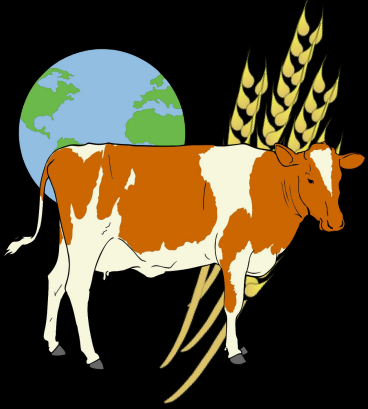


The climate responsibilities of industrial meat and dairy producers



Headline Issues

- > Animal agriculture companies are some of the world's largest emitters of greenhouse gases.
- > The majority of the largest 35 meat and dairy companies do not have a net-zero emissions target.
- > The extraterritorial emissions of companies are not currently applied to headquarter countries under the Paris Agreement but if they were, some meat and dairy companies could single-handedly exceed their country's emissions targets in the coming decade.
- > The ten largest U.S. animal agriculture companies have worked individually and collectively against climate-related policies.

The Center for Environmental and Animal Protection (CEAP) provides academic leadership for research policy-making and addressing critical social issues at the intersection of environmental and animal protection.

Summary

Animal agriculture contributes at least an estimated 14.5% of global greenhouse gas emissions, and an estimated 23% of present-day anthropogenic global warming (Gerber et al. 2013; Reisinger and Clark 2018). The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations predicts that meat consumption will increase 73% by 2050.

But there has been little attention paid to the emissions and climate influence of the world's largest meat and dairy companies.

Two companies, Fonterra in New Zealand and Nestlé in Switzerland, would make up over 100% of their headquarter country's total emissions target in the coming decade if extraterritorial emissions were applied to headquarter countries. All 10 of U.S.-based major meat and dairy companies have influenced climate-related discourse, ranging from lobbying against cap-and-trade, to funding research questioning the link between animal agriculture and climate change.

Meat and dairy companies are some of the world's largest emitters of greenhouse gases. U.S. companies have also influenced climate policy.

Meat and dairy companies show large discrepancies in reporting emissions

The 35 largest livestock companies show large discrepancies in the way that they report emissions. Some companies, however, do provide extensive reporting of their emissions. Danish Crown, for example, reports that over 90% of their emissions result from production activities, rather than processing or at other points in the supply chain. JBS, on the other hand, does not include "scope 3" emissions, which refers to emissions from contracted producers or purchased products such as feed and fertilizer. JBS explicitly notes they have "no responsibility or indirect responsibility" for scope 3 emissions (JBS 2019).

There are also large variations in mitigation commitments. Some companies, such as the Irish-based ABP and Fonterra in New Zealand, focus only on carbon but exclude other greenhouse gases, like methane, that make up animal agriculture's most substantial impacts on climate change. As of March 2021, just six of these 35 companies have made a net-zero commitment.

Of the 16 countries where these 35 companies are headquartered, only 7 explicitly reference animal agriculture in their climate commitments under the Paris Agreement.



Meat and dairy companies are large emitters with few plans to curb emissions

Under a business-as-usual scenario, the projected emissions of 27 of the 35 companies will consist of less than 10% of their countries' Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC), which are national targets to reduce greenhouse gas emissions submitted as part of the 2015 Paris Agreement. However, the global emissions of two companies will each alone make up over 100% of their headquarter country's NDC by 2030: Fonterra in New Zealand and Nestlé in Switzerland. In Denmark, the global emissions of two companies, Arla and Danish Crown, would surpass the country's emissions target.

The nine largest U.S. livestock companies combined represent 6% of domestic total emissions, which would increase to 9% in 2025 assuming meat production grows at predicted rates and the U.S. complies with its NDC. In the Netherlands, two livestock companies would represent 31% of the country's NDC. In France, three companies would represent 19%; four companies would represent 26% in Brazil; in China, four companies would represent 3%.

Only seven of the 16 countries where these companies are based make explicit reference to direct and indirect emissions of animal agriculture in their climate commitments. Many of the countries only mention livestock or agriculture in reference to preventing land degradation. Six of the seven countries that do account for the totality of animal agriculture emissions are EU countries, whose NDC addresses land use changes, enteric fermentation, and manure management. The only non-EU country to include these emissions is Mexico. However, none of the NDCs specifically mentions reducing animal agriculture production, or attempting to make the industry more efficient, or the impacts of specific animal products as part of their climate commitments. The NDCs of New Zealand and Switzerland, where animal agriculture is predicted to represent over 100% of each country's future emissions, do not reference animal agriculture or livestock at all.

All 10 of the largest meat and dairy companies in the U.S. have influenced climate policies and discourse.



U.S. meat and dairy companies undermine action on climate change

Based on a set of criteria for assessing influence, Tyson and National Beef engage on the issue of climate change policy more than any of the other 10 largest U.S. livestock companies. All 10 companies have worked to prevent action on climate change. Each company has contributed to research that minimizes the link between animal agriculture and climate change.

Eight of the 10 companies have consistently lobbied Congress and the EPA on environmental and climate issues. Cargill has issued 173 quarterly lobbying reports on these issues since 2000, with a peak of 24 in 2010, when a cap-and-trade bill passed the U.S. House of Representatives. These companies have issued 545 quarterly lobbying reports since 2000 on environmental and climate issues.

U.S. meat and dairy companies act collectively to block climate legislation that might limit production. Six of these groups—the National Cattlemen's Beef Association, the National Pork Producers Council, the North American Meat Institute, the National Chicken Council, the International Dairy Foods Association, and the American Farm Bureau Federation and its state groups—have collectively spent ~\$200 million in lobbying between 2000 and Q1 of 2019, lobbying yearly on climate-related issues like cap-and-trade, the Clean Air Act, and greenhouse gas regulations.

Animal agriculture industry organizations (e.g., National Cattlemen's Beef Association, the North American Meat Institute) also regularly fund, publish, and promote research and web content minimizing the link between animal agriculture and climate change.

Views of climate responsibility must expand to include livestock companies

Views of climate responsibility have shifted in recent years to include the actions of corporations, particularly in the fossil fuel industry. A similar perspective must also be taken to understand the links between animal agriculture companies and climate change. This shift in assessing responsibility allows us to see how individual livestock companies have contributed significantly to climate change and responses to it.

The largest U.S. meat and dairy companies have challenged the causal connection between meat production and climate change, as well as postponed collective action on climate-related policies. In other countries, too, livestock companies have shaped climate policy. JBS, for example, may have been involved in shaping the public discourse about beef and climate change in Brazil (Lahsen 2017), and has stated that they have “no responsibility or indirect responsibility” over scope 3 emissions, which represent the largest sources of the sector's emissions (JBS 2019); Danish Crown has influenced scientific research on beef and climate change in Denmark (e.g., Stevnhøj 2019); and Fonterra has fought the 47% reduction targets for methane by 2050 in New Zealand (Fonterra 2019).

Countries and civil society should not ignore the physical as well as social impacts of large meat and dairy companies if we hope to effectively limit warming.

As the global consumption of beef and dairy grows, so too do emissions from meat and dairy production, and the importance of scrutinizing the individual and collective behaviors of companies in this sector and the countries that host their operations. These behaviors include not only physical impacts on the Earth system, but also fostering social and political conditions that discourage collective action and regulation.

Countries and civil society cannot ignore the physical as well as social impacts of large meat and dairy companies if we hope to effectively limit global warming.

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Emissions data comes from GRAIN 2018 and the UNFCCC. Company websites, annual reports, and other publicly available information were used to assess political influence.

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This research brief was prepared by Oliver Lazarus, Sonali McDermid, and Jennifer Jacquet, Department of Environmental Studies, NYU.

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