

May 19, 2023

Dr. Hoesung Lee, Chair
Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)
IPCC Secretariat
c/o World Meteorological Organization
7 bis Avenue de la Paix
C.P. 2300
CH- 1211 Geneva 2, Switzerland

Dear Chairman Lee:

In 2021, a [leaked draft](#) of the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)'s report included applaudable mention of the need for drastic reductions in meat consumption, particularly in wealthy countries, and a shift to plant based diets as a crucial climate tool. Unfortunately, this recommendation was notably excluded from this year's latest synthesis report. This is particularly concerning given that the provision was [reportedly](#) heavily contested — and actively lobbied against — by the global meat industry via Brazil and Argentina's delegations.

Our organizations, representing millions of individuals who are concerned about the future of our planet, are deeply troubled by the potential influence of the meat industry's years-long campaign of interference on any climate recommendations that include plant-based diets as a solution. We are writing to urge the IPCC to fully recognize the scientific evidence that shows the role of food and agriculture in driving the climate crisis and to ensure that future reports specifically highlight plant-based diets as a key climate strategy. Furthermore, we encourage the IPCC to maintain its credibility by taking steps to ensure that Big Agriculture and the global meat industry have no influence over future reports.

Meat and dairy industry actors have long obfuscated the negative climate impacts of their practices while putting up roadblocks against healthy and necessary regulations. In fact, the industry's tactics seem to be [modeled](#) on the fossil fuel playbook, using its tremendous lobbying power to pressure lawmakers to prevent regulations.

While the IPCC has [historically](#) managed to recommend plant-based diets, mention of plant-based diets was notably lacking from this year's report. The scientific community and the public at large deserves to have the IPCC's recommendations be unbiased, untainted, and undiluted by interference from industries that are financially incentivized to undermine science. The IPCC's recommendations would be more powerful and more effective with the assurance that there was no interference of industry lobbyists and political actors who prioritize their industry over the common good.

The Problem

The [meat and dairy](#) industry produces [16.5 percent](#) of global greenhouse gas emissions according to peer-reviewed analysis of data collected by the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization, which accounts for more than half of the environmental impact of food production as a whole.

If the global livestock industry were its own country, with [its](#) methane equivalent of [3.1 gigatons of carbon dioxide](#) in emissions, it would be the world's [third-biggest](#) greenhouse gas emitter. Beyond cattle, [pig](#) and [chicken](#) manure plays a huge role in generating the potent greenhouse gas nitrous oxide. And [we know](#) that cows, pigs, and chickens eat fertilized crops like corn and soy, which generate even more emissions.

Put a different way, the [Washington Post notes](#), "Meat production is also the most resource-intensive form of agriculture. A whopping 30 percent of Earth's ice-free land mass is used for pasture for livestock, and red meat requires more water and carbon than any other food. If Earth's biggest beef eaters [limited their intake to 1.5 hamburgers](#) a week, they could avoid about 5.5 billion tons of greenhouse gas emissions per year — twice the annual emissions of India."

Indeed, beef alone accounts for a stunning [41 percent](#) of the world's tropical deforestation, according to OurWorldInData.org. A [Stanford University publication](#) adds: "The meat and dairy industries alone use one third of the Earth's fresh water, with a single quarter-pound hamburger patty requiring 460 gallons of water — the equivalent of almost 30 showers — to produce. [...] If everyone in the U.S. ate no meat or cheese just one day a week, it would have the same environmental impact as taking 7.6 million cars off the road."

Furthermore, animal agriculture's primary greenhouse gas emission is methane. The warming effect of methane is radically larger than that of carbon dioxide. The numbers are staggering: in the long run (over 100 years), methane warms the atmosphere 28 times more than does carbon dioxide. The short run is even more catastrophic. Over a twenty year period, methane warms the atmosphere 80 times more than carbon dioxide. [37 percent](#) of methane emitted by human activities is the result of animal agriculture, [greater](#) than even that emitted by fossil fuels. The good news is that methane stays in the atmosphere for less time than carbon dioxide, so if we reduce new methane introduced to the atmosphere, we can mitigate climate change significantly more efficiently than if we focused solely on fossil fuels.

The Solution

Multiple studies have found that producing and consuming plant-based foods is more environmentally friendly than raising livestock and producing conventional meat. What follows is a summary of research in support of plant-based diets as part of the solution to the climate crisis we face:

- [Analysis from the University of Oxford](#) found that avoiding meat and dairy products was the single biggest way to reduce an individual's environmental impact on the planet.

- The [Researchers at the University of Michigan and Tulane University, supported by the Center for Biological Diversity](#) found that “cutting 90% of beef consumption and replacing 50% of other animal-based foods with plant-based foods in the United States would save more than 2 billion tons of greenhouse gas emissions from being released into our atmosphere by 2030 — the rough equivalent of taking nearly half the world’s cars off the roads for a year.”
- [Johns Hopkins University researchers found](#) that producing plant-based meats requires only fractions of the land and water necessary to produce the equivalent amounts of beef, pork, and chicken – and generates only fractions of the emissions.

As such, the planet clearly benefits from the shift to plant-based diets because of this diet’s massively reduced comparative emissions. In addition to the direct environmental benefits from plant-based foods, there are also massive additional environmental benefits from this transition from further down its supply chain. Research from the [University of Oxford](#) shows that “Food production creates ~32% of global terrestrial acidification and ~78% of eutrophication. These emissions can fundamentally alter the species composition of natural ecosystems, reducing biodiversity and ecological resilience.” Joseph Poore, who led that research, [said](#) at the time of its publication, “A vegan diet is probably the single biggest way to reduce your impact on planet Earth, not just greenhouse gases, but global acidification, eutrophication, land use and water use.”

What’s more, cropland that is no longer used for animal feed and grazing could be used to mitigate climate change through reforestation, soil conservation or renewable energy production. Surplus land could be allowed to revert to forest or other natural vegetation that store carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and contribute to biodiversity conservation.

A stronger recommendation for plant-based diets is needed by the IPCC in order to capitalize on these environmental opportunities. The faster we shift to plant-based diets, the sooner we can significantly reduce global emissions, air pollution, and global mortality rates — while also reaching IPCC stated environmental targets.

We urge you to consider that even the *appearance* of impropriety can have profoundly negative impact on the perceived legitimacy of institutions and of their outputs. Unfortunately, given the curious exclusion of animal agriculture from this year’s report coupled with the widely reported lobbying interest of the meat industry in IPCC activities in years past, we are concerned that IPCC is failing to accurately report on the science around the benefits of lower meat consumption. Moving forward, we urge you to take steps to prevent both any potential future interference by the meat and dairy industries, and the appearance of such interference, in a manner that could weaken these necessary recommendations around the urgent need to reduce meat consumption and production. The world is counting on the IPCC to communicate the most accurate science and most effective solutions for the safekeeping of our planet’s future.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,

1000 Grandmothers for Future Generations
50by40
Accelerate Neighborhood Climate Action
AFGE Local 704
Amazon Watch
Animals Are Sentient Beings, Inc
Animal Outlook
The Bloom Firm
Blue Dalian
Businesses for a Livable Climate
Call to Action Colorado
Capital V
CatholicNetwork US
The Center for Biological Diversity
CESTA Friends of the Earth El Salvador
Citizen Kind
Climate Save Argentina
CO Businesses for a Livable Climate
Color Brighton Green
Community for Sustainable Energy
Concerned Health Professionals of Pennsylvania
Creation Collaborative
Don't Waste Arizona
Earth Ethics, Inc.
The Enviro Show
Extinction Rebellion San Francisco Bay Area
Factory Farming Awareness Coalition
Farm Sanctuary
Feedback
Feedback EU
Food System Innovations
Freedom BLOC
Friends of the Earth
GBC Sustainability Team
Greater New Orleans Housing Alliance
The Green House Connection Center
Green REV Institute
I-70 Citizens Advisory Group
Indivisible Ambassadors

Kentucky Interfaith Power and Light
Larimer Alliance for Health, Safety and Environment
Littleton Business Alliance
Mayfair Park Neighborhood Association Board
Mental Health & Inclusion Ministries
The Mind's Eye
Montbello Neighborhood Improvement Association
North Range Concerned Citizens
Nowadays
Oil and Gas Action Network
Our Revolution Ocean County
PETA
Planetary Health Collective
Plant Based Treaty
Rainforest Action Network
RapidShift
RapidShift Network
Real Food Systems.org Youth Network
Resource Renewal Institute
Revolving Door Project
Rise Up WV
Pennsylvania Interfaith Power & Light
Save EPA
Sinergia Animal
Small Business Alliance
Southwest Organization for Sustainability
Social Compassion in Legislation
Spirit of the Sun, Inc.
Stray Dog Institute
Switch4Good Inc.
System Change Not Climate Change
Terra Advocati
True Animal Protein Price Coalition
Turtle Island Restoration Network
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