Livestock production is also water-intensive, especially the indoor, intensive systems. Already 8 per cent of global human water use goes towards animal production: 7 per cent on feedcrops and the remainder for irrigation of livestock and plants. 14

In the future, cereals and soya should be grown primarily for human consumption, with animal farming being undertaken in smaller farming units where farmers can take care of and pride in their livestock and where environmental and human health can be protected and promoted.

Joyce D’Souza
Ambassador for Compassion in World Farming

References
40% of livestock production produces 64% of total human-induced ammonia emissions. Ammonia, although not a greenhouse gas, is highly damaging as it contributes to the production of acid rain.4

Another serious environmental problem is over-grazing. As little as 20% of the world’s drylands are degraded or being degraded under current use. If livestock numbers rise above the carrying capacity of the land, then over-grazing can lead to soil erosion, loss of topsoil and a reduction in the productivity of the land. Furthermore, when vegetation is removed, the land exposed to the sun can quickly become desertified.

Almost 17% of the world’s forests have already been destroyed and much of the remaining forest is under threat. Deforestation, including the felling of tropical rainforests, is often a result of the conversion of forests to pasture or crops for livestock production. If numbers of livestock increase as predicted, their environmental impact will be severe indeed. Sustainable agriculture must therefore reduce large concentrations of livestock, where the potential for environmental damage is heightened.

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37% of human-induced methane emissions and 65% of total human-induced nitrous oxide emissions – both the latter and nitrous oxide 296 times).4 Animals excrete nitrogen in urine and faeces, contributing to water pollution. The current rates of livestock production are already responsible for 9 per cent of total human-induced CO₂ emissions, with 60 billion farm animals used globally every year, and global meat production predicted to double by 2050, 2 there are a range of methods to reduce the environmental impact of agricultural land use, and which may have added marginal lands, to increase the standing biomass of carbon; cultivating perennial, rather than annual grasses as they manures to increase biomass in the soil; applying composts and manures to the soil; using agro-forestry, especially in the trend in global agriculture has been to enlarge agricultural units in the interests of productivity and profitability. This must aim to achieve vibrant rural communities. When local farmers can make a decent living from their land, then rural communities will benefit from their economic and social wellbeing. For global agriculture to be sustainable it needs to meet several criteria. It should: 

1. Providing a reasonable living for those working in agriculture and contributing to the viability of rural communities
2. Reducing as far as possible its negative impact on the environment and particularly the climate
3. Protecting the welfare of farm and working animals
4. Producing the kind of food which will contribute to healthy and affordable diets for both humans and farm animals
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SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE

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3. Protect the welfare of farm and working animals.

4. Produce the kind of food which will contribute to healthy and affordable diets for both humans and farm animals.

5. Ensure the production numbers created by modern farming methods are not wasted on growing crops for livestock feed and conversion to meat and milk.

The report says, “Livestock are one of the most significant contributors to today’s most serious greenhouse gases having a much higher global warming potential (GWP) than carbon dioxide (methane 23 times the GWP of CO2 is an urgency to address the issue of production of animal protein. As Henning Steinfeld, chief author of the FAO’s IAASTD Report (2008) points out, “At both ends of the spectrum, the IAASTD Report (2008) says that the use of GM crops is “contentious” and that “data is still emerging on the safety of GM food.”

In addition to production of animal protein, agriculture is responsible for a significant proportion of GHGs as does the use of nitrogen fertilisers – widely used throughout the world. Nitrogen fertilisers can cause environmental problems from eating foods which are not natural to their species and the wealthy drive their cars on clear-conscience grounds would free up food crops to provide food for the swelling human population.

The IAASTD Report says that it takes around 18 weeks, as many would have died as a result of lameness or heart failure.10 After two or three years of reduced life. Parasitic diseases and sores are common and many farmers can ill afford to seek veterinary treatment for their animals.

Working animals, whilst often incredibly important to farmers, are frequently worked too hard, are fitted with ill-fitting harness or badly balanced carts. They often suffer from hunger or thirst and may not be fed or watered throughout the working day. Parasitic diseases and sores are common and many farmers can ill afford to seek veterinary treatment for their animals.

Sustainable agriculture must be sustainable for the animals too. For farm animals this means keeping them in conditions which promote their health and welfare. Ideally they should have an outdoor range for grazing and for exercise, food and play and carrying out grooming behaviors. Where outdoor access is absolutely impossible due to the size of holding or the need to keep out predators, indoor facilities must be clean, but also requires provision of material such as straw, wood shavings or rice hulls as bedding material to enrich the environment. This is a expensive and time consuming task for which farmers with the financial capacity to do so, are an excellent model for others to emulate.

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Livestock production is also water-intensive, especially the indoor, intensive systems. Already 8 per cent of global water use goes towards animal production: 7 per cent on feedlots and the remainder for hydrating the animals themselves and on slaughter and food processing plants.14 Meat and dairy are expensive commodities to produce and can have adverse impacts on global food and water resources, can damage the environment, including the climate, and can end up contributing to high risks of certain non-communicable diseases in humans. In addition, large concentrations of animal numbers in intensive farms predispose ideal conditions for transmission and mutation of zoonoses (diseases transmitted from animals to humans) and viruses.15

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References

9. Compassion in World Farming. 100% post consumer reclaimed material.
Livestock production is also water-intensive, especially the indoor, intensive systems. One third of farm water use goes towards animal production; 7 per cent on feedlots and the remainder for hydrating the animals themselves and on slaughter and food processing plants.11

World agriculture and its environmental impact

The impact of livestock farming on the environment

Livestock is not only a source of food but also a significant contributor to environmental degradation. Livestock farming is responsible for a large proportion of global greenhouse gas emissions, and it is estimated that the livestock sector accounts for around 14.5% of global greenhouse gas emissions.12

Livestock production is a major source of water use, especially in arid and semi-arid regions. Agriculture accounts for 90% of the world’s water use, with livestock production being the largest single user of water in many countries.13

Livestock production also contributes significantly to air pollution through the release of gases such as methane, a potent greenhouse gas that is produced by animals through their digestive processes. Methane accounts for around 15% of global greenhouse gas emissions.14

Livestock production also has a significant impact on biodiversity through habitat loss and fragmentation, as well as through pollution and the introduction of invasive species.15

Livestock production is also a major contributor to deforestation and land degradation, as forests are cleared to provide feed for livestock and to provide space for agriculture.16

The impact of livestock farming on human health

Livestock farming has a significant impact on human health, both directly through zoonotic diseases and indirectly through pollution and environmental degradation. Zoonotic diseases are diseases that can be transmitted from animals to humans, and around 70% of all human diseases are zoonotic.17

Livestock farming is also a major source of pollution, contributing to air pollution, water pollution, and soil degradation. These pollutants can have a significant impact on human health, causing respiratory and cardiovascular diseases, as well as cancer and other chronic illnesses.18

Livestock farming is also a major contributor to climate change, as it accounts for around 14.5% of global greenhouse gas emissions. Climate change has a significant impact on human health, causing heatwaves, floods, and other extreme weather events that can lead to death and illness.19

REFERENCES


