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EMISSIONS OF EUROPE'S 20 BIGGEST MEAT AND DAIRY CORPORATIONS OUTSTRIP THE NETHERLANDS

European Commission plans for agriculture offset schemes will give companies free pass to continue polluting

BERLIN/MINNEAPOLIS—The emissions of Europe's 20 biggest meat and dairy corporations — including Danish Crown, Nestlé, Danone, Tönnies, FrieslandCampina, and Coren — outstrip countries such as the Netherlands and Denmark, yet only three companies have committed to reduce their overall emissions from livestock, reveals new research from the [Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy](https://www.iatp.org/) (IATP) today.

The report is being launched ahead of the European Commission Communication on “sustainable carbon cycles” set to come out the week of December 13. A [leaked version](#) sets out a framework for expanding questionable carbon offset schemes for agriculture that include soil carbon and the use of public funds to bolster unaccountable voluntary carbon markets. The Commission also plans to expand the production of biogas from manure through the Renewable Energy Directive.

Emissions Impossible Europe: How Europe's Big Meat and Dairy are heating up the planet calculates that the emissions of the 35 largest meat and dairy companies are equivalent to nearly 7% of the EU's total emissions in 2018. It reveals:

- The 20 biggest meat and dairy companies produce almost one-third (131%) more greenhouse gas emissions than the Netherlands, the 6th largest economy in Europe and almost five times as much as Denmark (492%).
- The combined emissions of the 20 biggest companies equal nearly all of Italian oil giant Eni's emissions, and are equivalent to 60% of the emissions of French fossil fuel corporation, Total.
- Seven out of 10 companies that were tracked over time saw their climate footprint grow between 2016 and 2018. The emissions of Irish beef producer ABP increased by 45% and Germany's Tönnies, which supplies Aldi, by 30%.

Shefali Sharma, European director at the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy said, “The climate footprint of Europe's big meat and dairy companies rival the fossil fuel giants, yet they continue to operate with impunity. The handful of companies that have climate plans rely on accounting tricks, greenwash and dubious offsets to distract from the fundamental changes needed to cut emissions, while offloading many of the costs and risks onto farmers in their supply chains.”

Analysis of the climate targets and plans of the 20 biggest companies revealed six key approaches — none involve a shift to agroecological farming or the production of less and better meat and dairy which offer the greatest potential to cut emissions.

- **Offsetting emissions:** Companies such as Danone and Arla, which produces Castello cheese, plan to offset their emissions through practices that impermanently lock carbon in the soil. Carbon is quickly released when the soil is disturbed or due to floods, drought and fire. Many companies including Nestlé, Danish Crown and Dutch meat processor Vion plan to offset part of their emissions by converting animal manure into so-called “biogas.”

- **Greenwash:** Many companies claim to reduce emissions through ill-defined “regenerative farming practices,” which purport to create healthier soils. Companies invest relatively little in these practices and offload the bulk of the cost and risk onto farmers. Danone’s funding for regenerative agriculture amounts to just one day of its annual sales turnover, while Nestlé’s was equivalent to 1.8% of its 2018 sales revenue.
- **Under-reporting:** Only four companies report emissions from their entire supply chain even though livestock production accounts for 90% of their emissions. Half the companies provide no emissions data including France’s Groupe Bigard, which produces Charal meats, and all six of German companies such as Tönnies, Westfleisch and Müller.
- **Fudging the targets:** Only Nestlé, FrieslandCampina and ABP commit to an overall reduction in livestock emissions, yet even frontrunner, Nestlé, only aims for a 4% cut by 2030. Six companies, including Groupe Sodiaal, which makes Entremont cheese and Yoplait yogurt, aim to reduce the emissions produced per kilo of meat or litre of milk — allowing them to expand production and their overall climate footprint. Ten companies have no targets including Spain’s Coren Group and Italian beef producer Inalca.
- **Unproven tech-fixes:** Virtually all the companies that have climate plans, including Danish Crown and Ireland’s Dawn Meats, which supplies McDonald’s, plan to use animal feed supplements to cut methane emissions from cow burps despite uncertainty about their effectiveness. A U.K./Swiss company, Mootral, is already offering “cow credits” to offset airline emissions.

Animal farming is responsible for 17% of Europe’s emissions and rose by 6% between 2007 and 2018. Ten countries — Germany, France, Spain, Poland, Italy, Netherlands, Denmark, Ireland, Belgium and the U.K. — produce the majority of Europe’s meat and dairy. Beef and pork exports increased by over 10% and poultry by 38% between 2005 and 2018 leading to a steady increase in meat and dairy production and emissions.

The report also found that Europe’s five biggest poultry companies, including the U.K.-headquartered 2 Sisters Food Group, which owns Bernard Matthews, have failed to set climate targets despite being major consumers of animal feed. Feed is a key source of emissions from livestock farming, in part because its production is linked to deforestation.

“The European Commission will be handing big meat and dairy corporations an early Christmas present if it throws its weight — and taxpayers’ money — behind dubious soil carbon offsets and continues to promote biogas from industrial livestock facilities as a sustainable fuel. The Commission should stop financing industrial agriculture and support the transition to sustainable agroecological farming practices based on less and better meat. It should also put rules in place to regenerate rural economies and provide decent work in the food sector,” added Sharma.

Andoni Garcia Arriola, a farmer in the Basque country and European coordinator of Via Campesina: “For the agricultural sector to participate in climate change mitigation we need concrete support for the activities of small and medium-sized farms, action to encourage more people — especially young people — to start farming and more support for an agroecological approach to farming. The incentives given to agribusiness are counterproductive to the climate emergency in which we find ourselves.”

Notes to editor

The report, including the methodology note and annexes, is available [here](#). The full *Emissions Impossible* series is available [here](#).

Emissions estimates are based on the latest available livestock production data *at the time of calculation*: Dairy figures are for 2017, beef and pork for 2018 and poultry for 2019. More recent data is now available for some sectors. Dataset 1 is available [here](#), and Dataset 2 is available [here](#).

The report calculates the emissions of the 10 biggest beef, pork, poultry and dairy producers in Europe — a total of 35 companies as several companies are among the top 10 producers of beef and pork.

The climate plans of the 20 biggest meat and dairy companies were assessed including:

- Dairy: Lactalis, Danone Bongrain/Savencia, Groupe Sodiaal (France), Arla Food (Denmark), Nestlé (Switzerland), FrieslandCampina (Netherlands), Müller Gruppe, Deutsches Milchkontor DMK (Germany).
- Beef/pork: Danish Crown (Denmark), Tönnies and Westfleisch (Germany), Vion Food Group (Netherlands), Glanbia Group and ABP Food Group (Ireland), Groupe Bigard (France), Coren Group (Spain), JV Dawn Meat and Dunbia, INALCA and Pini Group (Italy).

The climate plans of the five biggest poultry companies were also assessed including: LDC (France), Plukon Food Group (Netherlands), Gruppo Veronesi (Italy), PHW Group (Germany) and 2 Sisters Food Group (U.K.).

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Based in Minneapolis with offices in Washington, D.C., and Berlin, Germany, the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy works locally and globally at the intersection of policy and practice to ensure fair and sustainable food, farm and trade systems. To learn more, visit: www.iatp.org.