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## **Climate Policy Needs to Ensuring Sustainable, Equitable Food and Agriculture Systems and Protect and Restore Forests and Biodiversity**

### *Context and rationale*

Green welcomes this opportunity to submit input to the Nature-Based Solutions coalition for the UN Secretary General's UN Climate Action Summit. We welcome the Secretary General's commitment to explore concrete and bold ways to redefining human societies' and human beings' relationship with nature. We believe it is crucial for governments and non-state actors to more seriously consider the proper role of agriculture in meeting climate commitments, as well as to take concrete actions to ensure a more secure, sustainable future for food systems and natural systems around the globe.

The Paris Agreement and Conference of the Parties (COP) summits, as well as high-level climate summits, including at the UN, have largely ignored a crucial fact: what the world eats and how it produces its food are extremely important factors in addressing climate change and realizing a just transition, more than most governments and their citizens generally recognize.

### *Overview of the contribution*

Worldwide, industrial systems of animal agriculture account for approximately two-thirds of egg and poultry meat production and over half of pork production, with countries in the global South producing approximately half of the world's industrial pork and poultry. Globally, more than 70 billion land animals are used in food production each year, and this number could reach 120 billion by 2050 if the current trajectory is unchanged. Increasingly, researchers, civil society organizations, community-based organizations, and indigenous peoples' organizations and networks agree that such a scenario is wholly unsustainable and incompatible with global climate and biodiversity goals.

They also agree that it will be almost impossible to achieve the targets agreed in the Paris Accord without a shift to eating and producing less meat and other animal-based foods. Yet, the large-scale awareness and change – from climate negotiators, policy-makers, the private sector, institutions, international agencies, and the world's citizens – is still only a small portion of what is required.

### *Natural systems as solution*

Climate change is already endangering animals and communities around the globe. Diseases are more frequently emerging and spreading to new areas; and rising air and sea temperatures are damaging critical habitats and threatening species who rely on these habitats for survival. Farm animals will not be spared from these impacts, and also will be affected by climate change-induced rangeland drought and other weather events, which could lead to more animal deaths. Moreover, during their often short lives, farm animals suffer myriad assaults to their physical, mental, and emotional well-being, and are typically denied the ability to engage in species-specific natural behaviors.

Brighter Green's research and the work of a growing body of natural and social scientists concludes that the current system of food production and agricultural development also forestalls the possibility of promoting sustainable, equitable, and climate-resilient food systems. This is due to industrial animal agriculture's enormous water, land, and chemical fertilizer requirements; the monocultures it creates, of both non-human animals and feed crops; the massive water pollution, deforestation, and

biodiversity losses it requires; and, of course, the GHG emissions embedded in the production system itself.

#### *Mitigation, adaptation, and co-benefits*

The FAO defines sustainable diets as “diets with low environmental impacts which contribute to food and nutrition security and to healthy life for present and future generations. Sustainable diets are protective and respectful of biodiversity and ecosystems, culturally acceptable, accessible, economically fair and affordable; nutritionally adequate, safe and healthy; while optimizing natural and human resources.”

In March 2016, researchers at Oxford University published an analytic report with the conclusion that reducing meat consumption and transitioning to plant-based diets would cut GHG emissions by between 29 and 70 percent by 2050 and save up to eight million lives each year by 2050. They also calculated that plant-centered diets could save between U.S.\$ 700 and one trillion annually in healthcare costs globally. The researchers found the greatest reductions in GHGs and the largest numbers of deaths avoided came from adopting vegetarian and vegan diets.

#### *Stakeholders, implementation, action*

A multi-pronged approach by governments, cooperating with researchers, civil society organizations, educational institutions, and other stakeholders is most likely to succeed.

Governments should put a priority on nature-based solutions and, on a basis of urgency, identify and remove or redirect subsidies and fiscal policies, or other facets of policy and political support, for practices that put at risk the goals of the Paris Accord and more ambitious targets, and that have negative effects on forests, other ecosystems, soils, water, and overall resilience to the effects of global warming. This would mean a reorientation from large-scale animal agriculture toward more sustainable, climate-compatible means of producing and consuming food. Such a transition would also provide opportunities for nature-based solutions, like protecting forests, grasslands, and soils, as well as restoring landscapes to enhance nature-based systems of carbon sequestration.

Such protection and restoration will also have multiple additional benefits for natural resources (e.g., water, land, air), public health, livelihoods, and biodiversity. Several of the United Nations’ 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) would support such efforts, especially goals 2 (zero hunger), 3 (good health and wellbeing), 12 (responsible production and consumption), 13 (combat climate change and its impacts), and 15 (life on land).

Governments are often the largest buyers of food products, for example for schools, state institutions like hospitals and government ministries, and militaries. Governments can and should also work with industry to agree on labels that clearly identify low-GHG, healthier, more sustainable food products that don’t exploit natural resources; and encourage investment in the research and development of alternatives to animal-based protein, including plant-based proteins and cellular meat, and develop a regulatory environment to support such innovation.

Government subsidies that now support the expansion of industrial-scale livestock and feed operations should be ended and the nature-based “externalities” on which animal agriculture is dependent—such as riverine and marine pollution, contamination of soil and groundwater, land degradation, and GHGs—should be paid for, in full, by the industry and/or specific facilities that cause them and such nature-based exploitation ended.

In conclusion, political openness, especially in policy-making, ought to be encouraged so that voices questioning intensive animal farming and feed production and promoting sustainability, equity and the protection and resurgence of the natural world and non-human species are heard.

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Brighter Green is a New York City-based public policy action tank that works to raise awareness of and encourage policy action on issues that span the environment, animals, and sustainability. Brighter Green has been participating as an NGO observer in the UNFCCC since COP 15 in 2009. Brighter Green works in the U.S. and internationally with a focus on the countries of the global South and a strong commitment to ensuring and expanding equity and rights. On its own and in partnership with other organizations and individuals, Brighter Green generates and incubates research and project initiatives that are both visionary and practical. It produces publications, websites, documentary films, and programs to illuminate public debate among policy-makers, activists, communities, influential leaders, and the media, with the goal of social transformation at local and international levels.

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