

# **All Out to the Grocery Stores and Gas Stations!**

## **Strategic Action for Animals in the Context of the Food-Feed-Fuel Crisis**

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### **Summary**

In these dangerous days of economic and ecosystemic instability, as food riots rock cities and islands slip under the rising tides of climate change, activists must seize the unique opportunities offered by the feed-food-fuel conflict, which has raised the costs of meat-dairy-egg production and consumption. Timely, effective, collective action to illustrate the causal role of animal agriculture in ongoing hunger, fuel, and climate crises; to educate the public about hazards of and alternatives to meat-dairy-egg consumption; and to further raise the costs of meat-dairy-egg production could lead to substantial declines in both human hunger and animal exploitation as well as meaningful reductions in the greenhouse gas emissions responsible for global warming.

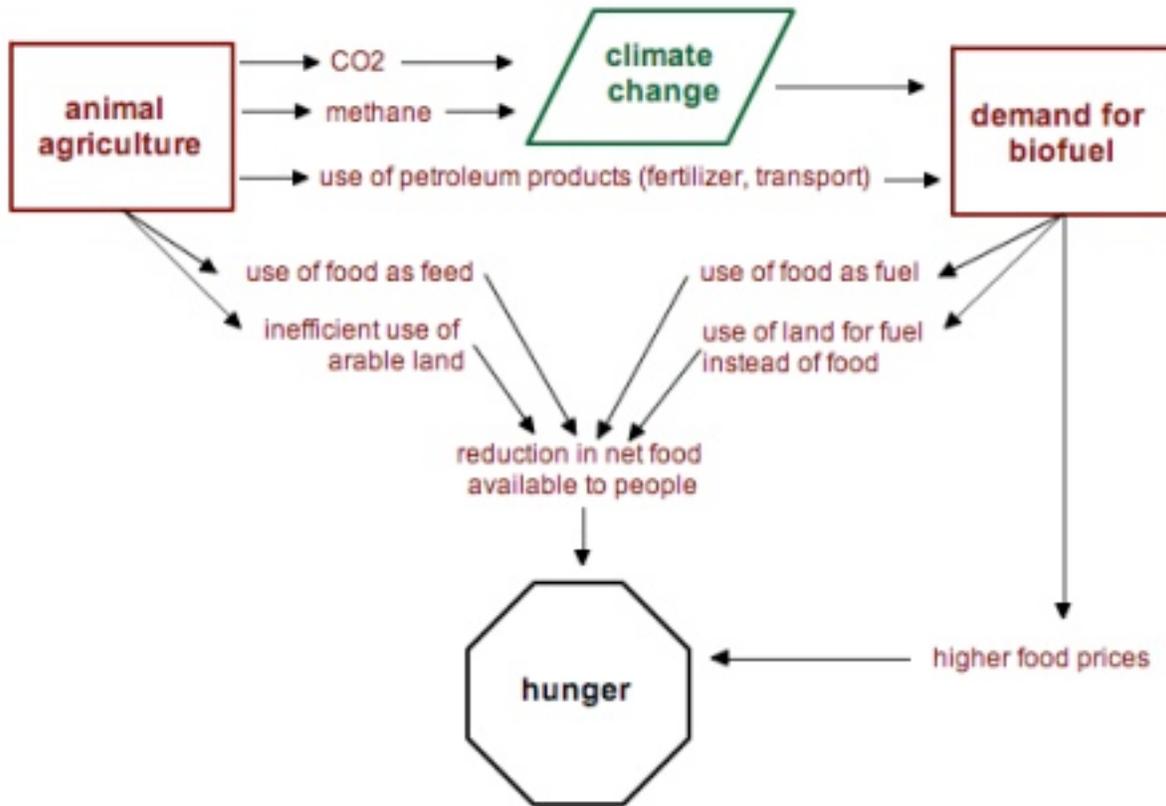
### **Background**

In recent weeks, food riots have rocked cities in South Asia, the Caribbean, and the Middle East in the wake of what the World Food Program of the United Nations calls “the most aggressive pattern of global increases perhaps ever recorded” in the number of people requiring food aid.

Increased demand for biofuel due to high gasoline prices and concerns about climate change is the most visible cause of this sharp upsurge in human hunger. Greater demand for corn for ethanol raises food prices, removes quantities of corn from the food chain, and motivates farmers to convert soy and wheat fields to corn for ethanol thereby further decreasing the food supply. The invisible agent in this volatile conflict between competing demands for corn and land is animal agriculture. As illustrated by the chart below, animal agriculture both drives up demand for biofuel and removes even greater quantities of grain and soy from the supply of food available to people.

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1. The Eastern Shore Sanctuary and Education Center offers a haven to roosters, hens, and ducks while also working toward the liberation of all animals from human ownership and exploitation.
  2. Global Hunger Alliance is a coalition of organizations opposed to the globalization of industrial animal agriculture and in favor of plant-based solutions to the world hunger and water crises.
  3. Working in a locale where multinational poultry production and export corporations exploit people and poison the environment in the course of killing more than a million birds each day, the Eastern Shore Sanctuary & Education Center understands that the abolition of animal agriculture will require a foundational restructuring of global farming and food trade practices as well as fundamental revisions in the ways that people think about themselves in relation to animals. This is the first of a series of memos, strategic analyses, and research reports aimed at building the capacity of the animal liberation movement to bring about such sweeping changes.

## Animal Agriculture Drives the Feed-Food-Fuel Conflict



Vital food resources are wasted when edible plants are cycled through animals rather than consumed directly. Animals exploited for their meat, milk, or eggs consume 32 percent of the world's cereal (corn, wheat, etc.) crops. Each year, 144 million tons of oilseeds (including soy), roots, and tubers that could be consumed by people are fed to animals instead. Ninety percent of the protein, 99 percent of the carbohydrates, and 100 percent of the dietary fiber in plants fed to animals are lost in the process of conversion of plants into meat, milk, and eggs. Twenty people could eat a healthy vegetarian diet on the food resources consumed by just one non-vegetarian. Thus, even though the farmers of the world grow enough grain alone to feed everyone in the world many more than the minimum number of calories necessary for life, many millions live with hunger and malnutrition even in years when no economic or climatic catastrophes interfere with the normal flow of food. Children starve as the grain that could have sustained them is exported to feed calves destined to be made into cutlets for affluent adults in other countries.

This is the food-feed conflict. The majority of the world's corn, for example, is used as feed rather than food, with many pounds of feed needed to produce just one pound of meat. Animal agriculture also contributes directly to hunger by its waste of arable land. Two and a half acres of land devoted to rice can meet the food energy needs of 19 people; the same amount of land devoted to eggs can feed only two. Much of the land now used to grow massive quantities of animal feed by means of vast monocultural acres of genetically modified crops would be more efficiently and ecologically used to grow diverse, locally-adapted plant crops for direct human consumption. Intensive animal agriculture leads to accelerated soil erosion, loss of topsoil, soil

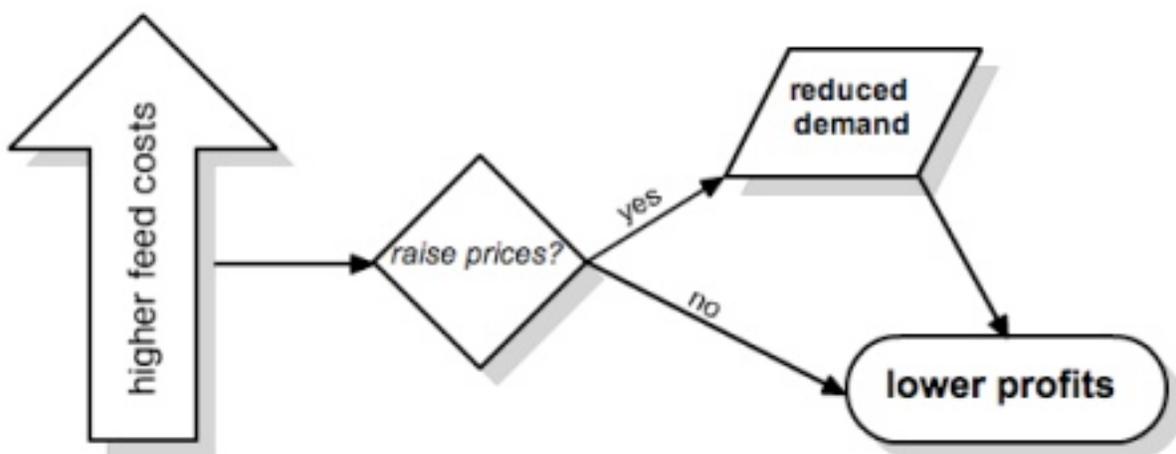
compaction, decreased percolation of rain into soil, depleted water tables, and desertification.

Animal agriculture further contributes to human hunger through its role in the food-fuel conflict. Demand for biofuel drives up corn prices and leads to food scarcity both by pulling corn out of the food chain and by motivating farmers to grow corn for biofuel instead of growing wheat, soy, or other edible crops. Demand for biofuel recently has risen sharply due to gasoline prices and concerns about global warming. Animal agriculture is implicated in both of those causes of increased demand for biofuel.

As recently reported by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, animal agriculture generates more greenhouse gas emissions than any other sector of the economy and is thus a significant cause of climate change. In addition, the inherent inefficiencies of animal agriculture — which require feed, animals, and body parts to be hauled from place to place — utilize vast quantities of fossil fuel, contributing to the high demand that keeps gasoline so costly.

With both worldwide meat consumption and worldwide hunger at record levels, the need to take action against animal agriculture is more urgent than ever. At the same time, both consumer frustration with high meat-milk-egg prices and the increased operating costs experienced by meat-milk-egg producers due to high feed costs offer unique opportunities for effective collective action.

For-profit meat-milk-egg-production is a capital-intensive enterprise for which the highest cost is feed. Under normal economic circumstances, meat-milk-egg prices are artificially low due to several factors that drive down the cost of feed. As the largest market for certain grains, meat-milk-egg producers can simply refuse to pay a fair price, trusting that government “farm aid” will make up the difference. (Because the aid goes to growers of crops, citizens never know that they are subsidizing the profits of industrial agriculture corporations in this way.) The new demand for biofuel brings new buyers into the market for corn, driving up its price along with those of now more scarce crops such as wheat and soy. Higher feed costs leave meat-milk-egg producers with a difficult decision, as illustrated by the chart below.



If they raise prices, they risk decreased demand and lowered profits. If they don't raise prices, profits certainly will decrease. So far, they have elected to raise prices but there is a point beyond which this strategy certainly will lead to the reduction of profits they fear. Indeed, some animal agriculture operations already have gone out of business in the wake of higher feed prices. Meanwhile, customers used to artificially low prices continue to be angry at prices that increasingly reflect the inherent inefficiency of feeding plants to animals and then consuming the bodies or products of those animals rather than eating plants directly.

Both the anger of consumers and the economic distress of producers offer avenues of timely intervention for activists. Timely, coordinated, collective action intended to further decrease demand and raise costs could lead to substantial reductions in worldwide meat-milk-egg production and consumption.

### **Recommendations**

We call on all opponents of industrial animal agriculture — whether they be motivated by support for animal rights, concern for human health, opposition to environmental pollution and depletion, or abhorrence at the abomination of hunger amidst plenty — to seize the day by working together to expose the role of animal agriculture in the current economic and climatic crises; educate the public about the hazards of and alternatives to meat-milk-egg consumption; and further raise the costs of meat-milk-egg production. Actions that might be taken in each of those three areas are outlined below with the understanding that individuals and organizations will and should work within their own areas of expertise and tactical comfort and with the hope that we will do so in cooperative solidarity with one another.

#### *Actions Illustrating the Role of Animal Agriculture in the Current Crises*

Citizens, the governments that purport to represent them, and non-governmental organizations working in the realms of food, hunger, energy, and environment all deserve and need to understand the causal role of meat-dairy-egg production in the emergencies of our times, as outlined in the “background” section above.

Actions may be taken by individuals or organizations, as follows:

- Credible organizations<sup>4</sup> can prepare briefings for elected officials, release reports to news agencies, and educate other NGOs on the issues.
- Individuals can write letters to newspapers and magazines whenever a relevant news article appears; call or write their elected representatives; educate the leadership of any charities to which they contribute; and seize every opportunity to casually educate neighbors, coworkers, friends, and family members.
- Organizations that prefer an educational approach can prepare leaflets or other educational handouts to be distributed at points of high interest in the issues, such as gas stations or grocery

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4. By “credible organizations,” I mean organizations likely to be respected by the recipient of the report or briefing. This is not to say that other organizations ought not to be believed, simply that this tactic is most effective when practiced by organizations likely to be respected by news media, elected officials, and mainstream NGOs.

stores. Such handouts ought to be made available online, so that unaffiliated activists can download and use them too.

- Individual activists who prefer an educational approach can leaflet with, mail out, and find other creative uses for materials made available by organizations.
- Activists and organizations preferring a more flamboyant approach might stage demonstrations illustrating the waste involved in animal agriculture, the role of animal agriculture in climate change, or other salient facts.
- Activists and collectives preferring a more direct approach can figure out their own ways to make the same points.

#### *Actions Intended to Further Drive Down Demand for Meat-Milk-Eggs*

Ongoing efforts to promote veganism ought to be both stepped up and pitched to the current context. Additional efforts, including campaigns targeted to the current crisis, also ought to be initiated. Ongoing and new efforts may be broken down into two categories: (1) those that stress the hazards or drawbacks of meat-milk-egg consumption; and (2) those that stress the benefits of veganism. In order to be most effective, both types ought to be paired with “how to” information that is both timely and easy to understand. Now, more than ever, the mistaken perception of veganism as a costly luxury lifestyle must be proactively countered by a multifaceted outflow of information demonstrating the ease and cost-effectiveness of veganism. In order to be most fully true, such information ought to be accompanied by efforts to increase access to fresh vegetables, fruit, and bulk grains in lower-income neighborhoods.

Actions may be taken by individuals or organizations, as follows:

- Credible organizations<sup>5</sup> can send out press briefings touting the cost-effectiveness and health benefits of a vegetarian<sup>6</sup> diet.
- National organizations can prepare new handouts touting veganism as a low-cost lifestyle, making sure that these are freely available to nonaffiliated activists.
- Individuals already leafleting with materials such as “Why Vegan?” ought to make reference to low cost in the context of ever-higher food prices while engaging in dialogue with members of the public.
- New leafleting efforts ought to be initiated outside of grocery stores. Handouts may be left in the free literature section (usually stocked with recipes and ads) found in many grocery stores.
- Brochures and leaflets stressing the cost-effectiveness of veganism and giving practical tips on eating well and cheaply ought to be regularly left in laundromats, bus stations, and other places frequented by poor and working class people. These handouts must be actually useful.

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5. Again, “credible” here means likely to be believed by the targets of the communication.

6. Given the unfamiliarity of the word “vegan,” it may be most effective to say “completely vegetarian” in order not to obscure the main message by taking a detour to teach a new word.

- Grassroots organizations can initiate or join local campaigns for farmer’s markets, community gardens, and other programs intended to increase access to healthy vegan food for urban and low-income people. National organizations can support or fund such local efforts.
- Individuals can write letters to editors whenever relevant news articles appear; can find creative uses for handouts prepared by organizations; and can talk to friends, relatives, coworkers, neighbors, and others about the economic and health benefits of veganism. Those who like to share food as part of their personal promotion of veganism ought to remember to regularly exclaim about the low cost of the food.
- Individuals and organizations preferring a more demonstrative approach can find creative ways — such as free community picnics or more dramatic events — to illustrate the cheap nutritiousness of vegan food in an attention-catching or memorable manner.
- Organizations ought to publicize and share not only handouts but reports of such events, in order that all might benefit from local bursts of creativity.

*Actions Intended to Make Meat-Milk-Egg Production Less Profitable*

Industrial meat-milk-egg production is a capital-intensive enterprise. Investors provide capital, demanding profit in return. Profits require that costs be lower than prices. Higher feed costs have already significantly lowered profit margins and driven some operations out of business. Any further increases in costs or decreases in investment would be likely to drive more operations out of business.

Costs might be raised by means of environmental, labor, or health regulations — all of which begin to be costly as soon as they are proposed (because the producers must spend money to fight them) and become even more costly when implemented. Other, more direct, means such as “monkey wrenching” and nonviolent civil disobedience also may be used to raise costs.

Some actions, such as picketing outside of a meat-milk-egg production facility, might raise costs (extra security guards) while also serving an educational function (press coverage of the reason for the protest.) Actions taken by individuals, such as urging investors to fund green enterprises that do not waste world food resources, might also serve both material and educational aims.

**Conclusion**

Factory farming exploits and kills billions of animals annually. It is possible to intervene in suffering on this scale but only if strategic actions are taken cooperatively and collectively within an accurate understanding of the political and economic conditions that enable the exploitation. Because factory farms are for-profit businesses, it is possible to bring them down by making them less profitable. When consumption drops as production costs rise, profit declines.

Now — right now — economic circumstances are such that it may be possible to significantly decrease the profitability of animal agriculture. All out, then, to grocery stores and gas stations with leaflets; to factory farms with picket signs and costly regulations; and to our allies in other movements with the facts they need to join us in this effort. Don’t wait. Don’t hesitate. Go!