



TACKLING MEAT PRODUCTION AND CONSUMPTION

COMMITTEE ON CLIMATE CHANGE AND HEALTH
EUROPEAN HEALTH PARLIAMENT 2016

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EUROPEAN
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Excessive human consumption of meat, in particular red and processed meat, is associated with major environmental and health impacts. In the past decade, evidence has shown that livestock industries in Europe and around the globe produce more greenhouse gas emissions than all transport devices combined. This puts significant pressure on public health and national healthcare systems, as well as representing a growing threat to planetary health.

The Committee on Climate Change and Healthcare believes urgent action is required to counter this challenge, and has elaborated four recommendations. Central to the committee's proposal is to trigger dietary change, which means overcoming the awareness gap among the population and leading EU bodies. Other items include reviewing meat industry advertising and related legislation, and consideration of financial support for better regulation of the meat industry. This paper will elaborate on tackling meat production and consumption by providing evidence-based recommendations aimed to attain innovative change in healthcare by 2030 in the European Union.



INTRODUCTION

Human consumption of meat and dairy products is a major driver of climate change. The livestock sector alone is responsible for 18% of the planet's emissions, producing more pollution than all forms of transportation globally. Global meat production and consumption is not projected to decline. On the contrary, the increase in the world's population and the growing purchasing power of developing countries support predictions that the global demand for livestock will double by 2050¹²³.

Dietary change is essential to contain this trend.

Even with ambitious supply-side mitigation policies in the agriculture sector, and without drastic shifts in consumption of meat and dairy products, growth in agricultural emissions will leave insufficient space for other sectors within a 2°C carbon budget⁴.

In addition, meat consumption has been shown to be associated with a significant disease burden: the World Health Organization (WHO) states that over 80.000 cancer deaths per year worldwide are attributable to diets high in red and processed meat⁵. As recently as October 2015, processed meat was classified as carcinogenic to humans as asbestos and tobacco, whilst red meat was classified as probably carcinogenic to humans. It was further estimated that annual EU healthcare spending related to colorectal cancer amounts to €13.1 billion, and to €196 billion for cardiovascular diseases.

A study from the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) concludes that *each 50-gram portion of processed meat eaten daily increases the risk of colorectal cancer by about 18%*⁶. The current meat production and consumption patterns impose a heavy burden on both human and planetary health,

and consequently on national healthcare systems in Europe and elsewhere.

Despite the evidence, a major awareness gap exists among leading European authorities and civil society about the connection between the meat industry and health. Additionally, there is a lack of consistency in European policies, as subsidies are granted to support unsustainable agricultural and husbandry businesses, whilst climate change technical mitigation strategies are adopted.

The Committee on Climate Change and Healthcare calls for new policies on livestock management, and highlights the need for an urgent reduction in meat eating in the European Union.

Awareness-raising strategies are one of four key recommendations, alongside a review of legislation on labelling and advertising of meat products. In addition, financial support should be given to tightening regulation of the meat sector, and incentives should be created to promote wide change involving civil society, industry and policy makers.

1 Garnett T., "Livestock-Related Greenhouse Gas Emissions." *Environmental Science & Policy*, Volume 12, Issue 4, June 2009.

2 Rowlinson P., M. Steele and A. Nefzaoui, *Livestock and Global Climate Change*, British Society of Animal Science, May 2008.

3 Food and Agricultural Organisation, "Tackling Climate Change through Livestock: A global assessment of Emissions and Mitigations Opportunities, Rome, 2013, p.1-115.

4 McMichael et al., "Food, Livestock Production, Energy, Climate Change, and Health."

5 World Health Organization, "Q&A on the carcinogenicity of the consumption of red meat and processed meat", 2015, <http://www.who.int/features/qa/cancer-red-meat/en>.

6 IARC, "IARC Monographs Evaluate Consumption of Red Meat and Processed Meat.", Press Release n° 240, October 2015, https://www.iarc.fr/en/media-centre/pr/2015/pdfs/pr240_E.pdf.



DEVELOPING AWARENESS CAMPAIGNS ACROSS EUROPE

STATE OF PLAY

Achieving dietary change at the European level to reduce meat consumption offers a rapid and effective way to contribute to meeting global climate objectives spelled out at the 2015 climate change conference in Paris, with its goal of limiting global warming to less than 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels. But the current access to information in the EU does not allow consumers to be aware of the health related-risks of their consumption habits. Countering this trend is of utmost importance as food safety issues – allergens causing adverse reactions for instance – arise when consumers lack knowledge about nutrition, food handling and preparation (FAO, 2011).

At the European level, the impact of meat consumption on climate change and healthcare attracts too little policy attention, and strategies to curb livestock emissions at the level of Member States are usually less visible than those for other sectors. These strategies face further challenges in terms of implementation, and cannot, on their own, reach emissions targets.

PROPOSAL

Public authorities should actively advertise the impact on public health and the environment of certain patterns of meat consumption. Awareness-raising campaigns at national level should link environmental goals with policy objectives such as reduction of healthcare expenditure. Messages should focus on the co-benefits of reduced consumption of meat, since highlighting the public and individual health benefits will have a stronger impact than a focus on environmental benefit alone. Engaging with mainstream media and non-partisan experts such as scientists would be a positive step towards this objective.

At the policy level, initiatives to adjust meat price should be developed. Direct or indirect subsidies to the livestock sector should be removed, and subsidies given instead to plant-based alternatives. The price of meat could be usefully increased by measures such as a carbon tax.

National authorities responsible for public healthcare and environmental security should make use of scientific resources to raise public awareness and to promote healthy behaviour. All data related to the health and environmental impacts of meat consumption should be centralised in national databases easily accessible by the public. Additionally, a European web-based portal should be developed as a hub for information exchange between national authorities and the Commission.

Public authorities should promote cooperation among health professionals, educators and independent communicators to formulate guidance for public food programs (in schools, administration, and governmental agencies) to ensure compliance with dietary science, reflecting the most advanced knowledge on nutrition and environmental impact. In parallel, courses and training in schools should provide education about the nutritional value of common foods and products, to raise awareness about the health and environmental risks of excessive meat consumption.



RETHINKING NATIONAL LEGISLATION ON FOOD ADVERTISING

STATE OF PLAY

At the present time, there are wide differences across the Member States in controls on food advertising and in the use of self- and co-regulation and statutory legislation. Social responsibility in advertising and marketing is encouraged through, for instance, the 2004 Framework for Responsible Food and Beverage Marketing Communication of the International Chamber of Commerce.

EU advertising regulations tackle several health-related issues: obesity, alcohol consumption, intake of fruit and vegetables, and food-related diseases in the European population. Freedom of manoeuvre in the marketing of legal products impedes adequate regulation of advertising and marketing of food and beverages and prevents sufficient restriction of the promotion of unhealthy products⁷. According to the WHO, advertisements for unhealthy foods predominate in all EU Member States over advertisements for healthy items⁸.

ISSUE

The Committee welcomes the health experts' call for a comprehensive advertising ban on products considered unhealthy under the WHO nutritional criteria; targeted items include candy and energy drinks, but most importantly red and processed meat. Furthermore, it supports initiatives such as the EU pledge, a voluntary initiative by food and beverage companies to alter their advertisement strategies towards children so that commercial communication is shaped to support parents in making healthy dietary and lifestyle choices for their children.

Simultaneously, the Committee considers there is a lack of consistent EU-wide regulation of food advertising that would highlight the negative environmental

and health impacts of the meat sector. EU legislation is not strong enough, and EU sanctions against food companies are too often not applied when advertising commitments are not respected. Consequently, citizens pursue their food choices unaware of their climate footprint and the impact on their health.

PROPOSAL

The Committee encourages the design of a consumption environment stimulating the choice for a healthy and climate-friendly diet. To achieve this, it proposes the creation of an initiative to assess meat advertising in Europe and its impact on climate and health, and the establishment of a monitoring system of the marketing of red meat and processed meat. Analysis should be conducted of good practices in the countries where mandatory regulation has imposed successful controls. Local and national commitments should be reviewed with a focus on children and adolescents, because it is easier to influence their health behaviour and climate footprint, with a beneficial impact on their individual and environmental health in adulthood.

Longer term, the Committee urges harmonized European rules on meat advertising and new European programs on sustainability and health and environmental preservation that take account of all stakeholders and the diversity in European regulation, and pay special attention to children's health.

⁷ Euractiv, *European children exposed to less food advertising on TV*, published 18 March 2014, accessed 15 February 2016.

⁸ World Health Organization, *Regional Office for Europe, Marketing of foods high in fat, salt and sugar to children: update 2012–2013*, Denmark, 2013.



IMPROVING THE EXISTING LABELLING SCHEME FOR MEAT PRODUCTS

STATE OF PLAY

Food packages are important promotional vehicles for companies' products and brands. Appealing images, catchy phrases and buzzwords alongside health claims are designed to induce consumers to purchase.

To assist consumers in their food choices, a new EU law on food information⁹ to consumers came into force in December 2014. Regulation No 1169/2011 will apply from December 2016, introducing new requirements on nutrition information, aiming for improved legibility and comprehensiveness. Amongst the changes, the law makes it mandatory for nutritional information to appear on most prepacked processed foods so that it is clear when food is defrosted, if the food contains meat or fish, and the origin of fresh meat from certain animals.

ISSUE

The Committee on Climate Change and Healthcare welcomes the new legislation on food information, as it will enhance consumer awareness. In particular, the provision on processed foods will allow for considered choices for healthy foods and the country-of-origin rule for meat encourages environment-friendly purchasing.

Meat labels do not however provide sufficient information. In particular, consumers remain unaware of or misinformed about the climate footprint of the meat they purchase and eat. No EU labelling scheme provides information about the climate footprint of products and their health impacts.

The Committee is convinced that additional labelling requirements for meat products will help to communicate to consumers more important information, in particular for consumers buying at the end of a long food supply chain.

Additional requirements could also help to protect meat producers from cheap imitations. As the JRC report on "Short Food Supply Chain and Local Food Systems in the EU" reveals¹⁰, labelling can, if well implemented, achieve high recognition and promote high quality, traceable, authentic food.

To address this gap, the Committee encourages European policymakers to work towards increasing consumer awareness over environmental impacts and health benefits of meat products.

⁹ European Commission, "Food information to consumers – legislation", accessed 24 March 2016, http://ec.europa.eu/food/safety/labelling_nutrition/labelling_legislation/index_en.htm.

¹⁰ Kneafsey M., Venn L., Schmutz U., Balázs B., Trenchard L., Eyden-Wood T., Bos E., Sutton G., Blackett M., *Short Food Supply Chains and Local Food Systems in the EU. A State of Play of their Socio-Economic Characteristics*, Joint Research Center, 2013, last accessed 17 May 2016.

PROPOSAL

The Committee on Climate Change recommends the following set of provisions, to be applicable consistently across the European Union.

Meat labels should provide for clear and readable information on climate footprint and health, such as:

- Water footprint,
- Carbon footprint,
- Use of antibiotics and hormones in the animal,

To achieve the necessary harmonisation across Europe, the Committee suggests amending the existing legislation No 1169/2011, via delegated acts, and developing related international standards by collaborating with the International Standards Organisation (ISO).

An expert panel should define the criteria for information labelling on climate footprint and health. Its role and responsibilities would be set out in an Annex.

The Committee also advocates requiring information about sustainability and health on meat products, similar to the regulation of alcohol or tobacco products. This would be developed in conjunction with the advertising recommendations the Committee has put forward later in this paper.

Producers should be allowed transition periods for implementing these provisions, and granted subsidies and/or tax incentives.

National and regional funds could also support an education-related labelling scheme to reward or subsidise primary schools that offer labelled meat in their menus.





SETTING UP FINANCIAL SUPPORT TOWARDS BETTER LEGISLATION ON MEAT PRODUCTION & CONSUMPTION

Two financial schemes could be leveraged to encourage sustainable and healthy practices in meat production and consumption across Europe:

A. the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)

B. the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD)

A. THE COMMON AGRICULTURAL POLICY

STATE OF PLAY

The Common Agricultural Policy governs the allocation of subsidies in the agricultural sector. Accounting for 37.8% of the EU multi-annual financial framework for the period 2014-2020, with an overall budget of €364 billion, the reformed 2014-2020 CAP aims at food supply stability while reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and environmental impacts of agriculture.

Two pillars of this legislative framework are deemed of particular relevance to tackling meat production and consumption across the EU:

1. Greening and Cross-Compliance,
2. Rural Development.

Within the first pillar, Green Direct Payments account for up to 30% of the national envelope and reward farmers for maintaining permanent grassland and ecological focus areas and for diversifying crops. The second pillar focuses on sustainability through reserving at least 30% of the budget of each Rural Development program for voluntary measures benefiting the environment and climate. These include agri-environmental-climate measures, organic farming, Areas of

Natural Constraints (ANC), Natura 2000 areas, forestry measures and other kinds of investments.

ISSUE

Though the 2014-2020 CAP reform represents a step forward, it does not fully respond to the environmental and health hazard posed by current farming methods and in particular livestock¹¹ common anthropogenic GHG emission, which is more than the entire transport sector¹². Greater efficiency in current production practices will not, therefore, help to win this challenge¹³, in a world where meat demand is predicted to increase from 229 million tonnes in 1999-2001 to 465 million tonnes by 2050¹⁴.

PROPOSAL

The Committee recommends that environmental sustainability becomes the leading principle of the CAP

¹¹ Brent Kim, Juliana Vigorito, "The Importance of Reducing Animal Product Consumption and Wasted Food in Mitigating Catastrophic Climate Change," the John Hopkins Center for a Livable Future, December 2015.

¹² Food and Agricultural Organization, "Tackling Climate Change through Livestock: A global assessment of Emissions and Mitigations Opportunities, Rome, 2013, p.1-115. Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, Tackling Climate Change through Livestock.

¹³ McMichael et al., "Food, Livestock Production, Energy, Climate Change, and Health," The Lancet, published 13 September 2007, accessed 23 January 2016.

¹⁴ Steinfeld, H., "Livestock Long Shadow," Environmental Issues and Options, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, November 2006.

framework, and is applied urgently to the most polluting farming activity: the livestock sector.

Moreover, the Committee would recommend that health be given greater priority in the CAP framework, with incentives for farms that take into account both health and environmental benefits when producing meat.

It is the Committee's belief that this recommendation is in line with the current CAP intentions to reward farmers for a wider set of services that do not have market value, such as landscape preservation, farmland biodiversity, climate stability and population health.

B. THE FUND FOR EUROPEAN AID TO THE MOST DEPRIVED (FEAD)

STATE OF PLAY

Almost one third of the EU's annual humanitarian aid budget is used to provide emergency food assistance¹⁵, making the EU one of the world's major donors of humanitarian food assistance. This is a big opportunity for the EU to intervene in the market, influencing demand for food, favouring healthier diets and boosting awareness among the populations which are traditionally the most difficult to reach.

With €3.8 billion earmarked for the 2014-2020 period, the FEAD's aim is to help alleviate the worst forms of poverty. Its tasks include supporting the collection and distribution of food donations that reduce food waste, and providing direct material assistance like food packages or meals.

The European institutions, through programs such as the FEAD, are providing money to EU Member States to aid them in assisting the most deprived.

When the Commission presents its scheduled mid-term evaluation of FEAD to the Parliament and Council in 2018, it should recommend additional conditions be added for a country to qualify for support through this program.

PROPOSAL

In return for EU-subsidized food support projects, Member States should meet a quality and quantity standard for the meat produced and distributed under FEAD. Meat procurement prices should reflect the costs of environmental damage, and meat provision should be in quantities in line with nutritional guidelines.

The rationale needs to be explained to the beneficiaries to educate them about the health risks of over-consumption of meat and about the environmental impact of meat production. Thus the EU and the Member States will further support environmental sustainable production of meat, and meat provision will match more closely the needs of a balanced diet.

¹⁵ European Commission (DG ECHO), "Humanitarian Food Assistance: From Food Aid to Food Assistance", November 2013, accessed 16 April 2016, http://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/policies/food_assistance/them_policy_doc_foodassistance_en.pdf.



CONCLUSION

Increasing populations and economic growth have made climate change one of the main threats to international stability and peace. To avert catastrophic environmental consequences and maintain global warming levels below 2°C, every need has to be pondered against the costs of meeting it.

The interconnections between climate change, food and health have become more familiar at scientific level in recent years, but remain unaddressed at a policy level. In response, we suggest systemic action to control the supply of and demand for environmental-unfriendly meat.

The Climate Change and Healthcare Committee encourages European and national policymakers to implement this proposal to reduce excessive meat consumption and to promote alternative food styles, with the aims of improving health and reducing the human burden on the environment.



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