

THE IMPACT OF LIVESTOCK FARMING: SOLUTIONS FOR ANIMALS, PEOPLE AND THE PLANET

COMPASSION IN WORLD FARMING 2008

Summary. The FAO Report “Livestock’s Long Shadow” (2006) highlighted the grave environmental impact of the global increase in meat production and consumption. The FAO view is supported by other authoritative reports such as the Stern Review “The Economics of Climate Change” (2006). At the current rate of increase in livestock production, urgent international action to counteract the predicted environmental crisis is required.

Compassion in World Farming offers a radical strategy to address this crisis, based on a planned reduction in meat production and consumption in the high-consuming nations, combined with a positive replacement of industrial agriculture with more environmentally sustainable and humane livestock systems worldwide.

“The increase in meat consumption suddenly looms as one of the biggest environmental crises that we are now facing.”

Jonathon Porritt, Chair of the UK government’s Sustainable Development Commission¹

What is Compassion in World Farming?

Compassion in World Farming is the leading non-governmental organization (NGO) working internationally to advance the welfare of farm animals and to achieve a vibrant rural economy based on humane and environmentally sustainable farming methods. Founded by a farmer in 1967, Compassion in World Farming’s headquarters are in the UK from where it co-ordinates a European Coalition and offices and representatives in four continents.²

Compassion in World Farming has a strong track record in lobbying, research and education and played a key role in achieving UK and European Union (EU) phase-outs of some of the most damaging livestock production systems such as the keeping of calves in narrow crates for veal, the confinement of breeding sows in narrow crates throughout their pregnancies and the keeping of laying hens in barren battery cages.

Compassion in World Farming initiated and led the EU-wide campaign to have animals recognized as “sentient beings” – a campaign which achieved success with the adoption of the Protocol on the protection and welfare of animals in the Amsterdam Treaty in 1997.³

Compassion in World Farming engages positively with farmers and the food industry, rewarding good practice, and has developed innovative resources on Good Agricultural Practice in Animal Welfare.

“Please eat less meat - meat is a very carbon intensive commodity.”

Dr Rajendra Pachauri, 15 January 2008, Paris.
Chair of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and joint winner of the Nobel Peace Prize 2007 (ABC News, 16.01.08)

The Future of Livestock Farming

Compassion in World Farming believes that the future of livestock farming is inextricably linked to several major global issues:

- the adverse environmental impact of the global growth in meat production
- our new scientific understanding of animals as sentient beings
- the links between higher consumption of certain animal products and raised incidences of the “diseases of affluence”
- the trend to consolidation and vertical integration of meat production, and its social impact, including rural-urban drift.

Environmental impact

The 2006 FAO Report “Livestock’s Long Shadow – Environmental Issues and Options” predicts that global meat consumption will more than double by 2050 (from 2001) and milk consumption will almost double.⁴

Animal farming itself has changed, from being small-scale, often ruminant-based to being industrial and based on monogastric animals, with burgeoning global numbers of pigs and poultry. Already, 50% of global pork production and over 70% of chicken production comes from industrial systems.⁴

Animal feeding regimes have changed from being forage-based to being heavily dependent on cereals and soya. The FAO Report reckons that the production of nitrogen fertilizer just for growing the 33% of global crops that are fed to farm animals results in “an estimated annual emission of CO₂ of more than 40 million tonnes”.⁴

The FAO Report shows us that livestock farming is responsible for significant levels of emissions of many of the gases associated with global warming, expressed in Table 1 opposite. Globally, the livestock industry is said to be responsible for 18% of the global warming effect - more than the transport sector.⁴

Industrial chicken farming, Brazil, and industrial pig farming, South Africa



Beef cattle feeding, Brazil



Table 1. Percentages of gaseous emissions derived from human-related activities in the livestock sector, including emissions from land use change.⁴

Carbon dioxide	Methane (23 times as warming as CO ₂)	Ammonia (a significant contributor to acid rain).	Nitrous oxide (Nitrous oxide has 296 times the Global Warming Potential of CO ₂)*
9%	37%	64%	65%

*Mostly emanating from manure

“Livestock are one of the most significant contributors to today’s most serious environmental problems. Urgent action is required to remedy the situation.”

Henning Steinfeld, Chief of the FAO’s Livestock Information and Policy branch⁵

The FAO Report declares that the livestock sector is the largest sectoral source of water pollution “contributing to eutrophication, “dead” zones in coastal areas, degradation of coral reefs, human health problems, emergence of antibiotic resistance and many others”.⁴

It is estimated that, by 2025, 64% of humanity will be living in areas of water shortage. The livestock sector is responsible for over 8% of global human water use, 7% of global water being used for irrigating crops grown for animal feed.⁴

Animals as sentient beings

In 1997 the concept of animal sentience was written in to the basic law of the European Union.³ The legally-binding Protocol annexed to the Treaty of Amsterdam recognizes that animals are “sentient beings”, capable of feeling pain and of suffering. In other words, it matters to them how they are treated.⁶

Free range pigs in a more natural environment, recently felled woodland, Sweden



Photo: © Dale Arey/CWFF

This understanding of sentience is important as it should influence – and already has influenced – policy and legal decisions on the ethical acceptability of certain livestock systems, practices and trades. For example, the EU has banned certain rearing methods which confine animals so that they are unable to turn round and has set minimum standards for their living conditions. Other countries have taken similar unilateral action, such as New Zealand and the Philippines. The OIE (World Organization for Animal Health) has issued Guidelines on the welfare of animals at slaughter and in transit.⁷ Future OIE Guidelines will address on-farm welfare.

In 2006 the International Finance Corporation (IFC) adopted a Good Practice Note on animal welfare, in which the IFC commits to consideration of welfare when making project-funding decisions.⁸ There are moves underway to have the United Nations adopt a Universal Declaration on Animal Welfare.⁹

Consumption of animal products and human health

Whilst consumption of meat, eggs and milk can be a useful source of protein in the diet, particularly for those with low nutritional status, high levels of consumption can have adverse effects on human health.

The 20th century change from more plant-based diets to energy-dense diets, high in fat and animal foods, has played a key role in the upsurge in diet-related, preventable health problems and diseases, from obesity to type 2 diabetes, many types of heart disease and some cancers. Rates of these diseases are now growing rapidly in the developing world as western-style diets become more common.^{10,11}

Any rounded study of the impact of livestock farming on human health must also take into account the role of zoonoses (diseases which originate in animals). The OIE says 60% of human pathogens and 75% of recent emerging diseases are zoonotic.¹²

Social effects of the intensification of livestock production

Many peasant and nomadic farmers depend on livestock for their own security. However the global trend is towards intensification, and in many cases, especially the poultry meat industry, towards vertical integration, with all processes controlled by one parent company. This can disempower the farmers themselves.

Small scale poultry farmer in Ivory Coast. Industrial farms can threaten the livelihoods of farmers like this



Photo: © MAEP/CiWF

The FAO/WHO report, “Diet, nutrition and the prevention of chronic diseases”, says “Intensive methods of livestock production may well provide much needed income opportunities, but this is often at the expense of the farmers’ capacity to produce their own food.”¹³

Around 160,000 people move from rural areas to cities every day.¹⁴ Although rural-urban drift is a multi-faceted problem, there is little doubt that intensive livestock production, with its demand for water and feed crops, its potential for polluting and degrading the local environment and its high rates of production, with which peasant farmers cannot compete, is often a contributory factor.

The role of intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) and investment banks

Intergovernmental organizations have a key role to play in addressing the issues raised by the global increase in meat production. They are uniquely placed to provide global vision and leadership and to adopt policies and strategies to address the problem. Both IGOs and investment banks can set policy criteria related to funding – a good example of this is the IFC’s decision in 2006 to incorporate animal welfare into its investment decisions. IGOs can directly influence the aid and investment policies of national governments through regular engagement with them.

The greatest challenge for both IGOs and Banks may be to *not* accept the “inevitable growth” of an unacceptable trend such as industrial livestock farming.

Sustainable solutions

The authors of the FAO Report “Livestock’s Long Shadow” declare that we cannot continue with “business as usual”. They make a series of recommendations, such as adoption of “the polluter pays” principle, relocation of industrial animal farms away from cities and subsidies for environmental enhancement.



However, it seems that the authors believe that they must continue to provide support for the predicted increase in global meat consumption, saying, “the considerable expansion of the livestock sector required by expanding demand *must be accomplished* while substantially reducing livestock’s environmental impact.” (author’s italics). Are not these two ambitions mutually exclusive?

Compassion in World Farming supports ameliorative measures which will reduce the impact of increased livestock production on the environment – provided they do not pose a threat to farm animal welfare. However, the situation is now so grave that these measures alone would seem inadequate to deal with the looming food, environment and health crises. A more radical approach is needed.

Compassion in World Farming believes we have to find a better way forward for farming, one which incorporates the welfare paradigm at its core, alongside the urgent environmental strategies which are already being proposed. This kind of farming will recognize the intrinsic value of farm animals by keeping them in conditions where their welfare is enhanced as well as minimizing environmental impact.

Compassion in World Farming proposes that part of any holistic policy package must be a planned reduction in global meat and dairy production and consumption.

IGOs should adopt policies clearly setting out minimum standards for good animal welfare and should acknowledge the negative impact of high consumption levels of red meat and dairy products on the health of consumers.

These locally bred broilers (meat chickens) in Portugal enjoy a natural environment

Most importantly, IGOs with different briefs, e.g. agriculture, health, development or environmental protection must develop joined-up policies and strategies. In the longer term, for one IGO to promote livestock farming to meet increased global demand for meat and dairy products, whilst at the same time another IGO calls for healthier diets, is totally counter-productive and gives conflicting signals to both governments and citizens.

Compassion in World Farming urges Intergovernmental Organizations and Investment Banks to take swift action to develop a new vision for agriculture, the environment and human health, where the potential of land is used to produce health-giving foods, where farming systems are used which protect and, if possible, enrich the environment and where smaller numbers of animals are farmed, in ways which positively impact their welfare.

Joyce D'Silva
Ambassador for Compassion in World Farming

References

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Compassion in World Farming materials

Animal Welfare Aspects of Good Agricultural Practice: Pig Production. The first part of a vital new series of educational resources for agriculture, veterinary and animal science courses. Book, video and presentation available free of charge. Also in Chinese.

Animal Welfare Aspects of Good Agricultural Practice: Broiler Chickens is in preparation. Further translations planned. Visit gapanimalwelfare.org or contact Compassion in World Farming.

Global Warning: Climate change and farm animal welfare. Referenced report on the impact of industrial-scale animal agriculture on animal welfare, climate change and the wider environment, on water and on human health. Report and further information available at ciwf.org/globalwarning

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