



# Meat Abolition

1. A New Demand
2. An Admissible Demand
3. Producers, Consumers and Citizens
4. Providing for the Future of Former Meat Workers
5. Meat with Animal Welfare Guarantee:  
an Alternative to Abolition?
6. For an Ecology of Sensibility
7. Making the Abolition Project Part of the World Today

**Abstract:** The idea expressed by this article is that we must now work explicitly towards the legal banning of the production and consumption of animal flesh. It is both a necessary measure, and one possible to obtain without waiting for a revolution in the way of thinking or the organisation of our societies.

“Animals should not be harmed or killed unnecessarily”: throughout the world, this precept is part of common morality. Throughout the world, the consumption of animal products for food is the main reason why humans harm and kill animals, unnecessarily. The aforesaid precept is not without consequence: some people refuse to consume products of animal origin, others reduce their consumption of meat, still others choose products from farms that offer some guarantee on how the animals are treated; some countries pass laws protecting farm animals. But this is not enough to reverse the trend: the number of animals raised and fished in the world is growing inexorably, whilst industrial farming becomes the norm. It is illusory to wait for laws protecting animal welfare to finally ensure decent living and dying conditions for the billions of animals eaten every year: it is difficult for farmers to decide to place the well-being of their animals before the profitability of their farm, and there is neither enough space nor a big enough workforce to properly care for so many animals.

Recognising the fact that the production of animal flesh has a disastrous environmental impact will not necessarily lead to an improvement in the allotted fate of animals: if the animals’ interests are not taken into account as such, this recognition may, on the contrary, lead to more intensive farming.

The contrast between the obligations that humans recognise having towards animals, and the way in which they actually treat them, does not imply that their declared good intentions are just hypocritical. What we learn from this contrast, however, is that spontaneous changes in consumer behaviour are not sufficient to put an end to the butchery. There are reasons for this. The situation is familiar: the problems of road safety, pollution, human poverty or child abuse cannot be solved just by relying on the capacity of each person to modify their habits to remedy the situation, even when they are generally acknowledged to be wrong.

To bring to an end the hideous fate reserved for animals that are eaten, the question should also be asked on the political level. A process must be begun which will finish by laws being passed to ban predation (hunting and fishing) and production (farming) of animals for human consumption. Public institutions have also a role to play in the retraining of workers whose incomes depend on these activities. This process begins by the public expression of the demand for the abolition of meat.

# Meat Abolition\*

Estiva Reus and Antoine Comiti

Translated from French by Jane Hendy

The time has come to work towards the abolition of meat, by opening a public debate about the idea that eating animal flesh should be outlawed, cultivating support for this idea, and eventually getting every country to pass a law forbidding meat consumption. It is a question of obtaining the consent of human societies to the eradication of a practice, based on the recognition of the great harm that it causes to animals. This recognition only requires the effective application of what is already common morality. The demand for meat abolition will take place in the current political agenda. We can imagine its culmination within the framework of institutions and social organisation that we already know.

## 1. A NEW DEMAND

This political demand is new. It is true that for more than two thousand years the legitimacy of meat has often been questioned; human individuals and groups have refused to consume it. And it is also true that for the last thirty years groups

of animal advocates have been trying to convince people not to eat animal products. Their ideal is to abolish livestock farming and fishing. However, up until now, nobody has proclaimed the prohibition of eating animal flesh as a declared objective, and its popularisation a priority. It was hardly mentioned that public intervention should *also* be used to right the wrongs caused to the animals concerned.<sup>1</sup> The belief was lacking that it is possible to persuade our fellow humans of this necessity.

The demand for the abolition of meat has taken a long time to emerge, because it was thought that a largely carnivorous population would not understand, and would react with hostility to any demand for prohibition. And all the while, with every investigation revealing the horrendous suffering of animals destined to be eaten, with every increase in specific demands (outlaw force-feeding, don't eat factory-farmed chicken, etc.), the meat industry has tried to make people worried by warning them: "Look out,

---

\* This article was first published in the journal *Les Cahiers antispécistes*, No 29, February 2008, <http://cahiers-antispecistes.org>

1. In this respect, action on behalf of animals used for their flesh is an exception to the rule. Groups fighting against bullfighting don't just incite the public not to go to bullfights, they demand their abolition. The defenders of circus animals not only try to dissuade the public from going to circuses, but they also campaign for the abolition of circuses with animals. It is the same in other domains, including fur, dolphinariums, hunting, and experimentation. The exception is meat, although there are demands for outlawing particular meat products, such as dog meat, horse meat and foie gras. At the end of the most harrowing videos about factory farming and slaughter the audience is at best urged to "Go veg!" You don't hear: "These activities should not exist, they should be outlawed."

this campaign is being led by a handful of vegetarians who want to *impose* their ideas!" In this way a paradoxical situation was created, wherein the only voices referring to an as yet non-existent offensive aimed at outlawing meat, belonged to those who stand to benefit by depicting such an offensive as a sinister plot instigated by a secret power.

The situation is changing. In the United States, a book<sup>2</sup> published in 2005 advocates the development of a "movement for dismantling animal agriculture". In France, the theme of meat abolition makes its first appearance in the same year (see box); a discussion group formed around this project proposes the following resolution:

***Because meat production involves killing the animals that are eaten, because their living conditions and slaughter cause many of them to suffer, because eating meat isn't necessary,***

***because sentient beings shouldn't be mistreated or killed unnecessarily, therefore, farming, fishing and hunting animals for their flesh, as well as selling and eating animal flesh, should be abolished.***

The people involved in this new movement believe that the general population is now capable of regarding the demand for the abolition of meat as a reasonable proposition, neither absurd nor scandalous. It already is an admissible initiative: a proposition that citizens are capable of understanding as a sensible project, even if it will take some time to gather wide support. The reasons for requiring a legal prohibition will be set out by the public debate over this initiative.

The arrival of this demand on the political scene will throw new light on what looks like a possible alternative to abolition: continuing to use animals for food while ensuring their well-being. The ideas raised by this demand may also

### ***The beginnings of the movement in France***

The theme of meat abolition was debated for the first time in August 2005 at the "Estivales de la question animale" gathering:

<http://question-animale.org/lang/en/>

The reflection was prolonged on a personal blog:

<http://meatabolition.blogspot.com/>

<http://abolitionblog.blogspot.com/> (in French)

and on a discussion group:

<http://fr.groups.yahoo.com/group/abolitiongroup> (in French)

This first discussion group was joined by a similar list in English in 2007:

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/meatabolition/>

---

2. Erik Marcus, *Meat Market*, Brio Press, 2005.

lead to further study of the link –long anticipated– between the animal cause and ecological preoccupations.

The proposal to abolish meat does not imply criticism of the value of the campaigns, ideas, and actions that have been carried out in favour of animals for many years, nor does it prescribe dropping them for radically different methods. On the contrary, fixing the goal of abolition should give more strength, sense and coherence to many initiatives already in place, and may inspire some new ones.

## **2. AN ADMISSIBLE DEMAND**

The demand for the abolition of meat is based on no more than common morality: not only with regard to what is due to animals, but also to justifiable restrictions to individual liberty.

### **Neither mistreat nor kill without necessity**

Moral condemnation of mistreatment of animals is widely shared: most people agree that they should not have to suffer for no good reason, nor be killed without necessity.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, it is factually true that farming, hunting and fishing kill, and that they inflict considerable suffering on animals. It is factually true

that humans do not need to consume animal products in order to live in good health. Not eating meat does not bar the way to a fulfilled life, nor even to the enjoyment of eating. Because the ethical premise is part of ordinary morality, and the intermediate assertions allowing us to deduce the conclusion are facts, not opinions, the demand for the abolition of meat is qualified to be regarded as a proposition that is worthy of being taken into consideration.

## **Moral law and legal law**

A moral imperative is universal: it is a statement of what should be done by everyone. Abolishing meat would be to take a legal disposition so that the moral imperative concerned may be effectively respected by everyone in one of its principal domains of application.

Such use of the law is difficult to imagine whilst the population is deeply divided in its concept of what is right. In this case political art consists in finding compromises enabling peaceful coexistence between those who hold different ethics. Often this involves fixing limits to the sphere of each one's operations, which means not recognising any claim for universal application.<sup>4</sup> However, the protection of animals against practices

3. This precept would be meaningless if we qualified as necessary all use of animals regarded by humans as being advantageous to them (however little), even if a great wrong was caused to the animals. Ethics is a practical discipline: it relates to what must be {done}. There is no reason to pronounce precepts empty of consequence on a certain way of behaving. That which forbids inflicting unnecessary suffering on animals has been pronounced and widely adopted. So it is not meaningless.

4. For example when it involves organising the cohabitation of religions which do not ask to adore the same god(s), but which believe that adoring their god(s) is a duty that everyone should carry out.

which cause them grave harm is different. The admonition “You should not mistreat or kill animals without necessity” is practically consensual. There is no significant group for whom the opposite prescription is an essential value (“You should torment and kill animals for your own enjoyment”), nor any major ethical theory which provides the foundation for such a conclusion. In these conditions, it is not unrealistic to work towards the “legal law” giving support to the moral law.

### **What about individual liberties?**

Of course the movement for meat abolition will be accused of trying to curtail individual liberties, probably by the same people who were protesting even before the demand was formulated. How long can the spectre of a takeover fomented by a minority be brandished and prevent the real debate from taking place? The initiators of this movement do not possess an army that is ready to crush the carnivorous masses. They have neither the means nor the ambition to raise one. Before a law that bans the consumption of animal products for food can be passed and enforced, a large part of the population must consent to it. The bill will only be examined after a process in which an increasing number of people will

have actively committed themselves in favour of it.

The fact remains that establishing a legal prohibition involves imposing a constraint on everybody, and that a wide-based agreement to a measure does not imply unanimous approval. The extent of individual liberties will be reduced. However, demanding such a restriction will not necessarily be regarded as odious and incomprehensible by everyone except its promoters. “Do not inflict unnecessary suffering on animals” is derived from the wider precept “Do not harm others”, combined with the fact that, animals being sentient, they are part of the “others” that it is possible to harm. When meat is abolished, it cannot be regarded as a victory of compulsion over freedom although some people will still resist this measure. The choice is not between imposing a diktat on unwilling carnivores (constraint) or imposing nothing on anybody (freedom). It is between constraining these carnivores to give up



a habit without which one can live and find pleasure in life, or continue to constrain animals to imprisonment, mutilation, separation from their family and friends, deprivation of autonomy, and death. Because it is a question of reducing freedom when it leads to behaviour which attacks the freedom, the health, the happiness and the life of others, we enter the domain where – including in cultures which are the most attached to individual liberties – it is acknowledged that institutions can (and must) constrain individuals.

### **3. PRODUCERS, CONSUMERS AND CITIZENS**

Why should the citizen – by a political demand – be involved in challenging the use of animals for food, rather than leaving the choice to the consumer alone?

#### **Supply and demand**

The consumer can choose to abolish meat from her own realm (banish it from her own table), or at least have a care for the living conditions of the animals in the farms that supply the products that she buys. These two attitudes are progressing numerically, but remain very minor. Worldwide, the consumption of animal flesh per inhabitant is progressing rapidly, along with farming methods that least respect animal needs. Thus the prescription “You must not mistreat

or kill animals without necessity” is at the same time both widely approved and widely inoperative. From both sides, “supply” and “demand”, factors push towards maintaining and extending the system in place.

Fishing and farming are economic activities which, like any other, have their own growth logic. They are not content to passively respond to a pre-existing demand. Technical evolutions in these sectors have facilitated the conquest of new markets. In a few decades technologies of animal husbandry have created an explosion of production capacities and a prodigious drop in production costs, and there has been a huge development of industrial fishing as well. Moreover, in these sectors the costs as well as the profits of businesses follow rather peculiar rules. Under-valuing of land or water used for agricultural purposes, as well as the absence of responsibility by producers for environmental degradations caused by their activity, lower production costs. In addition, it is frequent that the development potential of a business is not strictly dependent on its income from sales. Indeed, agriculture and fishing are among the most subsidised economic activities.<sup>5</sup> Apart from structural support, public authorities come to the rescue of producers during epizootic diseases or input price rises.

---

5. Worldwide fishing subsidies represent about 20% of the value of the catch. E.g. see this page of UNEP (United Nations Environment Programme): <http://www.unep.org/Documents.Multilingual/Default.asp?DocumentID=459&ArticleID=5086&I=en> Agriculture benefits from strong public support in developed countries. In 2007, 43% of the European Union budget was devoted to the common agricultural policy; state aid from member countries to their national producers can be added to that.

As for the consumers, they consume. Only a minority think about farming conditions when they buy. However, a majority of them say they are concerned about animal welfare.<sup>6</sup> The number of those who say they feel bad about, or disagree with, the killing of animals, is far from negligible. Thus, in a survey co-financed by the French Ministry of Agriculture,<sup>7</sup> disapproval of the killing of animals is expressed by a majority of French people in the case of bullfighting and hunting, and by a significant minority in the case of farm animals or fish. From a sample of 1000 people, the percentage of interviewees who say they “tend to disagree” or “strongly disagree” with the statements quoted is as follows:

The idea that you can kill an animal in a bullfight seems normal to you – don’t agree: 88%.

The idea that you can kill an animal in a hunt seems normal to you – don’t agree: 52%.

The idea that you can buy poultry and kill it

yourself seems normal to you – don’t agree: 40%.

The idea that you can kill an animal by fishing seems normal to you – don’t agree: 39%.

It is normal that humans raise animals for their meat – don’t agree: 14%.

Moreover, 65% of the people interviewed declared that they agree with the following assertion: “You would not wish to be present at the slaughter of animals.”

### Words and deeds

Fourteen per cent of the people surveyed declare that they do not find it normal that animals are raised for their meat, whilst they themselves consume the product of the slaughterhouse.<sup>8</sup> That does not make their judgement any less real; it can be used as leverage for change. This type of



6. For the EU, see this study “Eurobarometer” published in March 2007: [http://ec.europa.eu/food/animal/welfare/survey/sp\\_barometer\\_aw\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/food/animal/welfare/survey/sp_barometer_aw_en.pdf)

The phenomenon is not limited to developed countries. According to a survey carried out by IFAW in China, South Korea and Vietnam, 90% of those interviewed believe that “we have a moral duty to minimise suffering” and a vast majority would like to see legislation to protect animals: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/sci/tech/4357527.stm>

7. Geneviève Cazes-Valette, *Le rapport à la viande chez le mangeur français contemporain*, November 2004, p. 345, [http://www.esc-toulouse.fr/m\\_pages.asp?page=480&menu=234](http://www.esc-toulouse.fr/m_pages.asp?page=480&menu=234) (in French)

8. At least for most of them: vegetarians only represent 1,2% of the 1000 people interviewed for this survey.



contradiction between words and deeds is not unusual. At the present time, a majority of humans express worry about global warming or fossil fuels running out, and sincerely wish for solutions to be found. Only a minute proportion of them take the initiative to significantly change their consumption habits in order to preserve the environment. On the other hand, when policies are put into action in this area, they are generally understood and accepted, even when they involve new constraints.<sup>9</sup>

The explanation for these seemingly contradictory attitudes would entail using much more data than we can explore here. Let's just mention one direction among others by means of an example.

The moral imperative dictates: "Act as everyone should act in the same circumstances." To the driver who is caught parking in a space reserved for people with disabilities, and who retorts that this isolated action will not cause much harm, we offer this reproach: "What if everybody acted in the same way as you?"

According to a principle of ordinary behaviour, we should "Behave in awareness of how others behave."

Respecting parking spaces reserved for disabled people is the option which will be readily chosen in a society where the custom of leaving them free is already established. If on the other hand everyone parks in these spaces, the dominant reflex will be: "Why should I have to go and look for a parking place

ten streets away, when this spot will be taken within 30 seconds by another non-disabled driver?" Or else you could simply let yourself be guided by the habit of using these parking spots as ordinary spaces. Only drivers who are most aware of the difficulties of disabled people will not give in to the temptation of discounting the probability (not non-existent) that, for once, it may be a disabled person who occupies the space if they leave it free. Or else, without thinking of the consequences, they would be simply prevented by the uncomfortable feeling produced by the thought of an action which expresses indifference towards vulnerable people. A majority, however, would not be constrained, by their own initiative, to do what they would judge to be right if they were asked to express an opinion on the subject.

Concerning the use of animals for food, the consumption practices in force impose massive mistreatment and slaughter of animals. Standing out from the dominant behaviour in society (and stepping outside one's own routines) has a cost which, without being terribly high, is not less real. At the same time, it is tempting to reassure oneself on the harmlessness of one's own inability to act as one should by invoking the fact that this failing is generalised: "How will it help chickens if I don't buy this particular chicken, when they are produced by hundreds of millions?" Or else, one goes shopping in the usual way, without ques-

---

9. A similar phenomenon can be found in other domains (contradiction between personal opinion and behaviour, and acceptance of the creation of policies in conformity with expressed opinion): road safety, public health, or help for the most disadvantaged.

tioning anything, buying a chicken like one buys a kilo of carrots. There is little chance of being reminded of one's duty towards animals by the remark "What if everybody acted like you?" since everybody is busy doing just that.

### **Involving the citizen**

Let us imagine that people are asked this question: "Do you want to put an end to raising and slaughtering animals?" One could suppose that some of those who claim to disagree with the idea that it is normal to raise animals for their meat<sup>10</sup> would hesitate to participate by their vote in the continuation of livestock farming. And how would those react who confess their uneasiness at the idea of being present at the slaughter of animals, when asked to choose between ending or continuing slaughter? In contrast with choices made at the supermarket, they will no longer be in the role of consumers but in that of citizens, in a position to pass judgment on something that will be imposed on everyone. It is less easy now to avoid conscious reflection on the question asked, and fall back on routine, and impossible to escape from the choice of what one judges to be right by invoking the insignificant weight of our own consumer behaviour, since in this case the decision taken will apply to the whole community. On the contrary, and by this very fact, the fears inspired by the risk of social marginalisation in the case of adoption of a type of consuming differ-

ent from that of one's friends and family, no longer apply.

How many humans would demand that the massacre begin again after being interrupted, and after they have reorganised their lives without cutting the throats of animals or suffocating them in order to eat them? If we were in the post-meat period, it is possible that with no more than our current mentalities we would choose not to return. It is, however, also true that it is difficult to make the journey from the age of meat in the other direction.

The project for the abolition of meat wants the animal question to be asked at the citizen level also. That is where the moral imperative has a chance of being less easily buried under routine and easy self-justifications when a bad practice is generalised: the level where one is made to be aware that a reasoned decision has to be taken.

When the question of meat makes its entrance among the subjects debated in the political arena, the public will realise that a time will come when the community will have to choose, and that everyone has a responsibility in this choice. A growing number of people will be encouraged to take sides, to say so, and will feel obliged to justify their judgement. If this process gets under way, the tension will be then felt more strongly in the case of contradiction between the judgement announced and personal behaviour, and the result will be a certain encourage-

---

10. 14% of the French population according to the estimation provided by the survey referred to above.

ment to reduce it. If a growing number of people openly express the previously unexpressed position “I do not find it normal that humans raise (or fish) animals for their meat”, there will be more people who will limit or eliminate their consumption of animals. The exemplary nature of such attitudes will become more obvious if the debate “for or against the abolition of meat” has succeeded in making a place for itself in political life. The choice of these consumers will be clearly understood as a boycott and not as the expression of some particular orientation in the matter of dietetics or gastronomy. The increasing number of people who combine words and actions will strengthen the credibility of an evolution towards meat abolition. A development of the attitude of passive consent to abolition will also result: that of people who, without taking the initiative of changing their individual behaviour, will be ready to admit that the measure is good or acceptable once it is adopted.

The evolution of citizens’ proclaimed beliefs and of their consumer behaviour will reinforce each other.

#### **4. PROVIDING FOR THE FUTURE OF FORMER MEAT WORKERS**

Taking political action to abolish meat will raise the question of the future of the people who live from farming or fishing,

and of possible government intervention to facilitate their career change.

### **Meat factory workers**

Most meat is industrially produced. The jobs available are mostly for low-skilled or unskilled work, which is both physically and psychologically taxing. Most workers don’t stay long in these jobs, and most of them come from socially disadvantaged groups. Acts of deliberate cruelty are sometimes perpetrated on animals,<sup>11</sup> but for the most part the workers’ violence is inherent in the organisation and the purpose of the job. They cannot carry out the tasks for which they are responsible without neglecting, mistreating or killing animals. Some workers may be indifferent; this is not the general rule. The employees assigned to these tasks are aware of the brutality of the world they work in, and of the need to harden themselves in order to carry out the work. Sometimes their own insensitivity frightens them when they realise they are mechanically doing what at first seemed repulsive. “You shut down all emotions eventually. You just *can’t* care about anything. Because if you care about something, it opens the gate to all those bad feelings that you can’t afford to feel and still do your job.” writes Virgil Butler, former employee of a big chicken slaughterhouse in the United States.<sup>12</sup> This same idea of emotions that are “shut

---

11. For a hypothesis on the psychological factors leading to cruelty, read Philippe Laporte, “Il n’y a pas d’exploitation animale sans sadisme”, *Cahiers antispécistes*, No. 15-16, April 1998, <http://cahiers-antispecistes.org/spip.php?article127> (in French)

12. [http://www.cyberactivist.blogspot.com/2003\\_08\\_01\\_archive.html](http://www.cyberactivist.blogspot.com/2003_08_01_archive.html)

down” but still present, is expressed in the comments of workers interviewed in factory pig farms in France:<sup>13</sup>

I became harder. (...) The first year, you look at the little pigs. You look at the little piglet asleep.... (...) At the beginning, you're a bit like someone from the city who sees a pig for the first time, then, well, I'm not a farmer, I'm an employee... It's sad when a pig dies, but there's no point crying over it. You don't let it get to you as much. I know that if I make a mistake I won't be allowed to get away with it.

There are dead bodies every day. Sometimes it's from illness, sometimes there are respiratory or digestive problems, sometimes at birth, it's the babies who don't survive or the mothers who squash them, there are plenty of reasons.

No, the first three or four months, I couldn't do it (kill the weakest piglets<sup>14</sup>), I preferred to let them snuff it by themselves. But, well, sometimes they take two days, so then I said to myself, no, I'm at least going to put them out of their misery. I wouldn't like to stay like that if I couldn't do anything anymore. I wouldn't want to rot like that, I wouldn't want to be left like that. So I decided to kill them, because, oh well, I don't cry anymore

when I do it. I'm used to it, but it was hard at first.

### **Small producers in developing countries**

At the other extreme of production models, fishing and farming practised with low or no capital investment represents a resource for many families in poor countries. Livestock farming (of land animals) represents about 1,4% of worldwide gross domestic product (in 2005) and is carried out by 1.3 billion people.<sup>15</sup> This contrast between a modest contribution to global production value and a huge contribution to employment results from the fact that the bulk of production (number of animals raised and slaughtered) is carried out by intensive farming with few employees, while at the other end of the spectrum can be found countless farms with very low productivity, which are usually just one activity among others for their owners. Here animal farming is typically an activity for the poorest people.<sup>16</sup> It requires no training and very little capital and, in some regions, requires neither renting nor owning land (small domestic farmyard, or use of common land for grazing). The situa-

---

13. Survey carried out by Jocelyne Porcher. The quotations are from her paper (in French) entitled "Ecrasement de la sensibilité des travailleurs dans les systèmes industriels de productions animales" at the "Homme et animal: de la douleur à la cruauté" conference, Paris, October 10, 2007.

14. Farm workers regularly have to kill piglets because there are now pig breeds which are very prolific. Sows often give birth to more piglets than they can feed and when this happens, farm workers have no time to give the little pigs the care which would help them survive.

15. FAO, *Livestock's long shadow – environmental issues and options*, 2006, p. 271, <http://www.afpf-asso.org/afpf/vie/vie/images/FAO-Livestock-Environment.pdf>

16. Among those whose income depends (partly or totally) on animal farming, are nearly 1 billion people whose daily income is less than 2 US\$, *ibid.*, p. 268.

## **Some fishing facts**

In a document published in 2007, the FAO estimates at 120 million the number of people whose income depends (at least partially) on fishing.(a) However, it only gives a figure of 27 million for the number of fishermen in the world (in 2000).(b)

The contribution of fishing to human nutrition is generally modest compared to that of animal farming (with big regional disparities). The apparent consumption of fish, molluscs and crustaceans is 16.2 kg per inhabitant per year (in 2002) worldwide, of which only two thirds are provided by fishing (the rest coming from aquaculture).(c)

Other data (from FAO statistics) are available in an article by Roland Billard(d) in which we learn that in 2000, fishing only accounts for 24% of the total tonnage of animal flesh produced, and only 9% of global tonnage of animal products (flesh + milk + eggs). For reasons which we won't list but which appear in the above-mentioned article, these figures overestimate the part of fishing in the provision of consumable flesh.

(a) [http://www.fao.org/waicent/search/2\\_dett\\_fao.asp?strLang=es&pub\\_id=148994](http://www.fao.org/waicent/search/2_dett_fao.asp?strLang=es&pub_id=148994)

(b) [http://www.fao.org/docrep/005/y7300e/y7300e04.htm#P424\\_25152](http://www.fao.org/docrep/005/y7300e/y7300e04.htm#P424_25152)

(c) <http://www.greenfacts.org/en/fisheries/#4>

(d) <http://www.pubblicaitalia.com/cocoon/pubit/riviste/articolo.html?idArticolo=7718&Testata=3>  
(in French)

tion is similar for fishing: the income of 120 million people depends (most often partially) on fishing, with a large proportion (in employment terms) of traditional fishing carried out by the poorest groups of people.

### **Working to ruin lives**

“Animal products” represent the height of absurd economic activity: destroying myriad lives by large scale predation (fishing) or bringing into being billions of animals to be reduced to slavery in order to kill them (animal farming), often in the most extreme neglect of the interests of the animals concerned. The above-quoted resolution demands the abolition of meat for this reason alone. Its initiators want to emphasise that the immense wrongs caused to the victims

of this butchery are sufficient reason to end it. If as well this activity is analysed in relation to human needs only, it emerges that it is not just globally inefficient, but also harmful:

In terms of nutrition, livestock food products globally contributed an average of 17 percent of energy and 33 percent of protein to dietary intakes in 2003 (...). There are stark differences between countries and country groups, with meat consumption ranging in 2003 from only 5 kg per person and year in India to 123 kg in the United States. (...) In terms of health and food safety, livestock products as a category are more susceptible to pathogens than other food products. They have the capacity to transmit diseases from animals to humans (zoonoses). The World Organization for Animal Health (OIE) estimates that no less than 60 percent of human

pathogens and 75 percent of recent emerging diseases are zoonotic. (...) Livestock consume 77 million tonnes of protein contained in feedstuff that could potentially be used for human nutrition, whereas only 58 million tonnes of proteins are contained in food products that livestock supply. In terms of dietary energy, the relative loss is much higher.<sup>17</sup>

### **Helping meat workers change career**

Although meat is not necessary for human nutrition, it is currently necessary to ensure an income to the workers who produce it. It is unethical to support an activity simply because it creates jobs. (Should efforts to prevent disease or wars be abandoned in order to safeguard jobs in the pharmaceutical or armaments industries?) On the other hand it is realistic – and ethical – to make provision for the future of those who currently earn their living in animal production, when undertaking to abolish these activities.

Millions of poor families will not abandon farming or fishing if this involves going from great poverty to extreme poverty. This will only become possible if at the same time policies are created which allow them to develop other activities. Incentive measures may also prove necessary in order to facilitate the transport of plant products towards zones which neither produce nor import enough to feed the human population.

One might add that the activity of small, poor producers is already compromised, irrespective of the abolition of meat. The rapid disappearance of micro-farms results from their economic non-viability in relation to current evolutions in agriculture. A social backlash can only be avoided by policies aimed at developing jobs in other sectors. (See box reproducing FAO analysis)

When fishing, livestock raising and derived activities form part of a richer economic fabric, the decline of these sectors has no long term negative consequences. Many industries have disappeared in the past: demand is reoriented towards other productions which also provide jobs. The fact remains that economic difficulties linked to the disappearance of meat are concentrated on particular populations (and often on the particular geographical zones where this activity is important), creating for them the fear of being plunged into insecurity. Besides, the jobs which disappear are not necessarily replaced by new jobs right away, creating the risk of a period of reduction (or less growth) of income and demand. Even when these adjustment delays are absent, the jobs that are lost and the jobs that are created do not carry the same social weight. The former belong to determined individuals, who resist a dreaded deterioration of their situation; the latter to undetermined individuals, who cannot apply pressure to improve their situation. This same asymmetry adds its weight to the perception that public opinion has of such evolu-

---

17. FAO, *Livestock's long shadow*, op. cit., pp. 269-270.

### **The future of smallholder livestock producers according to the FAO**

“Current trends of structural change imply the likely and probably accelerating exit of smallholder livestock producers in developing countries as well as developed. This trend is likely to persist even where suitable institutional mechanisms, such as cooperatives and contract farming, can be used to connect smallholders to the growing and modernizing agri-business. Such mechanisms are important for buffering the social impact of structural change. However, many poor people engage in livestock activities for lack of alternative rather than out of choice, the demise of smallholders may not always be bad. This is already happening in OECD countries, it is generally not regarded as a problem, and adequate employment possibilities exist outside the sector.

However, it becomes a major social problem if such employment opportunities do not exist in other sectors and social safety nets will then be required. Policies that attempt to stem the trend of structural change, in favour of small-scale or family farming, will be costly. As demonstrated by the EU’s agricultural policy, they may only prolong the process and perhaps still fail. The important issue will be to find alternative options for displaced people to gain a living outside the livestock or agricultural sector.”

FAO, *Livestock’s long shadow*, *op. cit.*, p. 283

tions: one can sympathize more easily with identifiable people, who show their anxiety when faced with an event that everyone fears (loss of job and income), than to the unknown beneficiaries of the created jobs and the mostly invisible suffering of the farmed or fished animals. This is why we will be more successful at leading our societies out of the age of meat if we avoid getting bogged down in the false alternative “save jobs or save animals”. The future of workers in livestock farming or fishing is a question that some meat abolition supporters should take on by devising and promoting policies aimed at restructuring the economic livelihoods of meat workers. This is one of the reasons why the question of meat should be considered on the political level. The transition towards an economy from which animal production will have disappeared will take place in better con-

ditions for the workers concerned if all the means at the disposal of the public authorities in terms of territorial development, training policies and financial aid of various kinds are mobilised to this effect.

Providing an economic future for meatworkers is not just a reaction to public opinion. There is no real conflict between ethics and realism. It is only fair that all citizens should contribute (if only as taxpayers) to the required economic adjustments, rather than having all costs borne by the workers of an industry that served the whole community. You have as much – or as little – choice in what you consume as in what job you do. And above all: meat abolition belongs to a movement towards a civilisation that is more attentive to the needs of all sentient beings. It is not a question of insti-

tuting a sort of reverse speciesism where human sentience would be discounted. To consider that it is the community's duty to ensure that former meatworkers find their rightful place in a less violent society will be evidence of this reinforced attention. It should also remove one of the obstacles to treating animals more fairly: the fear that the end of humanism<sup>18</sup> will lead to a devaluation of the values and institutions which have been (some-what) helpful in appeasing relations between human beings, and in providing some solidarity.

## 5. MEAT

### WITH ANIMAL WELFARE GUARANTEE: AN ALTERNATIVE TO ABOLITION?

"There is nothing wrong with eating meat from animals who are well treated". We often hear this argument. Consumers of animal flesh equate this argument with what they practise "The important thing is to avoid causing suffering." So that a debate begins as if the choice were between "Treating food animals more humanely" and "Abolishing meat"; most find the first option to be the more reasonable.

Once the problem is presented in these terms, the discussion is limited to the question of whether or not animals should be killed for food, whether or not the act of killing them is morally neutral.

We will not go into details on this point here.<sup>19</sup> In fact, it is doubtful that the outcome of the debate on the act of killing will depend solely on the confrontation of ethical arguments about its legitimacy. Meat consumers, who endorse welfare-friendly productions, should rationally believe that to painlessly kill an animal who has led an agreeable life is a neutral action. But as it happens, this belief seems like a rationalisation, which nonetheless does not shield them from the negative feeling that the organised killing of animals inspires. Consequently, it is possible that a change of opinion on this subject may depend largely on what could be done to put an end to the invisibility of the killing operations. As the sociologist Claude Fischler notes:

The "meat industry" has a difficulty: there are some aspects that, literally, cannot be shown, and that in any case nobody wants to see. Not even in the most modern slaughterhouses where "animal welfare" is taken into account. A television programme recently showed a modern slaughterhouse, where the animals are treated with care. Piped music is played, and they are calmed by gentle misted water sprays. Those whom I have asked to comment on this sequence have often said that they find it shocking all the same. So it would seem that it is not just the cruelty aspect which is disturbing. It is something deeper, which makes the very idea of slaugh-

---

18. In the narrow sense of acute anthropolatry, which at the same time exalts man and devalues other animals.

19. We do not dismiss the ethical arguments about the act of killing or on the "right to life", but we prefer to accentuate what is *not* examined when the discussion is concentrated on this problem.



ter difficult to accept, especially *mass slaughter*.<sup>20</sup>

In reality, the two options – “abolishing meat” or “continuing to eat animals while respecting their welfare” - are not just differentiated by the question of killing. Another crucial difference separates them. This difference is of a practical nature: the “welfare in livestock farming” option is not available. There is no plausible pathway which, starting from here and now, could lead to a generalisation of farming which provides physical and psychological comfort for the animals.

### Evolution of meat production

From 1950 to 2005 the annual production of the fishing industry (excluding aquaculture) was multiplied by five, growing from 19 to 95 million tonnes.<sup>21</sup> In 2002, 72% of the “fishing resources” were exploited more rapidly than they could be replaced.<sup>22</sup>

With regard to livestock farming, meat production from land animals has

more than quintupled in half a century (1950-2000), going from 45 to 233 million tonnes per year.<sup>23</sup> Over the one period 1990-2002, the quantity of meat consumed rose by 32% in tonnes and by 12% per person.<sup>24</sup> In 2002, the consumption of meat from land animals per person reached a level of 40 kg per year on average.<sup>25</sup> Projections carried out by the FAO as far as 2015 and 2030 foretell the continuation of a strong production growth rhythm:

Between 2007 and 2016, according to the FAO-OECD common perspectives, world meat production is set to increase by 9.7% for beef, by 18.5% for pork and by 15.3% for chicken. Principally in India, China and Brazil. From now until 2050, meat production could even double, going from 229 million tonnes at the beginning of the 2000s to 465 million.<sup>26</sup>

As much by the absolute level as by variation rate, strong disparities can be observed according to global region.<sup>27</sup> Over the last few years, per capita con-

---

20. “Le consommateur partagé - entretien avec Claude Fischler”, in Monique Paillat, ed., *Le mangeur et l'animal – Mutations de l'élevage et de la consommation*, Éditions Autrement, June 1997, p. 145, [http://www.lemangeur-ocha.com/fileadmin/contenusocha/09-le\\_consommateur\\_partage.pdf](http://www.lemangeur-ocha.com/fileadmin/contenusocha/09-le_consommateur_partage.pdf) (in French)

21. FAO, <http://www.fao.org/fi/website/FIRRetrieveAction.do?dom=topic&fid=16073>

22. UNEP, [http://www.grid.unep.ch/activities/global\\_change/atlas/pdf/reagir\\_perte\\_biodiversite.pdf](http://www.grid.unep.ch/activities/global_change/atlas/pdf/reagir_perte_biodiversite.pdf)

23. “Mankind Benefits from Eating less Meat”, *Terra Daily*, April 18, 2006, [http://www.terradaily.com/reports/Mankind\\_Benefits\\_From\\_Eating\\_Less\\_Meat.html](http://www.terradaily.com/reports/Mankind_Benefits_From_Eating_Less_Meat.html)

24. INRA, “La consommation de produits carnés”, *Productions animales*, No. 16, 2003, <http://www.inra.fr/productions-animales/an2003/num235/devine/rd235.htm> (in French; abstract in English)

25. <http://earthtrends.wri.org/> (which quotes FAO figures).

26. Laetitia Clavreul, “Le vrai faux déclin de la viande”, *Le Monde*, September 23, 2007, p. 16 (in French).

27. Average consumption per person per year in 2002: 28 kg in developing countries and 78 kg in developed countries (with strong differences within both groups). Source: FAO, *Livestock's long*

sumption has tended to increase slowly or become stable in the more developed countries, it has decreased in a part of Africa, while most growth can be attributed to a few countries such as China or Brazil (in 2005, these two countries alone represent more than 60% of meat production in the group of developing countries, 49% just for China).<sup>28</sup> The increase in the number of animals killed is much greater than that of production measured in tonnes since the livestock farms with the most rapid development are those with the smallest animals (poultry).

The farming of aquatic animals is experiencing an even greater expansion since from 1950 to 2005, production rose from 639,000 tonnes to 63 million tonnes.<sup>29</sup> Here again these are small animals, and furthermore they are notably left out of welfare legislation, in respect of both farming and killing conditions.

### Laws and labels

Two factors procuring partial protection for farm animals are going forward.

The first one consists of the adoption of legislation in some states or groups of states which limit or prohibit certain practices: here the force-feeding of ducks and geese, there the confinement of sows in minute cages or the castration of piglets without anaesthetics, elsewhere isolation of calves in pens where they cannot turn around. Although these

advances are appreciable, they remain limited. When they are a sector that is well established in the territory concerned, they come up against resistance from the industry which leads to a notable watering down of the few measures envisaged, to lengthy delays in the adoption then the implementation of the protective legislation, often to a suspension of the time-table, and to a less than diligent verification of respect for the law and punishment of those who flout it.

Such legislation represents progress because it can put an end to some particularly painful or stressful elements in the existence of certain animals. However, such piecemeal measures, adopted and applied so slowly, will not lead to a state of well-being for the animals. These are only fragmented adjustments within factory farming, a method of farming designed to obtain maximum production in a minimum of time, and with a minimum of space and workforce, no matter what it costs the animals.

The second factor which provides some protection to animals destined for the meat industry lies in the development of labels attributed to farms which respect certain specifications, including obligations relating to the treatment of the animals. Farms such as these, responsible for a minor part of production, coexist with those producing cheaper meat without any guarantee for

---

*shadow, op.cit.* For complementary statistics by groups of countries, see A. W. Speedy, "Global Production and Consumption of Animal Source Foods", *The Journal of Nutrition*, November 2003, <http://jn.nutrition.org/cgi/content/full/133/11/4048S>

28. FAO, *Livestock's long shadow, op. cit.*

29. FAO, <http://www.fao.org/fi/webSite/FIRetrieveAction.do?dom=topic&fid=16073>

the animals (other than the basic rules previously referred to). Labels are mostly developed by groups of producers or distributors,<sup>30</sup> sometimes with the active support of animal advocacy associations (some of which draw up their own specifications and labels).<sup>31</sup> This sub-group of farms affords, in the countries where it exists, better living conditions for animals in certain respects. However, it remains far removed from the idyllic image of the farm where animals gambol in freedom in vast open spaces, enjoying freely chosen social interactions, having access to spacious and comfortable barns, and are transported and killed painlessly.<sup>32</sup>

### **Generalised animal welfare: an illusory future**

The movement for the abolition of meat neither aims to denigrate the progress made by legislation, nor to contest the fact that consumers of animal products who choose certain labels cause less harm to the animals concerned than those who don't. However, it does see its role as showing that it is utopian to imagine that the day will arrive when a decent life and a painless death can be provided to the billions of animals killed every year in the world to feed humans. Continued meat consumption, in conditions guaranteeing a good life and a good death to all

the animals eaten, is a mythical future. This myth should be destroyed because the false promise of this future made up of happy farms allows the innumerable atrocities caused by the meat industry to continue; it postpones indefinitely the decisions necessary to end it.

Would the solution be to end the concentration-camp farming begotten of animal production science by creating free-range farms where the animals would benefit from fresh air and free movement in grassy fields? But where is the available land that would allow huge numbers of animals to live in anything other than very high density? Where would we put towns, roads, and crops?

Would the solution be to evolve towards farms which employ workers who have been trained to understand animal needs, and who are capable of ensuring attentive care for them? But how can a farmer who produces chicken meat with thousands of birds, with the best will in the world, ensure them appropriate living conditions? How could he, for example, look after sick animals when he does not even have the time to look at each animal every day? Or otherwise how many million extra people would need to be paid to look after the animals correctly? By how much should the price of meat be

---

30. Official labelling for meat is being considered in the EU, along the lines of current egg labelling.

31. In the case of the USA, see Andrew Martin, "Meat Labels Hope to Lure the Sensitive Carnivore", *The New York Times*, October 24, 2006, <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/10/24/business/24humane.html>

32. In France, the PMAF site provides detailed information (in French and English) on the improvements guaranteed by various labels; it also lists the most flagrant causes of suffering which exist in these farms: <http://www.pmaf.org/labels/page3.php>

multiplied in consequence? And to what point can we expect the consumer to buy such meat at an outrageous price while other farms, here or elsewhere, will offer cheap meat obtained under pitiful conditions? To what point will farmers allow themselves to develop the fondness for their animals that comes from constantly caring for them, when this affection makes them feel sad about sending the animals to slaughter? To what point can they be indifferent to the cost of this care which makes their business less profitable? Is it easy for them to consider animals at the same time as sentient beings placed under their protection, and as income-generating merchandise?

Would the solution be to set up strict rules which would only leave room for farms that really respect animal welfare? How to ensure that the welfare in question is welfare and not a mere easing of the most atrocious practices? Who will pay the tens of thousands of inspectors who would be necessary to carefully check that standards are being kept up? And if not, how can animals, who can neither speak nor defend themselves, demand that their rights be respected even when these have been made law?

Eat less meat? This would certainly be noteworthy progress. But even if consumption were divided by ten, billions of individuals would remain to be sacrificed each year. To claim that human societies have the legal, psychological, technical and economic capacity to set up a system whereby myriad animals can be killed with neither anguish nor pain

is a downright lie. To claim that a decent life can be offered to farm animals who are more numerous than humans themselves, and by devoting to this a microscopically small part of the workforce employed in production, is a downright lie. And far from dividing meat consumption by ten or even by two, the pace of growth is so great that the suffering spared by the legislative advances or by certain consumers' attention to farming conditions is less than that added by the annual increase in production.

However, you might say, there are good farmers. Animals lead an enjoyable, albeit short, life with them. Why not just separate the wheat from the chaff rather than trying to ban all livestock farming?

Human slavery was not abolished because there were no good slave owners nor happy slaves. It is not even true that all slaves were better off after being freed. Nevertheless, in practice, the absolute power of slave owners is extremely harmful for most of those who fall into their hands; it is not possible to create filters which would leave only exemplary masters in activity.

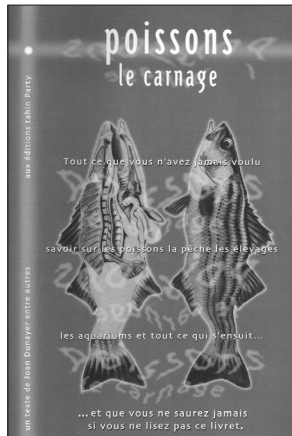
In the same way (leaving aside the problem of killing), it is not because there have never been good farmers that meat must be abolished. It is because it is not true that we know how to go about leaving only the good livestock farms in business, and ensuring that they stay good. Perhaps it would be excusable to try to find the path towards this selection, however great the risk of failure, if the continuation of livestock farming were vitally important. But meat not being necessary,

it would be criminal to allow it to persist in the name of the search for this improbable way.

As for fishing, it usually implies a slow and painful agony for the captured animals.<sup>33</sup> What on earth could welfare-friendly fishing be like, and who would take the trouble to invent it?

In practice, as long as animals are commodities, raised for sale on a large scale in a competitive market situation, there will be conflicts between their interests and the economic interests of the producer, and the producer will always be under pressure to cut corners and reduce costs.

Psychological aspects of our choice of diet need to be considered too. Just as farmers who start by raising animals «humanely» may slide into practices more profitable but less humane, so individuals may slide as well. How humane is humane enough to eat? The line between what conscientious omnivores can justify eating and what they cannot justify eating is vague. Since we are all often tempted to take the easy way out, drawing a clear line against eating animal products may be the best way to ensure that one eats ethically – and sticks to it.<sup>34</sup>



## 6. FOR AN ECOLOGY OF SENSIBILITY

The demand for the abolition of meat emerges into a world where environmental problems are becoming increasingly important. There exists, at different levels, a real closeness between the ecology question and the animal question, without the problem of meat being “solvable” in the currently dominant version of environmentalism.

### Comparable issues

The close relationship between the two fields arises firstly from the state of mind needed to deal with them, and in the tools which must be used to do this. In both cases, the understanding of the problem requires a high capacity for shifting off-centre in relation to oneself, in that the others whom one must consider are usually neither related to us, nor are they in a position to pressure us into consideration of their interests by threatening reprisals or promising rewards in exchange: chickens will not turn against those who would eat them, future generations and the victims of our polluting activities will offer us nothing in exchange for our abstaining from doing them harm. For this rea-

33. On the conditions of catching fish, cf. the section “Commercial fishing” in Joan Dunayer, *Poissons, le carnage*, tahin-party, April 2004. The booklet (in French) can be downloaded here: <http://tahin-party.org/dunayer.html>

34. Peter Singer and Jim Mason, *The Way we Eat*, Rodale, 2006, p. 257.

son, a satisfactory result is generally not achieved by counting solely on the interplay of private or professional influence which shapes our everyday behaviour (in this case, there is no such influence).

Good management of the environment was long ago pinpointed by economists as one of the areas where market forces fail: contractual relations between suppliers and demanders do not lead to a satisfactory situation from the point of view of all the agents affected by reason of the importance of externalities. (We speak of externalities when there are consequences – positive or negative – on a third party which is not involved in an economic transaction). Thus, if a business uses a production technique which harms the quality of the air or water, a disadvantage results for users of these natural resources (negative externality). But this affects neither the costs nor the earnings of the business, thus it exerts no influence over the profitability criteria which guide its decision to produce. The victims of pollution are outside the relationship between the supplier and its customers, so that goods with negative externalities are produced in excessive quantity in relation to what would have been decided if the costs suffered by third parties had been taken into account. The existence of externalities (of significant importance) is thus counted among the situations that can be corrected by public policies.

The case of meat is analogous: this is a product of which the supplied quantity is regulated by relations between sup-

pliers (breeders, fishermen, processors, distributors, etc.) and demanders (consumers). Now, there are third party victims of huge negative externalities – the animals that are eaten – whose interests count for nothing in the decision to produce. They are economically inaudible, unless the suppliers or the demanders decide to represent them. As in the case of activities causing degradation to the environment, it happens that these voluntary inflections of behaviour exist, but they are insufficient to solve the problem. Humans possess to some degree the faculty of understanding that it would be desirable to spare the helpless victims of their acts. They possess to a much lesser degree the faculty of effectively sparing them by spontaneous individual decisions. They are however capable of finding indirect means of achieving this, putting in place arrangements which incite or oblige them to do what should be done. Concerning meat, prohibition is a remarkably simple and efficient device. It is fortunate compared to other areas where solutions are more complex.<sup>35</sup>

### **The environmental impact of livestock farming**

The close ties between the ecological question and the animal question are not limited to the structural resemblance of the two problems (the similarity of the approaches necessary to understand and resolve them). There is also a substantial proximity: livestock farming, for example, is an environmental question,

---

35. For example, nobody would imagine that the problem of global warming could be solved by a simple decree prohibiting all greenhouse gas emissions.

in that it uses degradable or exhaustible natural resources. Its impact in the matter is considerable:

Eating meat is bad for the environment. This is the conclusion arrived at by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) which made public on 29 November (2006) a report on the ecological impact of livestock farming. This is “one of the main causes of environmental problems”, states one of its authors, Henning Steinfeld.

Measured in equivalent CO<sub>2</sub>, livestock farming’s contribution to global warming is higher than that of the transport sector. The activity is responsible for 65% of the emissions of nitrous oxide, a gas whose potential for global warming is 296 times higher than that of CO<sub>2</sub>, and is mainly released by manure. Moreover, cattle produce 37% of the methane emissions linked to human activity. This gas, produced by the digestive system of ruminants, has an effect twenty-three times greater than CO<sub>2</sub> on global warming.

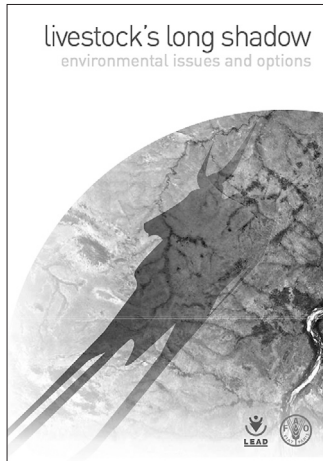
Pasture occupies 30% of land surface, while 33% of arable land is used to produce food for cattle – and these

surfaces are insufficient to supply the demand, which is causing forests to be felled. Other damage is listed: 20% of pastures are degraded by overgrazing, leading to soil erosion and compaction; this activity is also regarded as “among the most harmful for water resources”.<sup>36</sup>

Water degradation, deforestation,

soil erosion (and in some regions desertification) caused by livestock farming destroy or impoverish the habitat of wild animals, with the result that fewer of them are able to live and reproduce. Livestock farming is also more directly responsible for the death of wild animals, since 24% of the fishing catch (in 2004) is used to feed livestock.<sup>37</sup>

Finally, the current rise in cereal prices is a reminder that the different uses of arable land are in competition with each other (e.g. crops for human food, crops for animal food, or biofuel production) and that, through differentials in purchasing power, meat consumption can contribute to the growth of poverty and under-nourishment in the poorest groups of humans.<sup>38</sup>



36. Gaëlle Dupont, “L’élevage contribue beaucoup au réchauffement climatique”, *Le Monde*, December 4, 2006 (in French).

37. FAO, *Livestock long shadow*, *op. cit.*, p. 205. Chapter 5 of this report deals with the impact of livestock farming on biodiversity.

38. The rise in price of cereals also has the effect of increasing the incomes of farmers who grow them to sell, among whom are producers in developing countries. However, many of the least developed countries are net cereal importers. In these countries, the poorest farmers’

The impact (of the current cereal price rise) will vary according to buying power: in developed countries, the cost of food represents from 10% to 20% of a household budget, as against 60% to 90% in the poorest countries. "When 90% of expenses go towards food, an increase of 20% in the price of cereals is simply disastrous".<sup>39</sup>

### **Towards intensive, ecological, livestock farming?**

The consumption of meat causes immense harm to the animals who are raised or fished, and causes also the disappearance of wild animals. It degrades soil, water, forests, etc. Because of the unequal distribution of income, it also weighs heavy on the lot of the most impoverished humans.

Is it then possible to say that if policies were implemented to remove the environmental problems linked to livestock farming, they would necessarily be good "for people, for animals and for the planet"? The orientations suggested in the 2006 FAO report give little cause for optimism. The proposals were constructed around the acceptance of continual growth of meat consumption, so that the question becomes: "How to supply more meat while limiting ecologi-

cal damage?" The suggested solution could be qualified as evolution towards "intensive ecological livestock farming". This requires policies of including ecological costs in pricing, so that degradable or exhaustible resources cease to be wasted: end livestock farming subsidies, raise the price of water, increase the cost of using land (especially put an end to grazing on common land without charge), and apply the "polluter pays" principle. At the same time, financial aids and public means (such as research) should be implemented to reduce the environmental impact of livestock farming, taking account of the fact that this impact is different according to the species. For an equal amount of meat produced, cattle contribute most to greenhouse gas emissions and, when they are raised in extensive farming, contribute the most to land degradation. In this hierarchy of ecological harm, poultry farms are those with the least impact. They are also the least inefficient in terms of food produced as compared to food eaten by the animals.

According to the FAO report, the industrialisation of livestock farming is not a problem in itself; what is a problem (in terms of environmental damage) is the concentration of livestock farms on

---

production is mainly eaten by the family. The biggest cereal exporters are rich countries (e.g. United States, France, Australia, Canada) or intermediate development countries (e.g. Argentine, China, Russia). On the impact of the cereal price rise, see "Cheap no More" and "The end of cheap food", *The Economist*, December 6, 2007, [http://www.economist.com/opinion/displaystory.cfm?story\\_id=10252015](http://www.economist.com/opinion/displaystory.cfm?story_id=10252015)  
[http://www.economist.com/displaystory.cfm?story\\_id=10250420](http://www.economist.com/displaystory.cfm?story_id=10250420)

39. Laetitia Clavreul, "Envolée du prix des céréales : menace sur les pays pauvres", *Le Monde*, October 16, 2007, <http://www.lemonde.fr/web/article/0,1-0@2-3220,36-967521@51-959022,0.html> (in French)



certain geographical zones, which gives rise to the need to implement policies to encourage a more balanced distribution over the territory. However, for the report's authors, "if the projected future demand for livestock products is to be met, it is hard to see an alternative to (the) intensification of livestock production" (*op. cit.* p. 236). This intensification involves reducing extensive farming,<sup>40</sup> and increasing technical progress (actively supported by public research) which will lead in particular to economising on the quantity of feed consumed by the animals to produce a given quantity of meat, milk or eggs, by improving the breeds used through genetic selection.

In total, the reduction of the environmental impact of meat production via intensive ecological livestock farming signifies:

- Displacement of cattle production in favour of other species, particularly chickens, that is to say a significant increase in the number of animals killed per kilo of meat produced;
- Accelerated degradation of the animals' living conditions, through the disappearance of the remaining farms where they have the freedom to range over open fields; they would

henceforth be packed into concentration camp style buildings;

- Accelerated degradation of their quality of life caused by the physical characteristics researchers want them to develop. We all know what kind of progress animal production science is capable of in terms of genetic improvements. We already have chickens who grow in 40 days (instead of 80 days 30 years ago) and whose skeletons are too fragile to bear their weight,<sup>41</sup> the multiplication of the number of piglets per litter,<sup>42</sup> the number of eggs per hen, of litres of milk per cow.

To make livestock farming go down the path of such "sustainable development" is not to return to an imaginary past of harmonious relations between the shepherd and his flock on a backdrop of meadows and mountains; rather it is to go even further forward towards the reification of animals and their confinement, it is to knowingly produce deformed individuals, and to exploit their bodies to the bitter end.

---

40. It is mainly the type of livestock farming of the poorest people in developing countries which is targeted. Extensive pastoral livestock farming occupies 26% of the earth's surface and provides only 9% of meat production with «high costs in terms of environmental damage (water flows, soil losses, carbon, biodiversity)» (FAO, *op. cit.* p. 280).

41. Cf. <http://www.poulets.fr/> (in French)

42. "The average number of piglets weaned per productive sow per year went from 16.7 in 1971 to 24.6 in 1999. (...) the length of suckling (went from) 48 days in 1971 to 26 days in 1999. The interval between weaning the piglets and insemination went from 20 days in 1971 to 10 days in 1999." J. Porcher, "Le travail dans l'élevage industriel des porcs. Souffrance des animaux, souffrance des hommes" in F. Burgat, ed., *Les animaux d'élevage ont-ils droit au bien-être ?*, INRA Éditions, 2001 (in French).

## **A bearable environment: for whom?**

It is not a matter of an inevitable divorce between ecology and animal ethics. On the contrary, the emerging environmental challenges are an opportunity that shouldn't be missed of working to bring them together. People are becoming more aware that they cannot just rely on the network of microeconomic relations and everyday social intercourse to save the planet. FAO experts insist that the problems will not be solved by counting on "business as usual", neither will they be solved if the current policies of support for agriculture continue. If ever the measures necessary to combat environmental problems such as global warming, desertification, and water pollution, are set up, the price will be paid in huge changes to employment, consumption and the geographical distribution of activities. Vast resources will need to be allocated in order to make these necessary evolutions come about. For these changes to lead to a truly better world the questions should be thought through beforehand.

The most urgent question to be asked is: Who is affected by the environment? For whom must this planet remain (become) inhabitable, and so remain durably?" Humans are not the only sentient beings on earth. The other animals also have an interest in enjoying a habitat which is appropriate to their needs. A universe of cages, nets and fish hooks is certainly not a decent environment for them. What is the sense of these projects of "sustainable development" and

"durable growth" which consist of making life durably unsustainable for all those who share this planet with us?

Solving environmental problems caused by livestock farming through the abolition of meat is neither more difficult to organise nor less beneficial for humans than to undertake the complicated changeover to intensive ecological livestock farming. It is even probable that a good outcome from humanity's viewpoint alone, is more certain via abolition. And from the point of view of the animals, the difference between the two options is infinite.

It behoves the movement for the abolition of meat to help humanity to progress towards an ecology of sensibility, and not just a humanist one: to care about managing the earth well in the interest of all its sentient inhabitants; to stop thinking of animals as "natural resources" to be used as we please as long as humanity's long term interests are not compromised.

## **7. MAKING THE ABOLITION PROJECT PART OF THE WORLD TODAY**

Does the movement for meat abolition reduce its chance of becoming a political issue by the long-distance nature of its demands? No parliament or government will decide to prohibit the use of animals as food in the near future; no big political party of our time will put it on its programme. Consequently, if the movement is seen as demanding nothing less than the event which will seal its success (i.e. total abolition), it runs the risk of hav-

ing little influence on the current themes which make up day to day political life.

However, there is no reason why it should be like this. There are a host of partial measures which are consistent with the march towards abolition, such as: reduce and eventually end the subsidies to livestock farming and fishing, put a tax on meat, impose respect for the right to not eat meat (possibility of meals without animal products in school and work canteens and other community restaurants), discourage young people from entering the livestock and fishing trades (and all associated trades), prevent the opening or extension of livestock farms, refute propaganda that presents animal products as indispensable to our health, or obtain the prohibition of the production and importation of certain kinds of meat which have been produced in particularly atrocious conditions. Businesses, distribution networks, and private individuals can create non-meat zones on their own territory.

Supporting meat abolition does not necessarily imply cutting all ties with those who are working towards improving farming conditions and protesting against factory farms:<sup>43</sup> they are one of the expressions of the attention given to animals in our societies; in fact, to attack factory farming is to attack practically all livestock farming. In the field, many different points of convergence are possible, as long as they don't encourage people to believe the illusion that wide-

spread animal well-being will soon be the norm in livestock farms.

The demand for meat abolition does not push to the background the information effort directed at consumers so that more and more of them will refuse to buy animal products. The aim is not to prefer a more "collective" approach to the problem. No collective evolution can be created other than by winning the support of the individuals who make up society. The aim is to communicate with individuals as consumers *and* citizens, so that the two approaches are mutually strengthened.

The animal organisations have already undertaken to act on the different levels where decisions are taken: private individuals, political institutions, other organisations (businesses, research institutes, associations, etc.). The task of the movement for the abolition of meat is not to propose an upheaval in the methods employed or the campaigns waged, even if new themes are added. Its primary task is to facilitate the reinterpretation of a multitude of approaches already in place and to associate new actors. Beyond their immediate objective, many of these actions will make sense as being steps towards the abolition of meat, because this horizon will have been explicitly fixed and will have entered the public arena as one of the serious candidates for the role of the possible future.

Abolition will not creep up on us, taking little steps at a steady pace. Rather there will be an acceleration and a "jump" with

---

43. Regarding "welfarist" demands, there will be varying opinions within the movement for the abolition of meat, as is already the case within the overall animal advocacy movement today.

the straight out adoption of abolition. But before that day, many partial measures may represent signs (and effective progress) that make the idea ever more credible, more tangible, that we are bending towards the abolition of meat. They are preparing the acceptance and the willingness to end the sacrifice of animals for the purpose of eating them.

The movement for the abolition of meat is also about speaking out: it exists because individuals and organisations declare themselves in favour of the prohibition of the consumption of animal flesh. It exists because this belief is seen as something more than a pious wish for a better world which is not destined to come true.

### **Feet on the ground, head in the stars**

Meat abolition is a reformist approach. There is no need to revolutionise beliefs and social relations from top to bottom so as to install a radically new order. This is about bringing an operational response to a concrete problem: the hideous fate reserved up until now for animals that are eaten. Moreover, meat abolition helps safeguard habitats that are necessary for wild animals; it contributes to the solution of food and health problems concerning humans, as well as the preservation of the planet in the interest of its future inhabitants.



What is utopian is not abolishing meat, but thinking that we are progressing towards a guarantee of decent living and dying conditions for animals that are bred for food, hunted or fished. This idea is surreal – all the more so in a context where controlling environmental damage caused by rapidly expanding meat production is likely to become a supplementary factor for intensifying farming.

Although limited in its objective, the project for the abolition of meat aims at nothing less than the greatest reduction of suffering and death ever achieved. By its aim and the means to achieve it, it opens the way to a civilisation that is more attentive to all sentient beings affected by our choices. At the end of the journey, what we find may not be paradise; but, considering the limited nature of the demand, it won't be too bad.

---

contact : [redac@cahiers-antispecistes.org](mailto:redac@cahiers-antispecistes.org) or [contact@meat-abolition.org](mailto:contact@meat-abolition.org)

World Weeks for the Abolition of Meat : <http://meat-abolition.org/>

A website (in French) on meat abolition : <http://abolir-la-viande.org/>