

Grabbing the Bull by the Horns: It's Time to Cut Industrial Meat and Dairy to Save the Climate

By [Grain](#)

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Earlier this month the world's largest corporations and economic elites came together at the World Economic Forum's annual meeting in Davos. More than ever before, climate change figured prominently on the agenda—especially how it might be leveraged for greater corporate profit. “For many companies and their boards... climate change is a core part of the growth agenda”, said Dominic Waughray, head of public-private partnerships at the WEF.

But corporations played a large role in creating the climate crisis to begin with. And while energy companies are the most frequent targets of climate activism, a new report by GRAIN shows that large food corporations—especially in the meat and dairy sector—are huge contributors to global climate change. According to the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation, meat production alone now generates more greenhouse gas emissions than all the world's transport combined.

But all meat and dairy is not created equal. In most of the Global South, livestock is raised mainly by small farmers practising low-emissions, mixed farming, plus 200 million herders who often graze their animals in areas where crops cannot be grown. Not only do these production and consumption systems contribute little to climate change, they also improve family nutrition, enhance livelihoods and are an integral part of cultural and religious traditions.

“It's crucial to make a distinction between different systems,” argues GRAIN researcher Renée Vellvé. “Large-scale, confined feedlot operations controlled by a handful of corporations spew massive greenhouse gases into the atmosphere—from feed production to enormous manure lagoons to long-distance transportation. Not to mention additional negative impacts on the environment, labour conditions and public health”.

The power of meat and dairy corporations and the rapid expansion of industrial livestock and chemical-intensive feed crops must be curbed if we are to take meaningful action to address climate change, according to the report. This means tackling the policies, like corporate subsidies and free trade agreements, that promote factory farming.

“This is not about simply promoting a change in individual consumption habits, or telling people not to eat meat”, says GRAIN coordinator Henk Hobbelink. “Rather, we need to dismantle the structures that promote the expansion of industrial meat and dairy, which benefit large corporations and harm small farmers and consumers. Some governments have started formulating recommendations that people eat less meat, but as long as they continue to push cheap industrial meat with subsidies and trade agreements, this won't

make much of a difference”.

Indeed, cutting industrial meat and dairy—especially in North America, Europe and some other countries with high levels of consumption like Brazil—would have a significant impact on the earth’s climate. Methane, the major greenhouse gas from livestock, remains in the atmosphere less time than carbon dioxide, and traps 28 times more heat. Consequently, lowering the production of methane can have a relatively quick payoff.

As one recent study found, if people simply kept their meat consumption to the World Health Organisation’s recommended guidelines, the world could reduce some 40 per cent of all current greenhouse gas emissions!

The corporations and big banks at Davos do not hold the solution to climate chaos. But informed policy makers and social movements can make a significant dent in global climate change if they grab the bull by the horns and take actions to reduce industrial meat and dairy.

The full report can be downloaded from: <https://www.grain.org/e/5639>

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