

What's at steak?

—— the real cost of meat ——

Executive Summary

Full report: <http://globalforestcoalition.org/whats-at-steak/>

This report aims to expose the many ways in which industrial livestock farming is impacting our lives and environment, and to argue that—precisely because it does cause so many problems—transforming the industrial livestock sector should be a key objective not only the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, but also of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change. Put simply, changing the way we produce meat and dairy products, and how much of them we eat, could provide relatively easy to achieve but far-reaching win-win-win impacts—for people, including farmers and women, for forests and biodiversity, for animals and for our climate.

This is because the industrial livestock industry is a major contributor to forest and biodiversity loss and to climate change, as well as posing a threat to the world's small-scale food producers, and the availability of healthy and nutritious food for all. For example, the livestock sector as a whole already contributes an estimated 14.5% of global greenhouse gas emissions. So far these impacts have received little

attention, but concern is growing. We aim to help turn the spotlight onto this overlooked sector, looking at what's happening on the ground in five countries: Bolivia, Brazil, India, Paraguay, and Russia.

This is an urgent matter, because livestock production (for grazing and feedcrops) already accounts for the majority of agricultural land use across the world. In anticipation,

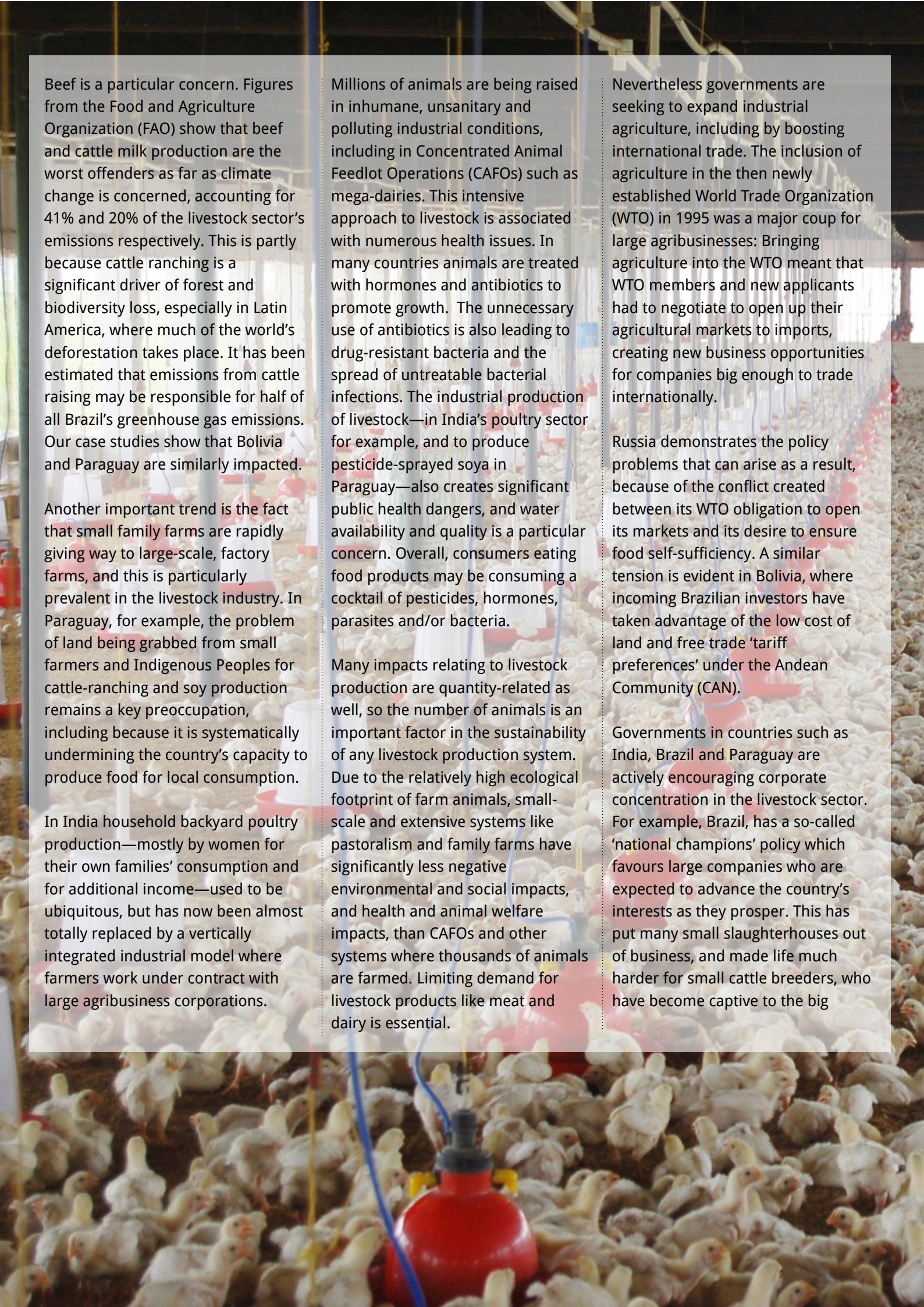
without corrective measures, global demand for livestock products is expected to increase by 70% by 2050. Demand for meat in developing countries is spiraling, and urbanisation is changing people's eating habits. This in turn threatens to drive up demand for cropland, and to increase the use of fertilisers, tropical forest loss and greenhouse gas emissions.

Cattle in Brazil. Kelly Sato/Flickr

Impacts of the industrial livestock and feedstock industry on forests, climate change, farmers and communities

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Beef is a particular concern. Figures from the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) show that beef and cattle milk production are the worst offenders as far as climate change is concerned, accounting for 41% and 20% of the livestock sector's emissions respectively. This is partly because cattle ranching is a significant driver of forest and biodiversity loss, especially in Latin America, where much of the world's deforestation takes place. It has been estimated that emissions from cattle raising may be responsible for half of all Brazil's greenhouse gas emissions. Our case studies show that Bolivia and Paraguay are similarly impacted.

Another important trend is the fact that small family farms are rapidly giving way to large-scale, factory farms, and this is particularly prevalent in the livestock industry. In Paraguay, for example, the problem of land being grabbed from small farmers and Indigenous Peoples for cattle-ranching and soy production remains a key preoccupation, including because it is systematically undermining the country's capacity to produce food for local consumption.

In India household backyard poultry production—mostly by women for their own families' consumption and for additional income—used to be ubiquitous, but has now been almost totally replaced by a vertically integrated industrial model where farmers work under contract with large agribusiness corporations.

Millions of animals are being raised in inhumane, unsanitary and polluting industrial conditions, including in Concentrated Animal Feedlot Operations (CAFOs) such as mega-dairies. This intensive approach to livestock is associated with numerous health issues. In many countries animals are treated with hormones and antibiotics to promote growth. The unnecessary use of antibiotics is also leading to drug-resistant bacteria and the spread of untreatable bacterial infections. The industrial production of livestock—in India's poultry sector for example, and to produce pesticide-sprayed soya in Paraguay—also creates significant public health dangers, and water availability and quality is a particular concern. Overall, consumers eating food products may be consuming a cocktail of pesticides, hormones, parasites and/or bacteria.

Many impacts relating to livestock production are quantity-related as well, so the number of animals is an important factor in the sustainability of any livestock production system. Due to the relatively high ecological footprint of farm animals, small-scale and extensive systems like pastoralism and family farms have significantly less negative environmental and social impacts, and health and animal welfare impacts, than CAFOs and other systems where thousands of animals are farmed. Limiting demand for livestock products like meat and dairy is essential.

Nevertheless governments are seeking to expand industrial agriculture, including by boosting international trade. The inclusion of agriculture in the then newly established World Trade Organization (WTO) in 1995 was a major coup for large agribusinesses: Bringing agriculture into the WTO meant that WTO members and new applicants had to negotiate to open up their agricultural markets to imports, creating new business opportunities for companies big enough to trade internationally.

Russia demonstrates the policy problems that can arise as a result, because of the conflict created between its WTO obligation to open its markets and its desire to ensure food self-sufficiency. A similar tension is evident in Bolivia, where incoming Brazilian investors have taken advantage of the low cost of land and free trade 'tariff preferences' under the Andean Community (CAN).

Governments in countries such as India, Brazil and Paraguay are actively encouraging corporate concentration in the livestock sector. For example, Brazil, has a so-called 'national champions' policy which favours large companies who are expected to advance the country's interests as they prosper. This has put many small slaughterhouses out of business, and made life much harder for small cattle breeders, who have become captive to the big

slaughterhouses, who pay them lower prices and grab their profits.

India's poultry sector exemplifies 'Tysonisation': the introduction of a vertical integration model in which the company (originally Tyson in the US) controls all aspects of production. In practice this means that it owns each of its millions of chickens from before they hatch to the day they are slaughtered, taking on contracted farmers to do most of the work and also shoulder most of the risk if things go wrong.

This corporate concentration dynamic is playing out on a global scale now, as industrial agriculture is conducted through 'global value chains' that account for some 80% of global trade. This situation is exacerbated by the fact that WTO negotiations failed to stop large-scale farms being subsidised in the

US and the EU. This has created the double challenge of unsubsidised farmers in developing countries having to compete with products from large industrial farmers elsewhere in the world, who are already operating to economies of scale and supported financially by their governments.

Given the industrial livestock sector's many negative impacts it is ironic that the livestock sector is promoting the further 'sustainable intensification' of its operations as a solution to problems like climate change and hunger. However, a growing body of research shows that the changes proposed cannot possibly counter the predicted scale of demand for meat and dairy products. Similarly, proposals to address livestock emissions through carbon accounting or even carbon markets will fail to address the many

social impacts of unsustainable livestock production, and its impacts on water, biodiversity and animal welfare.

These approaches also ignore the very essence of sustainable agriculture: maintaining the balance between producing food, crops, and pasture for grazing, and regenerating soil, preserving ecosystems, and co-existing with forests.

There are many practical alternatives already in existence, including agroecology, agroforestry, traditional pastoralist practices that enhance forest conservation, and the restoration of traditional livestock-breeding lands and farming with native breeds. This means that we can rapidly transition to ways of producing and consuming diverse and healthy foods that work for families and communities, create



Police protecting crop spraying operations from the protests of local communities, in Paraguay. Luis Wagner/CIC

livelihoods and employment, and are in harmony with our environment.

Reforming livestock production and consumption has the potential to generate really significant and far-reaching benefits for us and for our planet, and with relative ease. With respect to climate change switching to healthier diets with less meat, combined with a reduction in food waste, and improvements in livestock production, could result in emissions from livestock production almost halving by 2050.

Other measures are needed as well though, to address the many other significant social, environmental, health, and animal welfare problems caused by the corporate take-over of the livestock sector.

Fiscal reforms should support sustainable livestock production and consumption. These should include redirecting subsidies and other

forms of economic support to more sustainable livestock production methods in line with the Aichi targets of the Convention on Biodiversity. It is particularly important to eliminate perverse legal, fiscal and other incentives for commodity chains like unsustainably produced beef and animal fodder, which are major drivers of forest loss.

Government support for policies that build awareness and capacity in relation to sustainable livestock practices, and facilitate alternative models of production—such as farmer cooperatives and collectives in India—is critical. These should uphold small farmers' rights, and provide better support for existing and new small-scale food producers, with a specific focus on gender issues.

Reforming other governance and trade practices and policies is also essential. This should include

developing and implementing strict legislation prohibiting livestock practices that involve environmental pollution, weak labour standards, increasing the gender gap, land grabbing, health risks and the maltreatment of animals. CAFOs should be prohibited, and livestock-related pollution standards, including strict regulations on the use of antibiotics, should be introduced, strengthened and/or effectively enforced.

In general, it is essential that we change the way in which soils and productive resources are being used, recovering land and traditional patterns of land management, with a view to managing agricultural and pasture land judiciously for the benefit of the whole population, distributing productive resources fairly for the primary purpose of food security, food sovereignty and sound nutrition.



The local Indian cow is fast disappearing as other species are brought in. Ashlesha Khadse



Indigenous forest women of Indonesia working in a tree seedling plot. Martinus Sinani

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