CLIMATE SOLUTION:

Drastic reduction in meat and dairy consumption critical for land-sparing

WE BELIEVE IT IS CRUCIAL FOR GOVERNMENTS AND NON-state actors to more seriously consider the proper role of agriculture in meeting climate commitments, as well as to take concrete actions to ensure a more secure, sustainable future for food systems and natural systems around the globe.

The Paris Agreement and Conference of the Parties (COP) summits, as well as high-level climate summits, including at the UN, have largely ignored a crucial fact: what the world eats and how it produces its food are extremely important factors in addressing climate change and realizing a just transition, more than most governments and their citizens generally recognize.

Worldwide, industrial systems of animal agriculture account for approximately two-thirds of egg and poultry meat production and over half of pork production, with countries in the global South producing approximately half of the world’s industrial pork and poultry. Globally, more than 70 billion land animals are used in food production each year, and this number could reach 120 billion by 2050 if the current trajectory is unchanged. Increasingly, researchers, civil society organizations, community-based organizations, and indigenous peoples’ organizations and networks agree that such a scenario is wholly unsustainable and incompatible with global climate and biodiversity goals.

They also agree that it will be almost impossible to achieve the targets agreed in the Paris Accord without a shift to eating and producing less meat and other animal-based foods. Yet, the large-scale awareness and change—from climate negotiators, policy-makers, the private sector, institutions, international agencies, and the world’s citizens—is still only a small portion of what is required.

Climate change is already endangering animals and communities around the globe. Diseases are more frequently emerging and spreading to new areas; and rising air and sea temperatures are damaging critical habitats and threatening species who rely on these habitats for survival. Farm animals will not be spared from these impacts, and also will be affected by climate change-induced rangeland drought and other weather events, which could lead to more animal deaths. Moreover, during their often short lives, farm animals suffer myriad assaults to their physical, mental, and emotional well-being, and are typically denied the ability to engage in species-specific natural behaviors.

Brighter Green’s research and the work of a growing body of natural and social scientists concludes that the current system of food production and agricultural development also forestalls the possibility of promoting sustainable, equitable, and climate-resilient food systems. This is due to industrial animal agriculture’s enormous water, land, and chemical fertilizer requirements; the monocultures it creates, of both non-human animals and feed crops; the massive water pollution, deforestation, and biodiversity losses it requires; and, of course, the GHG emissions embedded in the production system itself.
Impacts of this action on...

**Carbon emissions (mitigation)**
In March 2016, researchers at Oxford University published an analytic report with the conclusion that reducing meat consumption and transitioning to plant-based diets would cut GHG emissions by between 29 and 70 percent by 2050.

**Climate capture (mitigation)**
Largely corporate agri-food systems that rely on deforestation for commodity crops and/or grazing livestock is an unsustainable and incredibly inefficient use of land, by any number of measurements including emissions, rights, and production of food for human consumption.

Once land is deforested or denuded of vegetation, its ability to capture and store carbon—and thereby slow global warming—is depleted or lost altogether. Simply ending the practice of deforestation would have a massive impact on global GHGs.

**Social and economic factors**
The Oxford study previously mentioned calculated that a plant-centered diet transition could save between U.S.$700 billion and one trillion annually in healthcare costs globally, as well as saving up to eight million lives each year by 2050.

Large-scale feed and livestock operations provide few jobs, in fact, it’s an industry offering one of the fewest jobs per hectare in Latin America (edged out only by monoculture tree plantations). Increasing consolidation of farms around the world robs livelihoods from farmers, especially those from marginalized communities. On the other hand, transforming agricultural lands to produce food predominantly for direct human consumption using agroecological practices creates many job opportunities.

**Food security**
The FAO defines sustainable diets as “diets with low environmental impacts which contribute to food and nutrition security and to healthy life for present and future generations. Sustainable diets are protective and respectful of biodiversity and ecosystems, culturally acceptable, accessible, economically fair and affordable; nutritionally adequate, safe and healthy; while optimizing natural and human resources.”

**Biodiversity and ecosystem resilience**
Nature-based solutions of protection and restoration of landscapes, especially forests, will also have multiple additional benefits for natural resources, public health, livelihoods, and biodiversity. Several of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) would support such efforts, especially goals 2, 3, 12, 13, and 15.
This action is transformational because...

It's high time for policymakers and governments cooperating with researchers, civil society, farmers, frontline communities and other stakeholders to map out a sustainable and just transition for our complex agri-food systems. The current model of ever-increasing consolidation and industrialization of our food systems benefit the very few at the expense of the masses, especially those who have contributed least to our changing climate.

Not only must we overhaul the way we produce and distribute energy, we absolutely must transform and, where possible, localize plant-forward food systems that create dignified livelihoods and true land stewardship, as we prepare for even more extreme weather events and trends.

This action could be scaled up through...

Governments are often the largest buyers of food products, so they can and should work with industry to agree on labels that clearly identify low-GHG, healthier, more sustainable products that don’t exploit natural resources; and encourage investment in the research and development of alternatives to animal-based protein, including plant-based proteins and cell-based meat, and develop a regulatory environment to support such innovation.

In conclusion, political openness, especially in policy-making, ought to be encouraged so that voices questioning intensive animal farming and feed production and promoting sustainability, equity and the protection and resurgence of the natural world and non-human species are heard.

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The CLARA network includes climate justice advocates, faith groups, conservation groups, land-rights campaigners, agroecologists, and representative of peoples movements around the globe. Our commitment to social justice brought us into the climate debate and informs our approaches to climate solutions. For more information about CLARA, visit climatelandambitionrightsalliance.org.

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