



**HUMANE SOCIETY
INTERNATIONAL**
EUROPE

President Juncker
European Commission
Rue de la Loi / Wetstraat 200
1049 Brussels
Belgium

**Re: Addressing unsustainable consumption of animal-based foods in the European Union:
policy recommendations**

Brussels, 14th November 2016

Dear President Jean-Claude Juncker,

Dear First Vice-President Frans Timmermans,

Dear Commissioners Karmenu Vella, Vytenis Andriukaitis, Phil Hogan, Neven Mimica and Miguel Arias Cañete,

We, the undersigned, call on the European Commission to take concrete steps towards addressing the overconsumption of animal source foods in the EU, which is having serious and negative impacts on our environment, human health, and animal welfare. The following concerns and policy recommendations were articulated during the Brainstorming Lab hosted by Humane Society International/Europe at the European Development Days 2016, entitled 'Creating the Right Climate for Reducing Meat Consumption'¹:

The science is clear that reductions in meat and dairy consumption are required to achieve meaningful reductions in GHG emissions. Animal agriculture accounts for 14.5 percent of human-induced greenhouse gas emissions globally, and even greater percentages of some of the most potent greenhouse gases such as Methane (35-40 percent) and Nitrous Oxide (65 percent). A 2014 study further predicts that reducing consumption of meat, dairy, and eggs across the EU by 50 percent would decrease the EU's GHG emissions by 19-42 percent.

A shift towards more plant based diets would significantly reduce the pressure on European river basins. The farm animal sector is also a [major consumer of scarce water resources](#). Animal products generally have larger water footprints than non-animal products. Compared to cereals or starchy roots, it takes about 20 times more water per calorie to produce beef, 6 times more to produce chicken meat, over 4 times more to produce pig meat or eggs and over 3 times more to produce milk.

¹ Led by experts and thought leaders, including Marta Zaraska, science writer and the author of "Meathooked, The History and Science of Our 2.5-Million-Years Obsession with Meat"; Laura Wellesley, research associate at Chatham House and lead author of 'Changing Climate, Changing Diets'; Hans Van Scharen, political advisor and publicist, European Parliament; Pat Thomas, Founder and Director of Beyond GM, former Director of Meat Free Mondays; and Bernard Cino, Senior Policy Maker, Directorate for Sustainability, Dutch Ministry of Infrastructure and the Environment.



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Numerous other studies and models strongly suggest additional benefits to the environment, from improved air quality to decreased stress on arable land, as a result of reducing meat, egg, and milk consumption in the EU.

Excessive consumption of animal products across the EU is contributing to serious chronic health problems. Individuals who eat a plant-based diet are likely to have a lower body weight and a decreased risk of diabetes, cardiovascular disease and some cancers, even as chronic diseases account for 80 percent of deaths in the EU. Plant foods may even have protective properties against many chronic illnesses. A [2008 study](#) published in the Bulletin of the World Health Organisation calculated that turning the tap off on EU Common Agricultural Policy subsidies for dairy and meat would avoid 12,844 deaths from stroke and heart disease, assuming saturated fat consumption dropped just 1 percent. This is a conservative estimate. If halting such subsidies affected consumption more, as was observed in Finland (5 percent) and Poland (7 percent), the life savings could be many fold higher.

More recently, a [2016 UNEP report](#) advised in its *Twelve critical shifts towards environmentally-sustainable food systems* that we need to “Reorient away from resource-intensive products such as meat, ‘empty calories’ and ultra-processed food”.

Refusal to act on meat consumption at a government level has left us in what Chatham House identified in its [2015 report](#) as the ‘Cycle of Inertia’. This self-reinforcing cycle begins with inaction by governments and other stakeholders, which leads to low levels of awareness, which in turn leads to it being a low policy priority. As Chatham House emphasises: “Breaking this cycle must be a clear policy priority”.

EU sustainable food policy recommendations

The European Commission must show global leadership and act to mitigate the negative impacts of overconsumption. With this in mind, and to address this policy gap, we recommend that the Commission:

GENERAL

- Adopt an EU target for a 30 percent reduction in consumption of animal-based foods by 2030, and implement pathways to meet this target;
- Establish a task force – involving DGs AGRI, CLIMA, ENV, SANTE, DEVCO and the JRC – to assess the economic impact of current and projected animal product consumption patterns, along with the associated rise in climate change and other environmental impacts, antibiotic resistance, and the incidence of non-communicable diseases (NCDs);

LINK FOOD POLICY TO SUSTAINABILITY GOALS

- Include a target to reduce the animal agricultural sector’s emissions in the EU’s current and future Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDCs), in line with the Paris Agreement, which includes meeting Sustainable Development Goals and including animal welfare improvements;



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- Incorporate the climate, environmental and health impacts of current, unsustainable diets within the framework of the next Common Agricultural Policy reform, and establish a cross-DG task force to consider how the CAP may be adjusted to foster lower consumption of animal products;
- Assess the steps needed to align the EU food system with the Sustainable Development Goals, and particularly SDGs 2, 3, 12, 13 and 15; and issue a plan of action for addressing production practices and consumption patterns that are contrary these goals;
- Produce sustainable and healthy dietary guidelines that address the environmental and climate burdens of current European diets, while promoting animal welfare and improved public health; and encourage adoption at Member States level;
- Encourage a discussion on the advantages and disadvantages of the introduction of a meat tax at a Member State level;
- Reconsider current structure for agricultural subsidies, and consider alternative systems that incentivise consumption of fruits and vegetables over meat;
- Consider tax incentives for healthy, unprocessed plant-based foods;
- Encourage greater transparency in food industry's lobbying of the European Parliament and Commission;

GREEN PUBLIC PROCUREMENT

- Include criteria that encourages more plant-based and less animal-based foods in the revised Green Public Procurement guidelines;
- Encourage plant-based catering at European Commission events, particularly those focused on health, climate change and the environment;
- Recommend national governments offer plant-based lunch options for children in state schools;

RESEARCH

- Undertake a consumption-based emissions inventory to assess the climate impact of current European consumption of animal products;
- Assess the opportunities for reduced consumption of animal products to contribute towards emission reduction targets as laid out in the revised Effort Sharing Decision;
- Assess nudge techniques that may be introduced across Member States to encourage behaviour change and drawing on lessons learned from the energy and transport sectors;
- Publish the long-awaited 'Communication on Building a Sustainable European Food System' to provide the EU with a long-term plan for achieving a sustainable food system;
- Fund research into the protein requirements for health at every stage of development;

EDUCATION

- Encourage Member States' national governments to implement public awareness raising campaigns on the negative impacts of overconsumption, including by issuing sample campaigns and guidelines;
- Consider an EU ban on the advertising of processed meat products, particularly in light of the World Health Organisation's recent classification of processed meat as a carcinogen and red meat as a probable carcinogen.



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According to a [2015 Eurobarometer poll](#), 95 percent of European citizens feel that protecting the environment is personally important to them; over half of Europeans think the EU is not doing enough to protect the environment; and almost one quarter are particularly concerned by our consumption habits.

This is an EU-wide problem and we need EU-wide solutions; we do not believe that subsidiarity is an adequate reason not to act. The European Commission must take concrete actions to reduce the consumption of animal-based foods. While some Member States are taking clear steps forward on their own, such as The Netherlands, the majority would benefit from increased guidance and a more comprehensive regional approach to the problem.

Lastly, we are concerned by Commissioner Hogan's recent pledge to release an additional 15 million Euros per year to promote meat consumption across the European Union. This goes against the grain of the scientific community and is at odds with meeting the EU's international climate commitments. We request that the additional funds be put to better use promoting healthy and sustainable plant-based diets.

We hope that you will take these recommendations into consideration and we look forward to hearing your response.

Yours sincerely,

Members of the European Parliament:

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