Open Letter on the Value of Animal Agriculture

How livestock is supporting global nutrition, high standards of food safety and public health during the Covid-19 pandemic

The coronavirus crisis has brought into focus the incredible public health challenge our world faces, and nowhere is this challenge more apparent than in food production. Nourishing the world during this crisis is a top priority across nations.

**Our world needs the contributions of livestock.** Globally, 1.3 billion people depend on livestock for their employment, while billions more rely on livestock to provide food for their families. Animal agriculture provides milk, meat, fish and eggs at a time when access to safe, nutritious and affordable food is necessary to fend off a potential global hunger crisis, and offers invaluable support for farmers facing severe, often existential, economic hardships.

The precise origin of Covid-19 remains under investigation, but ongoing research continues to confirm that **domestic livestock production is safe and has not played a role in the spread of Covid-19.** Current evidence points to a journey from wild animals to humans, which aligns with research showing most zoonotic diseases originate in wildlife.

However, some are making unfounded claims that livestock and modern agriculture were somehow the source of the pandemic. This threatens to distract the global public health response at a time when **animal agriculture can offer lessons for wildlife zoonosis management** as part of the long-term pandemic preparedness.

For example, **livestock diseases are monitored globally** to help prevent them from spreading across borders the way that Covid-19 has done, and advances in farm and facility practices, animal nutrition, veterinary diagnostics and medicine mean many zoonotic diseases, such as *Salmonella*, are well managed in most economies. Using these learnings to develop more robust early warning systems for wildlife could enhance our ability to detect emerging diseases.

Importantly, **livestock production is a regulated, monitored system with food safety and public health at its core.** Even in the face of unprecedented challenges, farms and food facilities are taking every precaution possible to keep employees as safe as possible and fulfill their critical roles in our food supply, while producers continue to rely on biosecurity, hygiene, vaccination, and other tools to control animal disease.

The knowledge and expertise of the livestock sector can help strengthen the global Covid-19 response and tackle the growing risk of nutrition insecurity.

**We urge authorities, intergovernmental groups, and NGOs to support these efforts by:**

- **Reaffirming the safety of livestock production** and reminding consumers of our robust food safety system, including the important role of veterinarians and animal nutrition.
- **Refuting misinformation** that tries to manufacture a link between livestock and the spread of Covid-19.
- **Consulting with livestock experts, including farmers and other stakeholders in the feed and food chain** to understand how to aid their efforts to feed communities.

During this pandemic, livestock farms and the value chain are working tirelessly to ensure we have safe and affordable food to eat and drink. It’s vital that society supports these efforts and tap into their knowledge to build a more resilient world in the future.

*See Next Page for Signatories*
This letter is undersigned by the following organisations and individuals:

**International Signatories**

- Dr. Daniel Bercovici
  Chairman
  International Feed Industry Federation
- Donald Moore
  Executive Director
  Global Dairy Platform
- Guillaume Roué
  President
  International Meat Secretariat
- Dr. Jimmy Smith
  Director General
  International Livestock Research Institute
- Dr. Judith Bryans
  President
  International Dairy Federation
- Dr. Patricia Turner
  President
  World Veterinary Association
- Rick White
  Chair
  International Agri-food Network
- Robin Horel
  President
  International Poultry Council
- Serge Leterme
  Chairman
  Diagnostics for Animals
- Carel du Marchie Sarvaas
  Executive Director
  HealthforAnimals

**European Signatories**

- Dr. Anders Karlsson
  Head of Department
  Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences
- Prof. Andrew Peters
  Program Director, Supporting Evidence Based Interventions (SEBI), Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Studies University of Edinburgh
- Birthe Steenberg
  AVEC
  Secretary General
- Dr. Daniella Dos Santos
  President
  British Veterinary Association
- Dawn Howard
  Chief Executive
  National Office of Animal Health
- Dr. Dirk-Jan de Koning
  Professor in Animal Breeding
  Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences
- Prof. dr. ir. Frédéric Leroy
  Professor of Food Science and Biotechnology
  Vrije Universiteit Brussel
- Dr. Jana Picoka
  Professor
  Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences
Jean-Louis Hunault
Président
SIMV

Dr. Jude Capper, CEO
Livestock Sustainability Consultancy

Karsten Maier
Secretary General
European Livestock and Meat Trades Union

Dr. Mario Estevez
Associate Professor
University of Extremadura

Dr. Michael Lee
Professor of Sustainable Livestock Systems, University of Bristol and Head of Sustainable Agriculture Sciences – North Wyke, Rothamsted

Minette Batters
President
National Farmers Union of England and Wales

Alexander Döring
Secretary General
European Feed Manufacturers’ Federation

Prof Nigel Scollan
Director, Institute of Global Food Security, Queen’s University Belfast

Pekka Pesonen
Secretary General
Copa-Cogeca

Dr. Philip Skuce
Principal Scientist, Moredun Research Institute
KE Sector Lead for Livestock, SEFARI

Roxane Feller
Secretary General
AnimalhealthEurope

Dr. Stefaan De Smet
Professor, Department of Animal Sciences and Aquatic Ecology, University of Ghent

Dr. Ulf Emanuelson
Professor
Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences

**US and Canadian Signatories**

Allan Ribbink
Chairman
Canadian Sheep Federation

Alexander Mathews
President and CEO
Animal Health Institute

Benoit Fontaine
Chairman
Chicken Farmers of Canada

Brian Bilkes
Chair
Canadian Hatching Egg Producers

Catharine Perry
Executive Director
American Dairy Science Association

Chad Gregory
President and CEO
United Egg Producers
Paul Zajicek  
Executive Director  
National Aquaculture Association

Dr. Richard Raymond  
Former United States Department of Agriculture  
Undersecretary for Food Safety

Dr. Robert Hagevoort  
Co-Founder and Director of Development, U.S. Dairy Education and Training Consortium

Roger Pelissero  
Chair  
Egg Farmers of Canada

Ryan Greir  
Chair  
National Sheep Network

Scott Helps  
Chair  
Egg Farmers of Ontario

Dr. Shanna L. Ivey  
Ph.D., Department Head, Professor, New Mexico State University, Departments of Animal and Range Sciences and Extension Animal Science and Natural Resources

Dr. Yvonne Thaxter  
Professor Emeritus, Director of the Center for Food Animal Wellbeing, University of Arkansas

New Zealand Signatories

Prof. Pablo Gregorini  
Professor of Livestock Production  
Lincoln University Pastoral  
Livestock Production Lab

*Endorsement of this letter by academic signatories does not necessarily reflect the views of their institutions

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6 https://www.nature.com/articles/nature06536
8 Professor Peters views do not necessarily represent the views of the University of Edinburgh