

## 'Who We Eat' and at what cost?

Close to 9 billion land animals and about a billion farmed fish are slaughtered in the EU each year, with further millions of animals killed to prevent the spread of diseases and for private consumption. Most of these animals are kept in intensive farming systems, so-called factory farms, which involves great suffering.

This systematic disregard for animal welfare does not only have severe ethical implications but is also linked to wide-scale environmental destruction and poses a threat to public health. Even though diets rich in fresh vegetables, fruits and legumes are the most beneficial for human health and the environment, the EU's skewed subsidies' system often makes the unhealthy and unsustainable foods most affordable and readily available; it even promotes the consumption of such products.

### What is the hidden cost?



**Animal suffering:** Hundreds of millions of farmed animals across the EU, including egg-laying hens, rabbits and mother pigs, are restricted in cages, where they cannot express even the most basic behaviours like turning around or stretching their limbs. Horrendous practices such as painful mutilations without any medication, long and hellish journeys to the slaughterhouse or unsuitable stunning practices before animals are killed are the standard in farming. Billions of animals across the EU such as meat chickens and turkeys are cramped in barns without access to outside areas. The irresponsible breeding methods have turned their bodies into machines that grow and produce way beyond any healthy limit, with lameness and heart disease rampant among very young animals before they are sent to slaughter. Their needs to explore, forage, groom or socialise in suitable settings are suppressed.

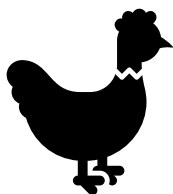


**The climate crisis and food security:** The animal farming sector produces more greenhouse gases than the direct emissions of all the world's planes, trains and cars combined. In the current climate crisis, there simply cannot be any effective climate action without reducing our consumption of animal products. Apart from its climate externalities, factory farming is linked to the on-going collapse of ecosystems, thus further posing a threat to our food security. When animals are confined in cages or in barns, they are unable to graze, and this requires a significant supply of feed. In the EU, 60% of crops are fed to animals, with the crops being treated with pesticides that further endanger the fragile stability of our ecosystems by annihilating pollinators and other insects. Even soy grown on deforested areas from the precious Amazon rainforest end up in EU farms to feed factory farmed animals. Pollution with toxic waste running from animal farms are yet another threat to our ecosystems.



**Public health:** In addition to these environmental costs, our overproduction and overconsumption of animal products add a myriad of public health costs to our budgets, which are already strained. For example, diets rich in animal products are linked to a higher risk of heart disease, while red and processed meat is classified as probably carcinogenic and carcinogenic respectively by the World Health Organisation. In addition, factory farming exacerbates the global health threat of superbugs and is a breeding ground of pandemics. Despite a recent EU law aiming to prevent farms from abusing antibiotics, the only real solution to this is to tackle the problem at its roots – end factory farming and promote healthier, plant-rich diets.

## What EU policymakers can do



**Revision of the EU animal welfare legislation:** The current state of EU farm animal laws fails to keep up with science and provide animals with good welfare. In its on-going revision of animal welfare legislation, the EU should:

- phase out the use of cages in all animal farming across the EU;
- adopt species-specific standards for all species farmed on land, as a lack thereof and a vagueness of general rules lead to animals being reared in unsuitable environments;
- adopt legislation on the keeping, transport and slaughter of the most commonly farmed species of fish, including salmon, trout, sea bass, sea bream, European eel and common carp;
- ban painful mutilations of animals, like cutting off tails, horns and beaks, which are performed routinely and without any medication to numb the pain;
- reduce the high densities allowed on farms and provide outdoor access;
- provide animals with sufficient space and environmental enrichment to allow them to engage in behaviours natural to them;
- ban force feeding of animals;
- ban octopus farming;
- introduce strict limits to the transport of live animals, ban transport of vulnerable groups of animals such as unweaned calves and pregnant animals and ban live animal exports;
- phase out the painful killing of pigs with highly concentrated CO<sub>2</sub>, the immersion of chickens into electrical waterbaths as an ineffective and painful stunning method, the mass shredding or gassing of day-old male baby chicks, and the brutal use of electric prods; and
- introduce an EU-wide mandatory animal welfare label covering the whole cycle of an animal's life, conveying information about the type of farming systems where animals are kept in.



**Implementing the Farm to Fork Strategy:** Good welfare can hardly be achieved in intensive farming systems as the concentration of large numbers of animals hampers the fulfilment of most of their basic needs. The current political ambition in the EU to move to more plant-rich diets, as outlined in the EU's Farm to Fork Strategy and Europe's Beating Cancer Plan, is a good opportunity to finally put an end to factory farming.

In the short term, the EU must revise its public procurement policy to promote plant-rich diets and provide funding for plant-based milks, pulses, nuts and seeds in EU school canteens. We must reallocate advertising funds to promote plant-based foods instead of animal products. We must finally make factory farms responsible for the environmental damage they cause through stricter pollution rules. We must reduce pesticide use (including for feed for farmed animals), ban animal feed that bulldozes precious forests worldwide and provide a legal basis to protect our soils. EU policymakers can achieve these through their on-going work on Sustainable Food Systems, the EU School Scheme, the Food Promotion Policy, the Industrial Emissions Directive, the Sustainable Use of Pesticides Regulation, the Regulation on Products Associated with Deforestation and Forest Degradation and the Soil Health Law.

In the long term, the EU must overhaul its harmful system of farm subsidies and move away from its excessive support for animal-based protein that has so far fuelled the expansion of factory farming, regardless of the environmental, social and ethical consequences.