Philanthropy Briefs

AGRICULTURE

Livestock

a series by Active Philanthropy

WHAT IS IT ABOUT?

Livestock refers to land-based animals that are domesticated to provide labour and to produce commodities like meat, milk, eggs, and hides.[1] Livestock makes up 40 % of global agriculture value and sustains the livelihoods of 1.3 billion people.[2] Over the past 50 years, global demand for livestock products has surged, underscored by a threefold rise in meat production.[3] Root causes are global trends in population growth, urbanisation, and rising per capita income.[4]

3 FAST FACTS

1.8x

The total biomass of global livestock is nearly double the biomass of humans.[5]

4 billion

more people could be fed if crop production used for animal-feed (and other non-food purposes) were reallocated to human consumption.[6]

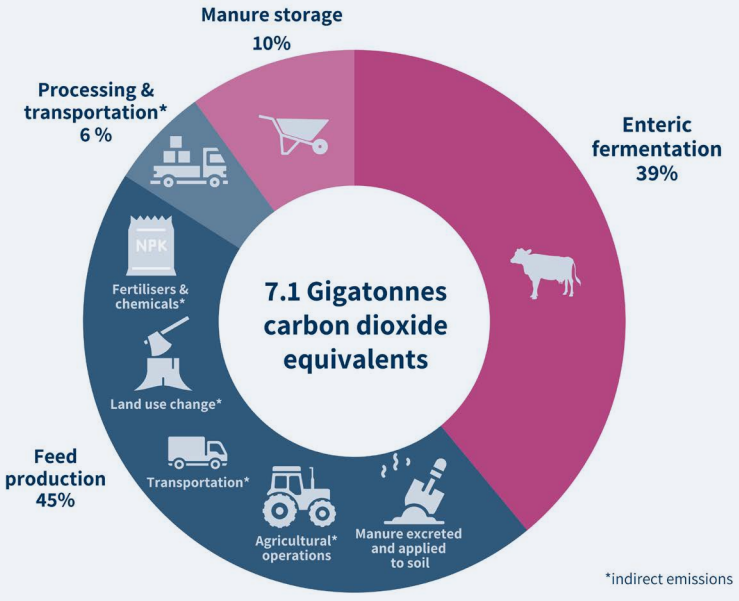
5

of the largest meat and dairy companies together emit more emissions than France.[7]

WHY IS LIVESTOCK IMPORTANT FOR OUR CLIMATE?

Emissions from livestock account for over 15 % of global GHG emissions,[8] which is comparable to all emissions from global transport.[9] Without action, the sector will account for half of the carbon budget left to limit temperature rise to 1.5 °C.[10]

Although livestock producers have reduced the emission intensity (i.e. emissions emitted per kilogram of protein), total emissions from livestock are expected to increase due to rising global demand, outpacing the positive effects of increased efficiency in production.



Breaking down emissions from livestock
adapted from Grossi et al. 2019, based on Gerber et al. 2013

Although improvements in renewable energy have reduced emissions from agriculture more broadly, specific interventions in the livestock sector – addressing issues such as enteric fermentation (methane production during digestion) and manure storage – are crucial to decarbonising the livestock sector.[11] Addressing livestock production also has important co-benefits, like freeing land for additional plant-based food production and storing more carbon in soil.

[1] FAO 2018, [2] Gerber et al. 2013, [3] Ritchie et al. 2017, [4] OECD 2019, [5] Ritchie 2022, [6] West et al. 2014, [7] GRAIN and IATP 2018, [8] Twine 2021, [9] IEA 2023, [10] Harwatt et al. 2022, [11] Giving Green 2022

WHAT FUNDERS CAN DO

Efforts on the demand side

Shifting dietary behaviour: Consuming fewer animal products (especially from ruminants such as cattle and sheep) is essential to addressing global warming.[12] But governments have been slow to address this issue, despite public expectations.[13, 14]

Funders can help bridge this gap by advocating for lower taxes on plant-based products, or by working with governments on educational initiatives to inform the public about the benefits of a plant-rich diet. Funders can also support research and development of alternative proteins that make these options more appealing and affordable.[15] Supporting a growth in the market for alternative proteins is particularly promising because it does not directly interfere with consumer autonomy.[16]

Efforts on the supply side

Developing feed additives: Feed additives that inhibit methane production in ruminants can reduce emissions from enteric fermentation.[17] As most of these additives are not yet commercially available and universally applicable, funders can support further research and scaling up proven products as well as advocating for regulations that incentivise early adopters. Moreover, funders can foster collaboration between food processors, retailers, and consumer groups to stimulate market demand.

However important, the potential of feed additives should not overshadow the broader imperative to reduce the global consumption of animal products.

There are many different strategies to engage in climate philanthropy. See our Spotlight on Climate Funding Strategies to learn more.

THINGS TO CONSIDER WHEN FOCUSING ON LIVESTOCK

- **Cultural sensitivity**
  Cultural preferences play a key role in shaping both dietary choices and farming practices. Producers often adhere to long-standing traditions, while consumers practice certain dietary habits. Engaging local farming communities and integrating their traditional knowledge into sustainable practices is therefore essential. Similarly, shifting consumer behaviour requires strategies that transcend patronising narratives about irrational meat eaters. Collaboration and awareness-building are key to promoting sustainable and healthy dietary choices.

- **Emphasis on co-benefits**
  Factors like food safety or costs strongly influence food choices – often more so than climate change considerations.[18] Funders who prioritise co-benefits, such as health benefits, animal welfare, and cost savings, have the best chances to garner public support for plant-based diets. For example, revealing the 'True Cost of Food' for animal products (as the Rockefeller Foundation has done) can increase public awareness and put pressure on businesses to adopt more sustainable practices.

- **Tailoring solutions to the context**
  Addressing the climate impact of livestock requires recognising different regional contexts. In countries characterised by intensive and industrialised livestock systems with meat consumption beyond dietary requirements, shifting diets and scaling feed additives are promising approaches. Meanwhile, in regions with extensive pasture-based systems, the emphasis should be on supporting farmers to sustainably boost productivity. However, caution is essential to prevent a surge in animal numbers, which could counteract emission reduction efforts.[19]

Looking for funding opportunities?
Explore Active Philanthropy's Climate Solutions Hub!

Link to bibliography

[12] Clark et al. 2020, [13] Heinrich Böll Foundation et al. 2021, [14] Changing Markets Foundation 2018, [15] Giving Green 2022, [16] Rust et al. 2020, [17] Honan et al. 2022, [18] Bailey et al. 2014, [19] Siemons et al. 2023