

# REDUCTION OF LIVESTOCK GAS EMISSIONS MAY BE WITHIN REACH

Livestock is known to be a major global threat to the environment. In 2006, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) released a highly influential report (*Livestock's Long Shadow – Environmental Issues and Option*) stating that the livestock sector generates more greenhouse gas emissions as measured in CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent – 18 percent – than transport. It is also a major source of land and water degradation.

Henning Steinfeld, senior author of the 2006 report said at that time: “**Livestock are one of the most significant contributors to today’s most serious environmental problems. Urgent action is required to remedy the situation.**”

These words are certainly true today.



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On September 26, 2013, the FAO released a new report, entitled “*Tackling climate change through livestock: A global assessment of emissions and mitigation opportunities*”, which represents the most comprehensive estimate made to-date of livestock’s contribution to global warming – as well as the sector’s potential to help tackle the problem.

The report foreword states: “It is easy to draw a dramatic picture of today’s world. Climate change, the most serious environmental challenge humanity has to face, is threatening the well-being of the next generation. Globalization has led to rapid economic, social and technological changes that have left too many behind.

Hunger is still a persistent problem, affecting over 900 million human beings worldwide. Faced with these issues, we sometimes feel overwhelmed by their magnitude and powerless.”

According to the report, greenhouse gas emissions associated with livestock supply chains add up to 7.1 gigatonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent per year – or 14.5 percent of all human-caused greenhouse gas releases.

The main sources of emissions are:

- feed production and processing (45 percent of the total),
- outputs of greenhouse gas during digestion by cows (39 percent),
- manure decomposition (10 percent).

The remainder is attributable to the processing and transportation of animal products.

However, the foreword also states: “But we need not despair. Difficult problems can be tackled for the benefit of many if we apply the right policies that support the required innovation and investment. We have known for several years that livestock supply chains are an important contributor to climate change. This new report shows that the potential to significantly reduce emissions exists and is within reach. Options are available for all species, systems and regions. But we need political will and better policies.”

Indeed, the report reveals that greenhouse gas emissions by the livestock sector could be cut by as much as 30 percent through the wider use of existing best practices and technologies. The potential for achieving emissions reductions lies in enabling all livestock producers to change to practices already being used by the most efficient operators.

“These new findings show that the potential to improve the sector’s environmental performance is significant – and that realizing that potential is indeed do-able,” said Ren Wang, FAO Assistant Director-General for Agriculture and Consumer Protection. “These efficiency gains can be achieved by improving practices, and don’t necessitate changing production systems. But we need political will, better policies and most importantly, joint action.”

Toward this end, FAO has engaged with the public and private sector, producers, research and academia, civil society, NGOs, and inter-governmental organizations to establish The Global Agenda of Action in support of Sustainable Livestock Sector Development.

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