Two ways to tackle livestock’s contribution to the climate crisis: Trade Policy

The issue...
Industrial livestock is a major cause of climate change

The 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 of it is in the form of methane, a gas 25 times more effective than carbon dioxide at trapping heat in our atmosphere but able to disappear we know 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 concentration and vertical integration across the world in 1990, just the Brazilian company, Tyson, Cargill, National Beef and Matthey accounted for 20 percent of the world’s beef production.

If we did anything 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 ‘catastrophic’ warming scenario of 4.5°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, overpopulation of works, destruction of small family farms, abuse of billions of animals and global health emergencies, such as antibiotic resistance and avian flu.

Technological fixes could reduce more than 30 percent of current GHG emissions, according to the most optimistic FAO scenario. A system change is imperative.

The issue...
Consumption must be addressed

The global rise in meat and dairy consumption is projected to grow by 78 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 Organization’s recommended levels, 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 consumption, fast food chains, supermarkets and fast foods.

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 herders in poor countries as the climate culprits because of their animal ‘low efficiency’ in converting carbon to meat or milk on a per capita basis.

Yet, a narrow focus on efficiency and emissions intensively ignores the multiple benefits of mixed multifunctional and biodiverse small-scale livestock production systems. These include improving soil health, greater agricultural productivity 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 grn.org and IATP at iatp.org

The boeufprint of factory farms vs. agroecological production

Factory farms

- Methane emissions from enteric fermentation
- Fossil fuel extraction and transport
- Withholding land and resources
- Pollution (air, water, noise)
- Animal welfare

Small-scale farms

- Manure as natural fertilizer
- Local production
- Limited deforestation
- Multi-functional bioeconomy
- Transport energy, bioenergy
- Local food sovereignty
- Animal welfare
- Limited pollution
- Regional carbon capture sustainable grazing keeps carbon

Manure as natural fertilizer

The economic security (animals are the people’s “bank”)

Trade Policy

The impact: Manure as natural fertilizer

The economic security: (animals are the people’s “bank”)

The health: Protein source for the poor

The culture: Supports small markets and regions

The climate: Carbon capture, sustainable grazing keeps carbon

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

The solution:
Redirect the subsidies

Industrial meat and dairy production is propped up by an enormous amount of taxpayer dollars—around $63 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 $200 billion corn farm in Spain, should be invested on a sustainable 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.

While support should also go to building or refurbishing local infrastructures, abattoirs, milk and meat processing, roads, sanitation, etc., these local livestock and dairy markets thrive.

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The solution:
Direct from industrial meat and dairy

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

Bank and other institutional investors must account for the true carbon costs and climate risks of their application in-
vestments and direct from companies that harm the climate.

Rather than incentivizing factory farm ex-
pansion and the industrial model through
credit and carbon offsets, climate funds should be directed towards the greater resilience of agro-ecological systems by supporting integrated agroecological models and their practitioners.

Meat and dairy companies and their lobby groups must be prevented from undue infl-
fluence on decisions making in the public interest, including through stealthy tactics on campaign finance and preventing conflict of interest in government and intergovern-
mental advisory boards.

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

The solution:
Stop and rollback so-called trade
and investment deals

Trade and investment agreements, like the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), the Na-

tional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), and the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) and the Trans-

tlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP), expand markets for the global meat and dairy complex. They enable the dump-
ing of cheap meat, dairy and feed and pre-

vent the use of policies that can help smallholders supply markets, as well as regulations that dis-

credit this model. For example:

70 million dairy farms in India face im-
mediate import threats from the BSE-

prone trade being negotiated with the dairy powerhouse New Zealand, which exported a cheap milk producer.

The Colombo-Paro Agreement, signed by the South African government, could lead to its dairy farmers being displaced, and the European Union -Paro Agree-

ment trade deals new being killed off in Europe.

These policies will promote dumping of cheap dairy from the EU into those markets.

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These deals must be stopped and rolled back, and those that allow communities to grow their local markets in coop-

eration and mutual support.

The solution:
Reduce meat consumption, 
eliminate over-consumption

It is critical to work toward a reduction of industrial meat and dairy, especially red meat, in the浩s of over-consumption such as the United States, Europe, Brazil and China. This can be encouraged by raising 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 ineffective through taxes, subsidies, regulating the industry and in-

cluding fiscal measures. However, these measures must be executed in a way that does not penalize lower income consumers or small-scale producers.

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

Public sector institutions (hospitals, hosp-
tels, etc.) should be encouraged to cut industrial

meat and dairy from their menus and source proteins from short supply chains and small-scale sustainable suppliers.

The School Districts of Ueland in the U.S. has recently tested such a scheme with great success, saving $42,000 in the process.

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

The solution:
Support small scale production and local markets

There are over 600 million small-scale farmers and smallholder workers who de-
pend on livestock for their livelihoods and who feed billions of people every day with quality meat, dairy and eggs in a sustain-
able manner. They urgently need public at-

tention and support!

Policies and programmes should focus on supporting small farmers, smallholders and local markets that they supply.

Livestock producers should be support-

ed to move to agroecological production models, reducing rotational grazing and land and management measures, that help cut greenhouse gas emissions.

We need to invest in community-led proj-

ects and initiatives that seek to proliferate such practices and reduce the dependence on the high carbon footprint and production systems.