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## Our meat production and consumption also warms the planet

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If we are what we eat, nowadays we are, without doubt, climate change. Our diets, rich in animal proteins, fed by an intensive industrial production of meat and fish, are one of the main causes of global warming.

However, livestock farming and meat consumption are the poor cousins of the climate negotiations that culminated in the COP21 summit in Paris in last December. Let's analyse the current situation to develop strategies and action plans.

### ***Livestock farming: climate change winner***

According to the [Food and Agriculture Organization](#) (FAO), it is well known that livestock farming is the sector with the highest greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions rates, with approximately the 18%, after the transport sector which represents the 22% of GHG emissions. This is 9% of the global CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, 37% of methane (more than mining exploitation, oil and natural gas!) and 65% of NO<sub>2</sub>, with these last two having a higher impact on greenhouse gas increase than CO<sub>2</sub>.

Much of this is due to deforestation as a result of land use change caused by expansion of shepherding and fodder farming, the ruminants digestive process (methane), production and storage of manure (NO<sub>2</sub>) and finally, production and transportation of livestock products. In particular, 10% of the planet's agricultural land is used for pasture and the other 10% is for the production of cereals to feed them. And on top of that, the official estimates seem rather optimistic. According to the [World Bank](#), if we were to count all indirect emissions, the livestock sector would be at the top of the climate change ranking, responsible for more than half of the global GHG emissions.

Finally, meat consumption, and therefore the level of emissions, depend on where we live: for example, an American consumes 120 kilograms of meat and emits 17,6 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>; a Spaniard, 97 kilograms and 8,6 tonnes; a Rwandan, 6,5 kilograms and 0,08 tonnes. The global average is 40 kilograms of meat consumption and 4 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. While in order to respect the planet's limits, it is recommended that the [consumption of meat does not exceed 20 kilograms](#) on average and [emissions, 2 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>](#). Meat consumption and climate change are also an environmental and social justice issue.

### *... but absent in the Paris agreement*

Taking into account these figures, one would think that livestock farming (and fish farming) was a priority in the climate change talks in Paris. But, not at all! The [final agreement for the COP21](#), much more focused on the food production and food security concepts<sup>[1]</sup>, does not even mention the livestock farming sector, nor does it mention meat and fish consumption which are the results of this industrial and intensive production. Not visible at all at an international level, the emissions linked to this sector are only present in the national plans. And let's note that on a practical and symbolic point of view, the COP21 summit was not much veggie or, at least, animal welfare and rights friendly.

The debate on livestock farming has been left to another forum, the '[Global Agenda for Sustainable Livestock](#)' (GASL). In this forum, agrobusiness multinationals, governments and also some NGOs set out, in a completely voluntary way (as the talks are not part of the official negotiations carried out by the United Nations), a livestock system that allows "food safety, equity, growth and climate protection".

Beside the fact that animals are sadly considered as goods to serve human beings, the GASL agenda is a contradiction in itself. Trying to increase meat consumption and at the same time trying to reduce the GHG emissions and the suffering and objectification of living beings, is contradictory. Pretending to disconnect growth and CO2 emissions, as well as growth and animal abuse, [is a mirage in intensive livestock and fish farming](#). It is necessary to choose between climate and growth!

### *Real solutions and a new strategy*

Fighting climate change while strengthening animal rights follows a different path: reducing meat and fish consumption so that it fits within an admissible and ecological frame and, in those cases where meat will be consumed occasionally, supply eco-friendly meat from extensive and local livestock farming. Besides bringing this issue to climate negotiations, this means two complementary action plans:

1. At the production level, building a new model that allows transition from global and intensive livestock farming (and fish farming) to local and extensive livestock farming. Instead of pursuing the purely mercantile goal of producing the maximum amount of meat in the shortest time possible - at the expense of nature, animal welfare and human health - the goal would be to produce less quantity but better quality. This means that when meat production is reduced, impact on the climate is also reduced. The [use of animals for food is decommoficated](#), land is liberated to grow vegetal proteins and the power of small farmers and aware costumers is increased.
2. At the consumption level, eating less meat and substituting animal proteins for vegetal proteins. Besides the health benefits (as the World Health Organisation reminded us of recently when linking [red meat consumption with cancer](#)) and the consequences for global justice, [if Spain were to return to a Mediterranean diet](#), greenhouse gas emissions linked to food production would decrease more than 70%! The [CO2 emissions of vegetarians are 50% less](#) than of those consuming meat daily and the emissions of vegans are 60% less. This is normal: [producing 1 kilogram of beef](#) emits 27 kilogram of the CO2-eq and for the same quantity of lentils the emission is only 1 kilogram (all this without considering the difference in water and land consumption and the biodiversity impact).

Considering these two objectives and picking up [Jorge Riechmann's](#) proposal, we could articulate a broad political and social coalition in favour of climate, animals, healthy diet and a lively land, sea and rivers. In this transversal and plural coalition, ecologists could join animal welfare and rights activists, small

extensive farmers, landrace defenders, healthy diet activists and aware consumers. Even if we do not share exactly the same approaches and goals, this alliance of concrete objectives would allow a substantial improvement in the fight against climate change, and the defence of human health and animal rights.

[Read Spanish version here](#)

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[1] The Paris Agreement recognizes “the fundamental priority of safeguarding food security and ending hunger, and the particular vulnerabilities of food production systems to the adverse impacts of climate change” and the article 2 stands that: “Increasing the ability to adapt to the adverse impacts of climate change and foster climate resilience and low greenhouse gas emissions development, in a manner that does not threaten food production”.

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