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BRIEFING PAPER:

Towards equitable, humane and sustainable food systems.

November 2024

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1. INTRODUCTION

World leaders gathering at COP29 in Baku, Azerbaijan do so at a critical time. Twelve months have passed since the Emirates Declaration on Sustainable Agriculture¹ was agreed in Dubai at COP28 – a groundbreaking initiative that set out the links between changing current agriculture and food systems and solving climate change.

The 160 leaders that signed the Emirates Declaration committed to begin transforming their agriculture and food systems. This sector accounts for an alarming one-third of greenhouse gas emissions.² Each Government is asked to put in place climate targets and goals for agriculture and food systems ahead of COP30 in November 2025 – specifically putting these targets and goals in their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), National Adaptation Plans (NAPs), Long-term Strategies (LTS) and National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs).

However, global action on agriculture and food systems is at risk of fragmenting. We have yet to see signatory Governments put forward any ambitious commitments. We fear that some Governments are planning to submit lacklustre climate plans that maintain the status quo and are thus devoid of impactful greenhouse gas emission reduction targets.

The stakes could not be higher. Without aggressive action to cut agriculture and food system emissions, meeting the Paris Agreement's targets on climate action becomes impossible. Global heating will continue its relentless rise with implications for food production and global hunger. This will threaten "the ability of many, especially the most vulnerable, to produce and access food in the face of mounting hunger, malnutrition, and economic stresses" as the Emirates Declaration itself points out.³



This Briefing Paper stresses the essential and urgent need for Governments to uphold the commitments made in the Emirates Declaration and the devastating consequences if they do not.

It highlights the main sources of greenhouse gas emissions within agriculture and food systems, with a special focus on the enormous and growing emissions from industrial animal agriculture.

It details why and how industrial animal agriculture stands out as the overlooked climate culprit which decimates wildlife habitats, displaces local communities, causes animal cruelty and releases vast amounts of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere. The lack of concrete targets for greenhouse gas emissions reduction even allows governments to explore new ways of expanding fossil fuel use.

There is an alternative. This Briefing Paper proposes a roadmap toward global food systems that align with the critical 1.5°C target under the Paris Agreement and ensure food security and justice globally.

The path forward is clear.

But so are the dangers if we fail to act.

As this Briefing Paper details, immediate, coordinated and ambitious action on agriculture and food systems is the only option.





1.1. INDUSTRIAL ANIMAL AGRICULTURE: A MAJOR CONTRIBUTOR TO FOOD AND AGRICULTURE EMISSIONS.

It is estimated that agriculture and the production, transport and storage of food account for at least 15% of fossil fuels used annually, generating at least as many emissions as all EU countries and Russia combined.⁴ While other industrial sectors have mandated targets to reduce fossil fuel use, there are few set targets for greenhouse gas reduction in agriculture and food systems. Fossil fuel giants are investing in petrochemicals to make pesticides and fertilisers – thus ensuring the increasing dependence of agriculture and food systems on high-carbon energy into the future.⁵

This creates a vicious circle of increased use of pesticides and fertilisers on animal feed crops which then supply industrial animal agriculture, itself a massive user of fossil fuel energy. Without these set emissions reduction targets for greenhouse gas reductions in agriculture and food systems, the damage is potentially limitless. Research shows that even if fossil fuel emissions were immediately halted in every other industrial sector, current trends in global agriculture and food systems would prevent the achievement of the 1.5°C target and by the end of the century they would threaten the achievement of the 2°C target.⁶

An estimated 70% of farmed animals are raised and slaughtered within cruel industrial animal agriculture and this number is rising each year.⁷ Overall demand for meat is expected to increase in every region of the world in the coming years, including by as much as 30% in Africa (where current consumption levels are relatively low), 18% in Asia Pacific, 12% in Latin America, and 9% in North America.⁸

Industrial animal agriculture does not just drive greenhouse gas emissions through use of fossil fuels, it also drives widespread destruction of forests, grasslands and other habitats of wild animals to grow crops to feed industrially farmed animals. The destruction of biodiversity and the loss of these vital carbon sinks immediately releases tonnes of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere. It also leads to suffering and death for the wild animals that live in those habitats. This ensures increasing greenhouse gas emissions for years to come.⁹

The processing and transport of this animal feed also use significant amounts of fossil fuel energy. Industrial animal agriculture itself uses energy for heating, lighting and ventilation. Manure and emissions from animals generate significant amounts of methane - a greenhouse gas that causes rapid heating of the Earth.

Industrial animal agriculture is blocking the achievement of the Paris Agreement. With few targets for greenhouse gas reduction in the agriculture and food sectors, industrial animal farming continues to expand, destroy and pollute.

Industrial farming is also a fundamentally unfair system of food production. World Animal Protection research estimates that 66% of greenhouse gas emissions from industrial animal agriculture come from only 10 countries - US, China, Brazil, Russia, Canada, Germany, Argentina, France, Spain and Mexico.¹⁰ These countries benefit from the food produced, yet it is predominantly countries of the Global South without industrial animal agriculture that are suffering most from climate change effects - including changing seasons and temperatures that hinder food production. These countries often have less capacity to adapt to extreme weather events.

For all these reasons, World Animal Protection wants to see limits put on greenhouse gas emissions from industrial animal agriculture. We ultimately want an end to this polluting, cruel and unjust system of farming.

2. THE NEED FOR A BOLD AND TRANSFORMATIVE APPROACH TO FOOD SYSTEMS

Our world is at a crossroads. Without immediate action, industrial animal agriculture will continue to jeopardise global climate targets and our collective ambition to keep global heating to 1.5°C.

As well as causing greenhouse gas emissions, industrial animal agriculture threatens agreed global actions under the Sustainable Development Agenda 2030. Many of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) cannot be met because industrial animal agriculture is causing environmental damage, driving antimicrobial resistance, zoonotic diseases and exacerbating food insecurity through inefficient use of animal feed and water. Specifically, it is imperilling SDG goals of 2 (Zero Hunger), 3 (Good Health and Well-being), 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation), and 13 (Climate Action). The impact of industrial animal agriculture can be seen in environmental and climate disasters, worsening social inequality and irreversible loss of biodiversity. It is impossible to achieve sustainable development without putting limits on industrial animal agriculture.

World Animal Protection's vision is for equitable, humane and sustainable food systems to replace industrial animal agriculture.

2.1. WHAT DO WE MEAN BY EQUITABLE, HUMANE AND SUSTAINABLE FOOD SYSTEMS AND HOW DO WE GET THERE?

EQUITABLE: PUTTING PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES FIRST

Equitable food systems ensure that all people, especially marginalised communities, have fair access to land, resources and economic opportunities. This is vital because smallholder farmers, Indigenous peoples and rural workers often face systemic barriers which limit their participation in and ability to benefit from the agricultural economy. Fair and inclusive food systems address these inequalities, promoting justice and resilience, particularly in areas where many are vulnerable to food insecurity and climate impacts.

HUMANE: ENDING CRUEL PRACTICES

Humane food systems are anchored in the importance of animal experience within these environments. This means that animals enjoy good health and a favourable balance of positive experiences over negative ones and have opportunities to make choices and to fully express their normal behaviours. The opposite takes place in industrial animal agriculture, where practices that cause immense suffering are contributing to zoonotic disease outbreaks and antibiotic resistance. As the COP28 Declaration on Climate and Health recognises, there are benefits for both human health¹¹ and the climate from deep, rapid, and sustained reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, including lower air pollution, active mobility and shifts to sustainable healthy diets. Humane systems underpin healthier and safer food systems.

SUSTAINABLE: PROTECTING THE PLANET FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS

Sustainable food systems protect ecosystems and reduce environmental degradation by shifting away from high-emission, resource-intensive industrial animal farming and land-use change. In sustainable systems, resources are used responsibly and there are few costly synthetic external inputs such as routine antibiotic use, chemical fertilisers and pesticides.

2.2 A JUST TRANSITION IN FOOD SYSTEMS: A ROADMAP.

Discussions around just transitions have traditionally focused on sectors like energy and transport. There is growing recognition however that food systems must also undergo a just transition. Using the principles of a just transition could help move industrial animal agriculture toward more equitable, humane and sustainable food systems. The process should be a fair one and not cost workers or communities their health, environment, jobs or economic assets. The people who are most affected by pollution or environmental impacts, especially frontline workers and communities, should be in the leadership of crafting policy solutions.¹²

It is against this backdrop that World Animal Protection recently brought together a coalition of organisations¹³ to co-develop a white paper '[The Just Transition from Industrial Animal Production to Equitable, Humane and Sustainable Food Systems](#)'.¹⁴ The paper is informed by extensive consultations with individuals representing 72 organisations from 35 countries capturing the perspectives of diverse groups, including food chain workers, smallholder farmers, Indigenous communities, women, and youth in agriculture. Our common vision is for a world where respect for animals and nature sits at the heart of our food system, one which must be humane, equitable, sustainable, resilient and capable of feeding the world.

2.3. OUR VISION

Our vision is for an equitable, humane and sustainable food system supplying nutritious foods through agroecological practices¹⁵ that uphold human rights, especially for marginalised groups such as women, indigenous populations, people of colour and people with disabilities. One which protects the environment and animals, while ensuring food security and justice and helping people working across food systems to live in dignity and receive a liveable income.

In this vision, animal product consumption in high-consuming countries is reduced in favour of plant-rich diets, and any remaining animal-sourced foods are produced through agroecological practices and follow high animal welfare standards. Multinational enterprises are held accountable for their environmental and social damage, while policies and subsidies are reformed to ensure smallholders, cooperatives, and workers compete on a level playing field. These reforms promote just transitions and agroecological methods while supporting local and regional economies without compromising food security.



Companies, smallholders and family farmers should prioritise animal welfare, ecological health and social equity through sustainable practices. Companies can play a critical role in transitioning to an equitable, humane and sustainable food system by moving away from industrial animal agriculture and investing in plant-rich diets and agroecological practices. This will have the effect of reducing greenhouse gas emissions, animal cruelty and social, environmental and human health impacts.

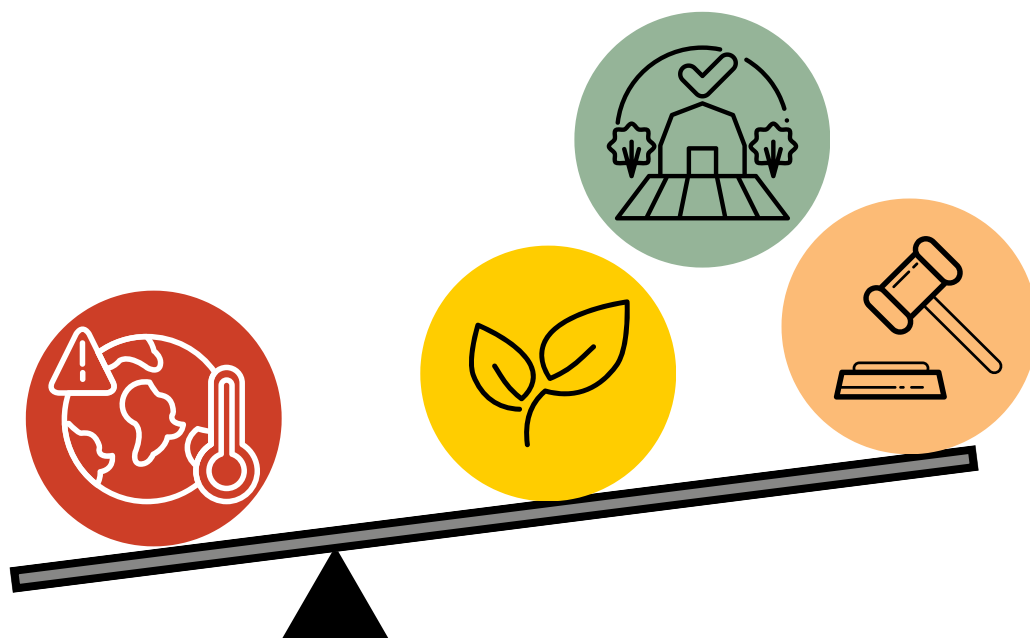
A reformed system of animal agriculture can form part of this vision when it is protective and respectful of biodiversity and ecosystems, aligned with Indigenous and traditional practices, ensures high standards of animal welfare and when it recognises the cultural, social and economic importance of traditional livestock systems, particularly for women and small-scale producers. Smallholders, pastoralists, fishers, and Indigenous peoples play a vital role in providing nutritious food for all.

Certain concepts are not compatible with this vision. They include carbon farming, sustainable intensification, regenerative agriculture and carbon off-setting.

Carbon farming focuses on sequestering carbon in soils but often at the expense of broader environmental and social damage. Sustainable intensification aims to increase agricultural yields while minimising harm, yet it still relies on industrial models that perpetuate environmental degradation. Regenerative agriculture emphasises soil health but can be co-opted by industrial practices that do not address systemic issues. Carbon offset programs allow industrial animal agriculture to continue polluting without addressing the root causes of environmental harm, effectively shifting responsibility rather than solving the problem.

2.4. THE THREE LEVERS OF CHANGE

Creating food systems that are equitable, humane and sustainable can be done through utilising three key levers of change:



STRENGTHEN FOOD SYSTEM GOVERNANCE

We must challenge the unaccountable control of food systems by multinational corporations - putting policies in place to foster transparency and hold them accountable for their social and environmental impacts and improve their practices. At the same time, environmentally and socially responsible companies should be supported and there should be protection for traditional and local food systems.

PROMOTE AGROECOLOGICAL PRACTICES

A just transition necessitates embracing agroecology which promotes human rights, environmental protection and animal welfare. Future food systems should ensure food security and justice while providing dignified and sustainable livelihoods.

SHIFT TOWARDS DIETS WITHIN PLANETARY AND SOCIAL BOUNDARIES

Countries with high per capita consumption of animal-based products must transition to plant-rich diets with reduced meat and dairy consumption to stay within planetary and social boundaries. This shift will benefit public health and free up land and resources to support diversified agroecological production systems.

2.5. WHAT HAPPENS IF WE DO NOT ACHIEVE FOOD SYSTEMS TRANSFORMATION?

If we continue to go down the path of expanding industrial animal agriculture, we will continue to release large amount of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere, worsening heat waves, wildfires, floods and droughts. Biodiversity will continue to be destroyed to plant crops for animal feed – in the process killing wild species and releasing greenhouse gases into the atmosphere.

Raising billions of animals in industrial animal agriculture subjects them to unimaginable cruelty. Pigs, cattle and chickens are bred for efficiency and profit rather than welfare, they are often constrained by cages or high stocking densities and painfully mutilated. These animals will continue to suffer debilitating injuries and they will be dosed with antibiotics to stave off diseases which fester in these cramped conditions. This is fuelling the spike in superbugs and dangers to human health.

But the biggest climate change and environmental impact will continue to be in the production of crops used to feed farmed animals. Increasing global demand for animal feed crops drives deforestation, causing carbon to be released into the atmosphere.

If we continue to grow crops to feed farmed animals that will eventually become our food, we are imperilling food security and food justice. For every 100 calories of crops fed to farmed animals, only 17-30 calories end up reaching humans in our food chain.¹⁶ Meat and dairy provide only 18% of overall calories and 37% of protein for humans, but they use 83% of farmland.¹⁷ It is far more efficient and safer to grow crops that feed humans directly.

To save our climate, to end suffering of farmed animals, to ensure healthy and humane food systems and to feed nearly 9 billion humans - limits on greenhouse gas emissions and an eventual phasing out of industrial animal agriculture are essential and urgent.



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3. OUR DEMANDS FOR GOVERNMENTS AT THE UNFCCC.

By setting ambitious greenhouse gas targets for agriculture and food systems and redirecting subsidies toward agroecological producers and frontline protectors, Governments can ensure access to healthy, nutritious food produced in an equitable and humane manner.

Also, protecting and restoring fragile ecosystems is vital for future food systems. Governments can drive meaningful change, ensuring that smallholders, Indigenous peoples and local communities thrive while fostering resilience in our food systems.

SUPPORT JUST
PROTEIN
TRANSITION





3.1. OUR RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COP29 AND COP30: THE ROAD TO BELÉM

UNEP's Emissions Gap 2023 Report¹⁸ highlights significant progress in global greenhouse gas emissions since the Paris Agreement was signed in 2015. While the projected increase in emissions for 2030 has been reduced from 16% to just 3%, a 28% decline is still necessary to meet the 2°C pathway of the Paris Agreement and 42% for the more ambitious 1.5°C pathway. Current unconditional NDCs could result in a temperature rise of 2.9°C above pre-industrial levels, underscoring the urgent need for transformative action.

As we move towards COP30, countries must adopt updated targets that reflect essential changes across multiple sectors, particularly in agriculture and food systems.

Our proposed actions include the following:

LEVER 1: STRENGTHEN FOOD SYSTEMS GOVERNANCE

- Require companies to adopt transparent sustainability reporting and traceability systems.
- Incorporate strategies into climate targets to halt deforestation associated with industrial animal agriculture, particularly policies that prevent or disincentivise the conversion of forests into pastureland or the production of animal feed.
- Create a regulatory environment that encourages reductions in production levels and emissions from industrial animal agriculture, particularly in countries where this model is entrenched.

- Redirect government subsidies and funding supporting large-scale industrial animal agriculture and unsustainable practices towards agroecology to unlock climate finance to support small-scale producers and marginalised groups.

LEVER 2: PROMOTE AGROECOLOGICAL PRACTICES

- Offer financial incentives that reward transitions to agroecological practices. Redirect policy and subsidy support from industrial animal agriculture to agroecological approaches that respect the rights of Indigenous peoples and local communities, as well as protecting animal welfare.
- Invest in research and education to promote agroecology as a solution for food production.
- Provide training and technical assistance to displaced industrial animal agriculture workers for safe, climate-resilient job opportunities.
- Establish protected areas, including terrestrial and marine reserves and wildlife corridors to maintain ecosystems and enhance nature's carbon sequestration capacity.

LEVER 3: SHIFT TOWARDS DIETS WITHIN PLANETARY AND SOCIAL BOUNDARIES

- Promote strategies to reduce meat consumption, particularly in high-meat-consuming countries, through measures like procurement reforms that favour plant-rich diets and updating national dietary guidelines to align with sustainability goals.
- Develop fiscal policies, including subsidies for fruits, vegetables, and plant-based proteins, to incentivise healthier food choices.
- Foster innovation in emerging food technologies, such as lab-grown meats and plant-based substitutes, by providing funding for research and development



BETTER DATA

- In addition to these actions, we call for comprehensive Scope 3 emissions data on industrial animal agriculture emissions. The current understanding of its impacts is incomplete, underscoring the need for tools that provide a holistic view of the sector and address its systemic issues. This understanding is crucial and urgent.
- There should be better research into knowledge of the alignment between the Paris Agreement and other global goals, such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework.

As host of COP30, Brazil exemplifies the urgent need for change, serving as a stark poster child for the destructive impacts of industrial animal agriculture on countries heavily involved in producing meat and other agricultural products for wealthier nations. Habitat destruction, land rights violations and loss of biodiversity are direct consequences of an industry that prioritises profit over people, animals and the planet.

The destruction in Brazil is not an isolated case. It reflects the broader failures of an agricultural system that perpetuates inequality, harms ecosystems, and undermines our environment. With the climate impact of the largest meat and dairy companies now exceeding that of several developed nations, we can no longer overlook the corporate giants driving the expansion of industrial animal agriculture and its associated harms.

We must push for coherent policies that promote social justice, animal welfare, protect our ecosystems, and advocate for the rights and dignity of all those affected by this crisis, to alleviate animal, human and environmental suffering on a global scale.

3.2. OUR CALLS FOR GOVERNMENTS

Governments should publicly recognise that industrial animal agriculture is a major contributor to climate change and take steps to prevent deforestation linked to animal feed, meat and dairy production, including imports.

Governments must include limits of greenhouse gas emissions in the agriculture and food systems sector as well as specific actions in their NDCs and other global targets to cap the growth of industrial animal agriculture. This should include halting new industrial animal farms and implementing a moratorium on expansion of existing farms.

Agricultural subsidies and public funding should be redirected to support the shift away from industrial animal agriculture and toward equitable, humane and sustainable forms of food production, prioritising environmental health, animal welfare and social equity.

Governments of countries with high per capita meat consumption must commit to halving animal meat production and consumption by 2040. To achieve this, Governments must have an overall policy architecture to refocus our food environments away from industrial animal agriculture systems.

The time for transformative action is now.



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