

Making Tracks

2007, Issue 9

ANIMAL RIGHTS FROM CAROLINE LUCAS GREEN MEP FOR SOUTH EAST ENGLAND



Since being elected to the European Parliament in 1999, I have campaigned for social and environmental justice, for conservation of vulnerable species and habitats, and for greater protection of animals. Now, in 2007, the links between abuse of animals and environmental degradation – which animal rights campaigners have known about for years – are finally gaining recognition from influential bodies such as the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO).

Animal agribusiness is not only responsible for wasting land and water, it contributes a staggering 18% of the total output of climate changing greenhouse gases (5% more than transport) and is responsible for causing untold suffering to billions of farm animals worldwide. As Green Party co-ordinator of the European Parliament's climate change committee, and vice president of its cross-party animal welfare group, I am pressing for wholesale changes to Europe's agricultural policy, and to food production and consumption patterns. Anything less cannot halt the worst effects of climate change, and will allow continuation of the abhorrent practice of factory farming.

Greening Europe's farms – and dinner plates

In November 2006 the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) published a report, *Livestock's Long Shadow*, highlighting the environmental impacts of animal farming.

The catalogue of devastating effects caused by mass animal agriculture is alarming: loss of biodiversity, soil degradation, deforestation, fossil fuel consumption, greenhouse gas emission, wasted food energy, pollution, and over-use of water. And all projections indicate that the situation is set to worsen.

The European Commission predicts that overall EU meat consumption will

increase from an estimated 84kg per person in 2006 to around 86.7 Kg by 2014 and that the EU will become a net importer of poultry meat and beef. Around one third of global cereal output and 80% of total soy production is fed to animals, so vast areas of arable land are devoted to animal agriculture. When animal products or animal feed are imported, land use, water consumption, and pollution do not disappear but are simply shifted to the producing country.

Studies comparing the environmental effects of different



diets consistently recognise that avoiding all animal products provides for the lowest environmental impact. Even small shifts in consumption can have beneficial effects, and as we respond to the need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, it is essential to include dietary changes in



The Greens | European Free Alliance
in the European Parliament

Green Party



the list of measures we can take as individuals.

However, while consumer action is vital, I am also keen to press for major shifts in agricultural policy that will allow EU farmers to move towards more environmentally friendly farming practices. At present, the environmental impacts of animal agriculture are recognised, but have not been acted upon by governments in any meaningful way: this has to change. Legislative measures have to be applied to animal agriculture if we are to tackle climate change.

In a series of questions to the European Commission, I have sought to draw attention to the FAO report, to ask how the EU will respond, and to propose solutions.

Minor adjustments currently under consideration include changes to animal feed and further selective breeding, but these do not go far enough. Alongside other mechanisms, the EU must innovate: the production of plant-based food for human consumption must be encouraged, and the potential benefits of growing currently under utilised plant species investigated. In particular it is vital that the EU provides leadership, information and, where necessary, incentives for those farmers wishing to switch from animal agriculture (including growing crops for animal feed) to producing plant-based food for human consumption.

UPDATES: cat and dog fur ban; progress on seal imports

Following growing pressure, the European Commission has now asked EFSA (the European Food Safety Authority) to provide an opinion on welfare aspects of methods used to kill and skin seals. I will continue to demand that this is followed by a proposal to end the trade in seal products.

In June the European Parliament voted to ban the import, export and trade in cat and dog fur. The ban will be introduced by the end of 2008, and represents a major victory for those who have campaigned for years to stop the horrible cruelty associated with this trade.

Animal experiments

Revision of the EU law governing animal experiments has been further delayed, although the European Commission claims a proposal is due to be published shortly. Campaigning to use the revision to phase out the use of primates in experiments has begun early, with over 300 MEPs signing a written declaration calling for action. While I believe that primate experiments should stop immediately without a phase out period, I have supported the declaration.



Photo: Humane Society of the United States

Bird flu: a virus of our own hatching?



Caroline with Michael Greger, Director of Health and Animal Agriculture, the Humane Society of the United States.

In June of this year, I organised a number of events in Brussels and the UK to publicise Michael Greger's research into the origins of bird-flu.

Dr. Greger is a medical practitioner and Director of Health and Animal Agriculture with the Humane Society of the United States. His book, *Bird Flu: A Virus of Our Own Hatching* (<http://birdflubook.com>) provides a stunning analysis of the possible link between intensive farming and development of the highly pathogenic H5N1 strain of the bird flu virus. Dr. Greger met with MPs and European Commission officials, and gave a presentation in the European Parliament. Following these meetings I have asked the European Food Safety Authority to study Dr. Greger's findings as a matter of urgency.

While recent outbreaks of the H5N1 virus in Europe have been contained,

the possibility that the virus might develop into one more easily transmitted to and between human beings remains, and factory farms provide the ideal conditions for such a mutation to take place. The need to take measures to reduce this possibility is desperately urgent, and yet factory farming, and the transport of poultry meat and hatching eggs over long distances, continue.

I have pressed both the UK and EU authorities to consider limiting the crazy 'food swap' which leaves poultry meat crossing the channel – pointlessly – both to and from the UK. In addition, factory farming practices intended to force prices to the barest minimum, and which result in sick animals prone to disease, must be ended.

KEEP WORKING FOR ANIMALS
make a difference

For more information on my work visit
www.carolinelucasmep.org.uk

Office of Caroline Lucas MEP
Suite 58, The Hop Exchange, 24
Southwark Street, London SE1 1TY

Tel: 020 7407 6281 Fax: 020 7234 0183
carolinelucas@greenmeps.org.uk