organisations - notably the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO).

"The world continues to fall gradually to pieces around us as some of the gravest threats to the long term sustainability of humankind remain all but ignored. I would put the excessive consumption of meat right up there in that category. And though I understand only too well why it is that politicians continue to ignore this particular aspect of food and farming today, I despair at their selective blindness."

Jonathon Porritt, Forum for the Future, Chairman of UK Sustainable Development Commission

Campaign Patrons: Jonathon Porritt, Professor Tim Lang, Colin Tudge, Dr Vandana Shiva, Jerome Flynn, Joanna Lumley.

This brochure is a summary of a full report 'The Global Benefits of Eating Less Meat' written by Mark Gold for CIWF Trust. Foreword by Jonathon Porritt.

A 17-minute video 'Eat Less Meat – It's Costing the Earth' is also available.

Contact CIWF Trust to obtain copies, or for further copies of this brochure.

Campaign web site: www.eatlessmeat.org

Reference

Livestock Development - Implications for Rural Poverty, the Environment, and Global Food Security, World Bank, report no 23241, November 2001

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