

Taxing animal production to reduce animal density in agriculture

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A huge proportion of the world's population is vegetarian, eating no meat for a range of reasons, including lack of availability and poverty, ethical and religious reasons, personal health and environmental health reasons.

Among that number are many who are vegan, eating no animal products. However, the environmental impact of raising livestock remains incredibly high; natural ecosystems are removed to create grazing land and to grow crops to feed cattle, for instance. From rearing and farming to slaughter, butchery and processing, the meat industry has an enormous carbon hoofprint, as it were.

There is increasing awareness of the problems facing the world if we continue to eat [meat](#) at the rate many people do. There is a powerful movement to urge people to become demi-vegetarian or wholly vegetarian and a parallel movement promoting veganism. However, many people enjoy meat and while they may recognize the issues, many are unwilling to change their habits. A radical approach to tackling the issues from another direction is discussed in the *International Journal of Sustainable Economy*.

Stefan Mann of Swiss agricultural research establishment, Agroscope in Ettenhausen, puts forward the argument that animal production itself should be taxed. This would put pressure on those who rear livestock to switch to other sources of income or else face being priced out of the food market when vegetarian options become the more affordable option, and perhaps only option, for consumers. The approach would, Mann suggests, ultimately reduce animal density in agriculture globally.

Of course, there have been many efforts of the last few decades to avoid the huge surpluses of milk, grain, and beef that we saw in the "butter mountains" and other problems of the late 1970s and early 1980s where supply massively exceeded demand. The intellectual drive for Mann's argument, which does not see a "right" or a "wrong" perception to [meat consumption](#), comes from three sources and draws on and interprets arguments from the research literature.

The first "is to acknowledge that global food production depends on the

amount of resources invested in agriculture and the efficiency with which these resources are converted into human calories, including proteins and micronutrients." This he explains would nudge us towards political discrimination against [animal production](#). His second driver is to reduce the calorie count of animal products being consumed to reduce our environmental footprint. Thirdly, considering moral arguments and inequities also pushes us towards a need to reduce the number of farm animals raised.

Animal husbandry has been part of human culture in many parts of the world for centuries. It will be a difficult transition to a more sustainable future for coming generations. However, Mann argues, it is a transition that must be made so that we find a more efficient, ethical, and environmental way to convert capital, resources, and labor into the food we need.

More information: Stefan Mann, Why governments should tax animal production: a system approach to internalise the externalities of agriculture, *International Journal of Sustainable Economy* (2022). [DOI: 10.1504/IJSE.2022.123869](#)

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