

# The just transition from industrial animal production to equitable, humane and sustainable food systems

## About this paper

This white paper was created by a coalition of organisations dedicated to ensuring a just transition away from the industrial animal agriculture system. The document has been through extensive consultation amongst impacted groups, including food chain worker organisations (e.g. unions, farmworker and meat-processing workers), smallholder farmers, small-scale fishers, pastoralists, women and youth in agriculture, Indigenous peoples, peasant communities, and just transition organisations. Over 120 individuals representing 72 organisations from 35 countries provided feedback.

The outcomes of the consultation process are reflected throughout the paper to support the views and narratives of impacted groups. As we work together to build a global movement to phase-out industrial animal agriculture, it's important to acknowledge the diversity of perspectives and needs among impacted groups. While the paper's contents represent a shared vision and pathways for transformation away from the industrial animal agriculture system, the details may not fully represent each organisation's unique viewpoints and priorities.

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## **Executive summary**

### **Urgent action for a just transition from industrial animal production to equitable, humane and sustainable food systems**

The global system of industrial animal production, including industrial fishing and aquaculture, is fundamentally flawed, inequitable and pushing our planet to the brink. It prioritises profit over everything else, exploiting workers, communities, women, animals and the environment, and is a critical threat to public health. It is unsustainable and undermines crucial international targets such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, the Paris Agreement on climate change and the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework. This alarming situation demands urgent action for a just transition towards an equitable, humane and sustainable food system.

Despite mounting evidence of its disastrous impacts, industrial animal production continues to expand, driving deforestation, habitat destruction and pollution. This rampant growth poses a grave threat to our planet's climate, with global food system emissions alone endangering the 1.5°C target even if we phase out fossil fuels immediately. Reducing the size of the industrial animal agriculture, fishing and aquaculture sectors, together with a shift towards diets within planetary and social boundaries and agroecology, must become a central climate mitigation strategy.

According to experts, global emissions from animal production must decline by 50% by 2030 to meet the targets of the Paris Agreement<sup>1</sup>. In an equitable, humane and sustainable food system, there is no place for false solutions. Concepts such as 'carbon farming', 'sustainable intensification' and 'regenerative agriculture' have significant trade-offs or limitations,<sup>2</sup> are poorly defined<sup>3</sup> or are not feasible at scale.<sup>4</sup> Carbon markets and other offset programmes allow industrial agriculture facilities to continue business as usual and keep producing greenhouse gas emissions and releasing air, water and soil pollution instead of reducing these harms. To meet the necessary emissions-reduction target, efforts will have to be led by high meat and dairy consuming and producing countries through a decrease of consumption of animal-based products and the number of farmed animals in industrial production systems.

We must act now to shift towards equitable, humane and sustainable food systems. This involves putting smallholder farmers at the centre and adopting agroecological practices that actively promote human rights, particularly the rights of traditionally marginalised populations including women and girls, Indigenous populations, people of colour and people with disabilities. It also means protecting the environment and animal welfare, while ensuring food sovereignty meets food security needs and guaranteeing that people working across the food system live in dignity and receive a liveable income.

Along with significantly decreasing consumption of animal products in high - consuming countries, remaining animal sourced foods are produced on small and medium-sized diversified farms using high welfare standards, strong worker protections and agroecological practices. Corporations are held accountable for the social and environmental damage they cause and the power that the multinational meat, dairy and seafood corporations currently hold over the system is shifted towards communities, worker-led programmes, cooperatives, Micro, Small & Medium Enterprises and smallholder farmers to strengthen local and regional economies.

Alternative proteins require far less land, water and energy to produce than conventional animal-based meat and dairy and, as such, can be a tool in the short term to address the environmental harms of high meat consumption by rapidly increasing the access and availability of humane and sustainable proteins. This can help accelerate the shift towards diets within planetary boundaries in high - consuming countries and free up land and resources to support diversified agroecological production systems. However, alternative proteins are not the end goal of a just transition as there are concerns about the social and public health dimensions of this sector. There are also concerns about whether alternative proteins can be compatible with food sovereignty since the sector is firmly entrenched in the industrial agriculture system. We must be particularly vigilant not to replicate the harmful practices and consolidation of power seen in industrial animal production systems and improve standards of sustainability and justice in this sector, including food tech justice and ensuring open access. In the long-term, food system transformation will move away from industrial products towards agroecologically-produced, humane and sustainable foods.

The need for analog products to accelerate the shift from animal-sourced foods to diets within social and planetary boundaries is largely a regional issue in high - consuming countries. There is an opportunity for the low-consuming countries to leapfrog these technologies and the industrial animal agriculture model of the

Global North by maintaining and promoting diets within social and planetary boundaries through the strengthening of agroecology and ensuring the availability of whole plant and minimally processed plant-based proteins.

Any exploitation of people, communities, workers, or the planet is not a just transition. A just transition shifts to a worker-owned, local and regional system where a healthy economy and a clean environment can and should co-exist. The process for achieving this vision should be a fair one that does not cost workers or communities their health, environment, jobs, or financial security.<sup>5</sup>

A just transition can only be achieved with the active involvement of women, youth, smallholder farmers, peasants, pastoralists, small-scale fishers, food workers, Indigenous communities and people of colour. It must address inequality and achieve food sovereignty, while addressing the climate drivers that create injustice. It must centre social, racial and gender equity and take an approach that addresses the multiple intersecting forms of discrimination such as sexism, racism, and ableism. Gender-based solutions and racial equity strategies that acknowledge the specific impacts experienced by women, Indigenous people, and people of colour and their crucial role in and knowledge of agriculture are critical.

This requires a strong commitment and inclusive process from governments that must use a human rights-based approach based on multilateralism with a clear definition of roles and responsibilities that involves impacted groups at all levels. Climate justice and the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change must guide this process, accounting for regional and cultural variations and sensitivities towards food.

Animal-based foods can be part of an equitable, humane and sustainable food system with Indigenous and traditional practices, knowledge and consumption patterns, which are vastly different from industrialised, high-meat diets in Global North countries. The just transition primarily applies to industrialised production and agribusinesses. It recognises the role of culturally-appropriate meat consumption and the economic, social, nutritional, and cultural significance of traditional livestock and pastoralist systems in certain contexts and communities. It also recognises the essential role of smallholders farmers, pastoralists, small-scale fishers, women, Indigenous peoples and peasants in providing healthy and nutritious food for all. The transition is an opportunity to address and advance the conditions and livelihoods of these groups by improving the current system through the adoption of agroecology, high welfare standards and the recognition and

strengthening of traditional land rights of smallholders and marginalised groups, particularly women, people of colour and Indigenous communities.

This paper outlines a roadmap to accelerate the just transition to a climate-resilient food system that is locally and democratically governed, mitigates greenhouse gas emissions, promotes biodiversity, protects animal welfare, empowers workers, and advances food sovereignty that fulfils food security. This is a global framework to guide the development of context specific roadmaps.

To achieve the transition, we must pull three key levers of change:

- **Strengthen food system governance:** We need to challenge the dominance of the food system by multinational corporations and put policies in place to foster transparency and hold them accountable for their social and environmental impacts. At the same time, we should support environmentally and socially responsible companies and protect and elevate traditional and local food systems.
- **Promote agroecological practices:** A just transition necessitates the embracing of agroecology to promote human rights, environmental protection and animal welfare, and to ensure food sovereignty meets food security needs while providing dignified and sustainable livelihoods.
- **Shift towards diets within planetary and social boundaries:** Countries with high per capita consumption of animal-based products must transition to plant-rich diets with reduced meat and dairy to stay within planetary and social boundaries. This shift will benefit public health and free up land and resources to support diversified agroecological production systems.

The roadmap includes more than 100 specific policy recommendations that will vary in priority, relevance, and applicability depending on local and regional contexts, including current legislation, cultural sensitivities, community-based solutions, levels of consumption and production of animal-sourced foods, and how entrenched industrial animal agriculture is in the region.

The urgency of this just transition cannot be overstated. The consequences of inaction are dire, from irreversible biodiversity loss and climate catastrophe to human rights abuses, public health crises and widespread animal suffering.

Governments, businesses, civil society and individuals must come together to drive this transformative change. We must embrace a future in which the systems that produce our food prioritise the well-being of people, animals and our planet over corporate profits. The time for action is now, and the path forward is clear. It is time to create an equitable, humane and sustainable food system that will secure a future for generations to come.