

How your diet can improve animal welfare

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A systematic approach to quantify impacts of food consumption on animal welfare has been developed by researchers of the Institute of Environmental Sciences, Leiden University in collaboration with ETH Zurich, and effective altruism organizations.

The scientific paper was recently published in the *International Journal of Life Cycle Assessment*. "With an increasing consumption of [animal products](#) worldwide, it's high time to consider [animal welfare](#) in our food choices," explains lead researcher Laura Scherer.

When we think of animal welfare, we typically think of the quality of

life on the farm, but more factors influence animal welfare: the conditions when leaving the farm up to slaughter, the sentience of the animals, and the number of animals affected by our [food consumption](#). The number of animals affected plays the key role. Although eating insects might be better for the environment than conventional meat, it is not an option to improve animal welfare.

Options to improve animal welfare

The study recommends a hierarchy of options to improve animal welfare with your diet, the three R's:

1. Replace animal products altogether with suitable plant-based products, such as beans, nuts, and soya.
2. Reduce your consumption of animal products, which in many cases (mainly in Western societies with an excessive consumption of animal products) also improves your health, and/or Reduce the number of [animals](#) affected by switching to animal products with a lower animal welfare loss (e.g. pork instead of chicken).
3. Refine your consumption of animal products by selecting products from farms with higher animal welfare standards.

As Oscar Rueda says: "Changing eating habits can be challenging, but it is greatly facilitated if plant-based options are readily available, especially in public canteens. Sentience politics, a political think tank, has submitted simple yet impactful ballot initiatives in Basel, Zurich, Lucerne, and Berlin to support such a change."

More information: Laura Scherer et al. Framework for integrating animal welfare into life cycle sustainability assessment, *The International Journal of Life Cycle Assessment* (2017). [DOI: 10.1007/s11367-017-1420-x](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11367-017-1420-x)

Provided by Leiden University

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