

The Rt Hon Boris Johnson MP
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The Rt Hon Rishi Sunak MP
Chancellor of the Exchequer
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Dear Prime Minister and Chancellor

Possible carbon tax on meat and dairy

The Times reports that the Government is considering placing a carbon tax on meat and dairy. Compassion in World Farming welcomes this as economists have argued for many years that the 'negative externalities' generated by meat and dairy production should be incorporated into the price of animal products in order to avoid further detrimental impacts on the environment.

In 2011 the Government's *Foresight report on the future of food and farming* said: "There needs to be much greater realisation that market failures exist in the food system that, if not corrected, will lead to irreversible environmental damage and long term threats to the viability of the food system. Moves to internalise the costs of these negative environmental externalities are critical to provide incentives for their reduction."¹

Similarly, the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) has said: "In many countries there is a worrying disconnect between the retail price of food and the true cost of its production. As a consequence, food produced at great environmental cost in the form of greenhouse gas emissions, water pollution, air pollution, and habitat destruction, can appear to be cheaper than more sustainably produced alternatives".²

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.^{3 4} Decreasing meat and dairy consumption leads to substantial reductions in GHG emissions.^{5 6 7}

A study published in the journal *Science* in 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.⁸ It highlights the need to move to plant-rich diets containing only moderate amounts of meat. A recent IMF working paper emphasises that reduced consumption of livestock products is needed if we are to meet our climate goals.⁹

A 2020 FAO report compares current dietary patterns with four healthy alternatives each including less meat and dairy.¹⁰ It states that in 2030 "any of the four alternative healthy diet patterns worldwide would reduce projected diet-related GHG emission by 41–74%".

The December 2020 report by the UK Committee on Climate Change states policies are needed to "encourage a reduction in consumption of meat and dairy". Their summary states that medium level targets are a "20% cut in meat and dairy by 2030, rising to 35% by 2050 for meat only" while a high level target is "50% less meat and dairy by 2050".

Reduced meat consumption would also produce health benefits. The UK Health Alliance on Climate Change includes ten Royal Colleges of medicine and nursing, the BMA and the Lancet. It has stressed the need to reduce meat consumption in order to tackle climate change and diet-related health problems.¹¹

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”.¹²

It is essential that all the revenue raised by the tax on meat is used to lower the cost of healthy food with low GHG emissions. There must be no overall increase in the price of food, simply a rebalancing to lower the price of healthy food with low GHG emissions, while increasing the price of unhealthy food with high emissions.

We have one caveat: the tax should not have the effect of encouraging consumers to substitute chicken and pork for beef and lamb. Although pigs and poultry generate lower GHG emissions than ruminants, intensive pig and poultry production causes many other problems both in the UK and globally.

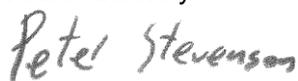
Intensive pig and poultry production uses high levels of soy as feed thus contributing to deforestation. It also uses large quantities of human-edible cereals as feed. Intensive livestock’s huge demand for cereals has fuelled the intensification of crop production. This, with its monocultures and agro-chemicals, has led (both in the UK and globally) to biodiversity loss,^{13 14} soil degradation,^{15 16} and overuse and pollution of water.¹⁷

Pigs and poultry convert soy and cereals very inefficiently into meat and milk, so undermining food security.¹⁸ In contrast, ruminants enhance food security by converting materials we cannot consume – grass – into meat and milk.¹⁹

Intensive pig and poultry production depends on the routine use of antibiotics (and other medication) to prevent the diseases that are inevitable when animals are kept in poor conditions. This leads to antibiotic resistance in animals which can then be transferred to people. The report *Preventing the next pandemic* by UN Environment and the International Livestock Research Institute identifies unsustainable agricultural intensification and increasing demand for animal protein as major drivers of zoonotic disease emergence. Moreover, intensive pig and poultry production often entails poor standards of animal welfare.

Accordingly, the new tax should be based not just on carbon emissions but should also take into account the differential impact of extensive ruminants and intensive pigs and poultry respectively on biodiversity loss, deforestation, water pollution, antimicrobial resistance, pandemic risks and animal welfare.

Yours sincerely



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¹ UK Government Office for Science, 2011. Foresight Report on the Future of Food and Farming

² FAO, 2015. Natural capital impacts in agriculture

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⁴ Wellesley, L., Happer, C. and Froggatt, A., 2015. Changing climate, changing diets: pathways to lower meat consumption. Royal Institute of International Affairs. www.chathamhouse.org/publication/changing-climate-changing-diets

⁵ IPCC, 2019. Global warming of 1.5°C

⁶ Bajželj, B. *et al.*, 2014. *Op.Cit.*

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- ⁷ Springmann M., Godfray H.C., Rayner M. & Scarborough P. ,2016, *Analysis and valuation of the health and climate change cobenefits of dietary change*. PNAS vol. 113 no. 15: 4146–4151. Supplementary information
- ⁸ Clark *et al*, 2020. Global food system emissions could preclude achieving the 1.5° and 2°C climate change targets. *Science* 370, 705–708
- ⁹ Batini N, Parry I and Wingender P, 2020. Climate Mitigation Policy in Denmark: A Prototype for Other Countries. IMF Working Paper
- ¹⁰ 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.
- ¹¹ UK Health Alliance on climate change, 2020. All-consuming: Building a healthier food system for people and planet
- ¹² World Economic Forum, 2020. The Global Risks Report 2020
- ¹³ Global Biodiversity Outlook 5, 2020. UN Environment Programme and the Convention on Biological Diversity
- ¹⁴ [UN Convention to Combat Desertification, 2017. Global Land Outlook](#)
- ¹⁵ Edmondson *et al*, 2014. Urban cultivation in allotments maintains soil qualities adversely affected by conventional agriculture. *Journal of Applied Ecology* 2014, 51, 880–889
- ¹⁶ Tsiafouli *et al.*, 2015. Intensive agriculture reduces soil biodiversity across Europe. *Global Change Biology*: 21, p973–985
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- ¹⁸ Nellemann, C., MacDevette, M., Manders, et al. (2009) *The environmental food crisis – The environment’s role in averting future food crises*. A UNEP rapid response assessment. UNEP
- ¹⁹ European Commission Joint Research Centre, 2018. Atlas of Desertification