



19 November 2020

António Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations  
 Patricia Espinosa, Executive Secretary, UNFCCC  
 Boris Johnson, Prime Minister of the UK  
 Giuseppe Conte, Prime Minister of Italy  
 Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission

Please reply to:

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Dear UN Secretary General, UNFCCC Executive Secretary, Prime Ministers of the UK and Italy, and President of the European Commission

**December 2020 Climate Summit and COP 26 in November 2021 in Glasgow**

**Food and farming must play their part in meeting the Paris Climate targets**

Energy, fossil fuels, transport and industry tend to dominate climate discussions and actions. However, the food system generates around 26% of global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. Around 75% of agriculture's emissions are produced by livestock, including the production of feed

for livestock and the associated land use changes.<sup>1 2</sup> In contrast to this, global meat and dairy production provides only 37% of our protein and 18% of our calories.<sup>3</sup>

We urge you to ensure that food and farming are included among the priority areas in the discussions at the December 2020 Climate Summit and COP 26 in November 2021, in view of the direct contribution of livestock production to GHG emissions, and its indirect impacts through the exacerbation of the biodiversity crisis.

### **Food and agriculture's emissions are travelling in the wrong direction**

To meet the Paris targets, all sectors need to **reduce** their emissions. Research shows that on a business-as-usual (BAU) basis, emissions from food and agriculture will **increase substantially** and could make it very difficult to reach the Paris targets.<sup>4 5 6</sup>

### **Supply side measures will not on their own be sufficient to meet Paris targets**

Mitigation techniques (such as improved manure management) and productivity improvements can reduce emissions. However, supply side measures will be insufficient on their own to achieve a sufficient reduction in farming's emissions.<sup>7 8 9 10 11</sup>

### **Food consumption patterns will have to change if we are to meet climate targets**

Many studies show that it will be very difficult to meet the Paris targets without reducing consumption of meat and dairy in the developed world and emerging economies.<sup>12 13</sup> Decreasing meat and dairy consumption leads to substantial reductions in GHG emissions<sup>14 15</sup> This is because animal products generally generate substantially higher emissions per unit of nutrition produced than plant-based foods.<sup>16</sup>

A study published in the journal *Science* in November 2020 concludes that even if fossil fuel emissions were immediately halted, current trends in global food systems would make it impossible to meet the 1.5°C target and difficult even to realise the 2°C target.<sup>17</sup> It shows that moving to plant-rich diets containing only moderate amounts of meat could reduce emissions from food systems by 47% compared with BAU.

A study published in *Nature* shows that globally, BAU in food production and consumption will lead to an 87% increase in GHG emissions by 2050 (compared with 2010).<sup>18</sup> The study reports that only dietary changes towards more plant-based (flexitarian) diets could reduce food-related emissions in 2050 to below their current level. A new IMF working paper emphasises that reduced consumption of livestock products is needed if we are to meet our climate goals.<sup>19</sup>

Harwatt *et al* (2019) report that without action, the livestock sector could by 2030 take between 37% and 49% of the GHG emissions budget allowable under the 2°C and 1.5°C targets, respectively.<sup>20 21</sup>

A 2020 FAO report compares current dietary patterns with four healthy alternatives each including less meat and dairy than current diets.<sup>22</sup> It states that in 2030 "any of the four alternative healthy diet patterns worldwide would reduce projected diet-related GHG emission by 41–74%". Reducing consumption of animal products would release some grazing land to support natural climate solutions such as restoration of forests, peatland and semi natural permanent grasslands.<sup>23</sup>

Dietary shifts could contribute up to a fifth of the mitigation needed to meet the Paris below 2°C target.<sup>24</sup> Failure by the livestock sector to reduce its emissions will put pressure on other sectors to shoulder more than their share of emission reductions and will reduce the feasibility of meeting the Paris targets.

Shifts towards plant-based diets would also produce substantial health benefits. The World Economic Forum states: "Reducing meat consumption would be good for nature and the climate. In a growing number of countries it would be good for people as well, as overconsumption of meat could be leading to worse health outcomes".<sup>25</sup> The FAO report referred to above states that changing from current diets to any of the four alternative healthy diets with less meat and dairy, would reduce global diet-related health costs by 2030 by up to a staggering 95%.

## Regenerative agriculture can store carbon

Regenerative agriculture such as agroecology, agroforestry and organic farming can sequester carbon in soils and trees. Independent audits of farms in the US and South Africa show that well managed grazing of cattle on pasture can sequester substantial amounts of carbon.<sup>26 27</sup>

To conclude, we urge you to ensure that food and farming receive a high level of attention at the December 2020 Climate Summit and COP 26. We urge world leaders to recognise the need to:

- Include a dedicated session that focuses on food systems at COP 26
- Transition to regenerative agriculture which can store carbon in soils and trees
- Reduce global meat, fish and dairy consumption as plant-based diets produce substantially lower GHG emissions.

Yours sincerely

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ARCA Brasil, Marco Ciampi, Presidente  
BirdLife International Europe and Central Asia, Ariel Brunner, Senior Head of Policy  
Born Free, Dr Mark Jones, Head of Policy  
Brighter Green, Mia MacDonald, Executive Director  
Climate Action Network, Europe, Wendel Trio, Director  
Coalition of African Animal Welfare Organisations, Tozie Zokufa, Director - Regional Coordination  
Compassion in World Farming, Peter Stevenson OBE, Chief Policy Advisor  
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Eurogroup for Animals, Reineke Hameleers, Director  
European Environmental Bureau, Jeremy Wates, Secretary General  
Feedback, Carina Millstone, Executive Director  
Food at COP, Silke Bölts, Co-founder  
FOUR PAWS International, Dr. Martina Stephany Director of Farm Animals and Nutrition  
GAIA, Ann De Greef, Director  
Health Care Without Harm Europe, Paola Hernández Olivan, Food Project and Policy Officer  
Humane Society International, Julie Janovsky, Vice President, Farm Animal Welfare  
IFOAM Organics Europe, Eric Gall, Deputy Director  
Nourish Scotland, Pete Ritchie, Executive Director  
OneKind, Kirsty Jenkins, Policy Officer  
ProVeg International, Raphael Podselver, Political Outreach  
Sinergia Animal, Carolina Galvani, CEO  
Slow Food International, Paolo di Croce, Secretary General  
World Animal Net, Jessica Bridgers, Executive Director  
World Animal Protection, Mark Dia, Programme Director, Animals in Farming

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<sup>1</sup> Springmann *et al*, 2018. Options for keeping the food system within environmental limits. *Nature*  
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<sup>2</sup> FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO. 2020. *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2020. Transforming food systems for affordable healthy diets*. Rome, FAO.

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<sup>4</sup> Bajželj B., Richards K.S., Allwood J.M., Smith P., Dennis J.S., Curmi E. & Gilligan C.A. (2014), *Importance of food-demand management for climate mitigation*. *Nature Climate Change*, Vol 4, October 2014.  
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