

FOOD, NATURE, ANIMALS, AND US

WHAT OUR MEAT CONSUMPTION HAS
TO DO WITH ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEMS



Industrial meat production is environmentally damaging and wastes natural resources. It turns farms into factories and damages rural life – small-scale sustainable farmers suffer under increasing price pressure since industrial meat production turns animals into commodities sold cheaply in supermarkets. Factory animals are over-bred, often kept in poor conditions and are treated violently. This is bad for animals, human health, small scale sustainable farmers and the environment. Here’s an overview of the most important figures!

Meat consumption in Europe

Although more people are reducing their meat consumption or becoming vegetarians, meat is still a popular food product in Europe. Despite a recent decline, meat consumption remains extremely high. The average per-capita consumption of meat in the European Union is around 69 kilos a year. Pork is people’s first preference with 32 kilos a year consumed per person, followed by 24 kg of poultry, 11 kg of beef and veal and 2 kg of sheep and goat meat. And this despite the fact that the number of vegetarians is increasing. The average EU citizen eats twice as much meat as the quantity recommended by health experts. It would be healthier & better for the environment to cut meat consumption by half – meaning a weekly intake of 300–600 grams.

HOW MUCH MEAT DO WE EAT?

Pork is the most widely-consumed meat in the EU – we eat **30 kilos** of it a year on average.

The average EU citizen eats **69 kilos** of **meat** a year.

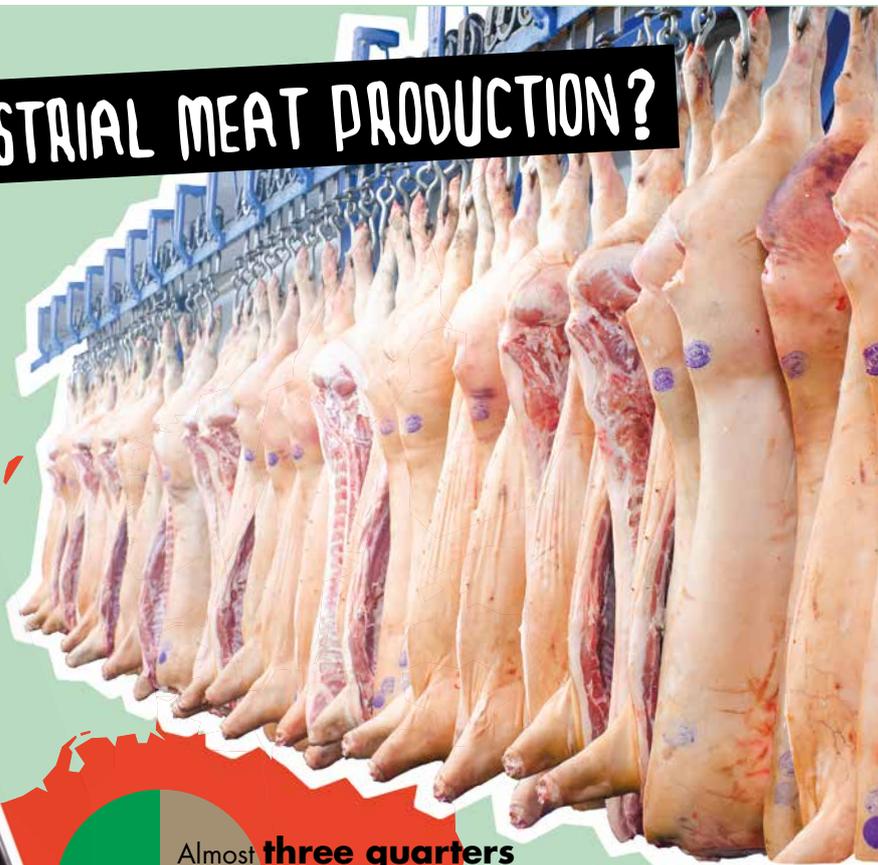
Men eat **twice as much** meat as women.

The recommended maximum is between **15 and 30 kilos** of meat a year, or between 300 and 600 grams a week.

The number of **vegetarians** in the EU is increasing. The largest numbers of vegetarians in European countries are found in Italy, Austria, Germany, and the UK.

WHO CONTROLS INDUSTRIAL MEAT PRODUCTION?

The **Danish Crown group** is among the **largest meat processing companies** globally: the world's largest pork exporter and Europe's largest pork processor



Almost **three quarters** (72.2 per cent) of the animals in the EU in 2013 were reared **on very large farms**.

Since 2005 the total number of animals reared **on very small farms more than halved**

More than quarter (27.5 per cent) of all farms in the European Union **closed down** between 2003 and 2013, 96 per cent of those had less than 10 hectares.



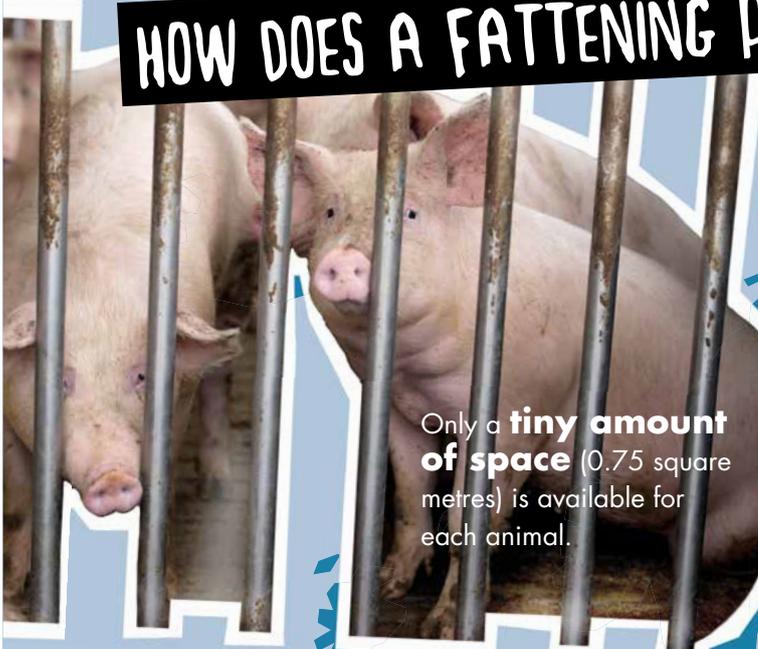
Factory farms and meat industry versus small scale sustainable farms

A few international corporations are gaining ever-increasing control over global intensive meat production. The meat sector is doubly concentrated as companies are getting bigger through mergers and acquisitions – expanding across borders and across species – and production itself is intensifying, so that more and more animals are housed together to be grown and slaughtered as quickly as possible.

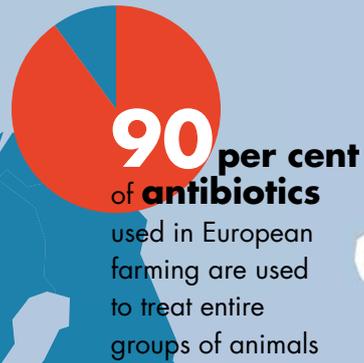
In Europe different companies operate in different countries. In France Cooperl Arc Atlantique and Groupe Bigard are the biggest processing companies. Cooperl Arc Atlan-

tique breeds, slaughters and sells pigs, with branches in Beijing and Moscow. Groupe Bigard owns half of all the slaughterhouses in France. It processes beef, mutton, and pork. The Danish Crown group is among the largest meat processing companies globally. They are the world's largest pork exporter and Europe's largest pork processor, as well as the largest meat processing company in Denmark. At the same time 72.2 per cent of the animals in the EU in 2013 were reared on very large farms in a major shift away from small businesses. By contrast, the total number of animals reared on very small farms more than halved since 2005. 96 per cent of the farms lost between 2003 and 2013 were smaller than 10 hectares.

HOW DOES A FATTENING PIG LIVE?

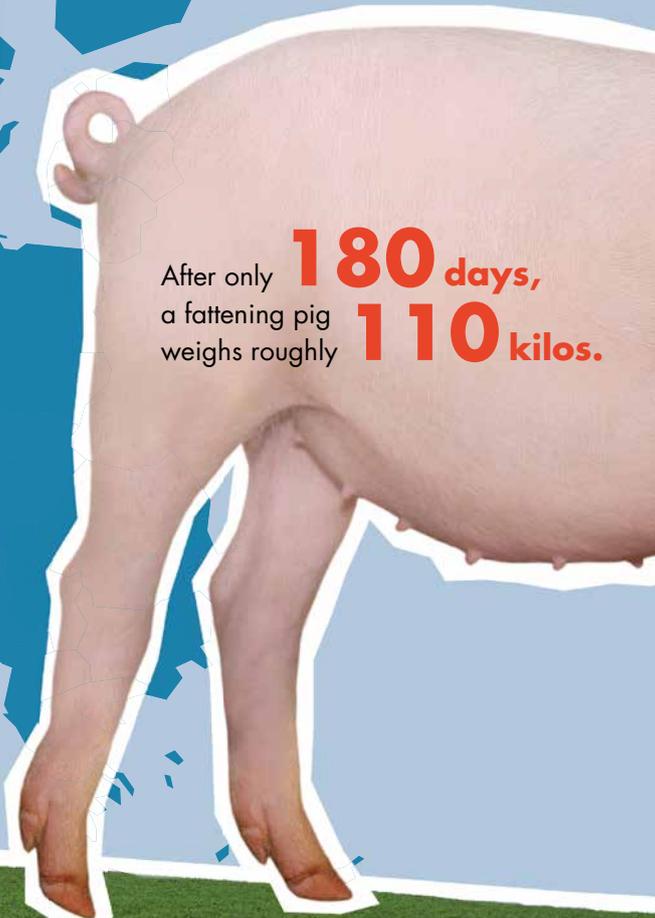


Only a **tiny amount of space** (0.75 square metres) is available for each animal.



Around **75** per cent of all pigs are kept in groups larger than **1,000 animals**; in **Denmark**, the average stock size even amounts to over **3,000 pigs**

After only **180** days, a fattening pig weighs roughly **110** kilos.



Photos: © istockphoto.com/Riccardo_Majano, TYNZA - brandholding

Farming conditions in factory farms

Can you believe it? Almost 148 million pigs are reared in the European Union, and the numbers are rising. Usually pigs are kept using intensive farming methods – this means they are supposed to increase their weight as quickly as possible. They are mostly fed a high-protein feed, the main ingredient of which is often soy. There's little space to move freely, and nothing to keep them busy, such as straw through which they could dig. Crammed into confined spaces, they often injure themselves. In order to prevent this, the piglets' tails are docked (cut off) and their teeth are clipped right after birth. Although this practice has been banned for many

years, it is still used in numerous places.

These farming conditions make the pigs sick, and so they're given large amounts of antibiotics. The antibiotics used in animal farming varies between European countries. In the EU, 99 per cent of veterinary antimicrobial agents sold are used for livestock. Group medication is used mainly in poultry and pig factory farms. The EU countries using the most antibiotics in animal farming are Spain, Portugal, Italy, Germany, Denmark.

This practice leads to the emergence of antibiotic resistance. When antibiotics become ineffective, this not only affects the animals, but us human beings too.

Environmental pollution arising from meat production

Intensive animal farming creates enormous amounts of liquid manure, which pollutes the groundwater with nitrates. In Malta and Germany the ground water data is especially alarming. In Catalonia (Spain), nitrate pollution exceeds the regulatory limit (50 milligrams per litre) in 41 per cent of groundwater tables, and nitrate pollution has led to problems with access to drinking water in 142 of the region's 947 municipalities.

Due to high levels of pollution, water treatment can become very expensive. Our high levels of industrial meat

consumption also use up resources we cannot see when looking at the meat on our plates. The production of one kilo of pig meat requires between 9 and 12 square metres of agricultural land, 5,990 litres of drinking water, 650 grams of soy feed, and emits 3,525 grams of carbon dioxide equivalents (the measure for the standardisation of the climatic effects of different greenhouse gases). In contrast to animal foods, plant-based foods cause far less harmful greenhouse gases. At the same time, our meat consumption goes hand-in-hand with a demand for large areas of agricultural land: one third of the farmland worldwide is solely used for growing animal feed crops.

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WHAT IS THE PRICE OF CHEAP MEAT?

By way of comparison: the production of **one kilo of potatoes** requires **1.4 square metres** of agricultural land and **210 litres** of water, and causes **199 grams** of carbon dioxide equivalents.

In 2010, the land footprint of a German citizen was equal to **2,700 square metres of farmland**, half of which is used to produce animal foods, one quarter for plant foods, and one quarter for non-food products (e.g. energy, cosmetics etc.).

Too much liquid manure resulting from intensive farming is applied to farmland. This pollutes the groundwater with nitrates.

Water treatment can become **very expensive** due to high levels of groundwater pollution.

WHAT IS SOY PRODUCED FOR?



5 per cent for food products such as tofu, soy sauce, or miso paste



15 per cent for industrial products, e.g. oils for margarine, frying fats, or cosmetics

WHERE IS SOY PRODUCED?



The US, Brazil, and Argentina are the main producing and exporting countries.

The soybean plant originally comes from Asia.

Soybean plants require warm and humid conditions to grow, preferably at temperatures between 24 and 34 degrees Celsius.

Feed imports used in animal farming

More than 120 million hectares of land are used for growing soybeans. The EU imports nearly all its soybeans from South and North America, with the country of origin dependent on the current price and trading conditions. The global increase in meat consumption requires ever-more land for growing soybeans and leads to increasing deforestation of tropical forests.

Soybeans are mostly grown as a monoculture. This often involves the use of large amounts of agrochemicals, that is, chemical fertilisers, insecticides and herbicides such as glyphosate, which not only damage nature but are also

linked to serious health problems such as cancer.

Most of the soybeans grown in South America and in the USA are genetically modified. The main purpose of genetic manipulation is to make the soybeans resilient to chemical sprays, mainly glyphosate, or to contain insecticides to kill bugs that eat the crops. As GM animal feeds are exempt from labelling laws in the EU, we are indirectly consuming large amounts through the meat, cheese, and eggs we eat.

Land use and climatic effects

Animal farming is one of the main causes of climate change and generates around 18 per cent of greenhouse gas emissions worldwide depending on the methodology used to calculate it. Among them are direct emissions such as methane arising from the animals, as well as emissions from feed production. Farmland used for growing soy as animal feed, and cattle pastures created by converting semi-natural grasslands or forests contribute significantly to climate change. Moreover, soy production involves long transport routes. Since 1965, global meat production has almost quadrupled, increasing from 84 to 335 million tons.

Likewise, per-capita global consumption has increased by around 73 per cent, rising from 25.2 kilos in 1965 to an estimated 43.7 kilos in 2018.

Industrial meat consumption thus causes intact forest regions to shrink. Tropical forests are cleared and converted into temporary cattle pastures. Later the land is converted into soybean fields, while the pastures are relocated to other regions, leading to new deforestation. Soybean acreage has reached a size of 120 million hectares worldwide. According to projections, soy production will cover an area of 141 million hectares in 2050 if the current trends in meat consumption are allowed to continue.

HOW MANY RESOURCES DO WE USE?



73 per cent of EU's land footprint (196 million ha) was associated with the consumption of animal products in 2010; **81 million ha** of those were due to meat.



The EU imports **36.1** million tonnes of soybeans and soy meal each year.



Animal farming generates **18** per cent of greenhouse gas emissions worldwide and is one of the main causes of global warming.



Europe's agricultural industry depends on **soy**. More than **40** per cent of **plant proteins** used in the EU come from soybeans.

Soybean acreage has reached a size of 120 hectares worldwide. If meat consumption continues to increase, soy production will, according to projections, cover an area of 141 million hectares by 2050.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Two part-time vegetarians make a full-time vegetarian

Planning to cut down on animal products? Why not do it together! Cutting meat consumption by half is something you can do as a family, or with friends or colleagues.

Try out alternatives

Try to cook your own meals together with friends or family. Fast food often contains meat the origin of which is unclear. Or try vegetarian/vegan dishes once in a while. Instead of meat, use other protein sources such as legumes like beans, chickpeas, lentils or soy (e.g. in the form of tofu products). In many cities there are vegetarian/vegan cooking classes, where you can learn more about healthy eating. Some youth groups also come together to cook or bake.

Change your buying habits

When eating meat, make sure it's from pasture-raised animals rather than factory farms. The best option is to buy meat from local organic farms. Boycott meat sold in supermarkets and try to buy it from local markets, cooperatives, or through a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) group. Why not even try visiting farms near you which

produce sustainably, and witnessing how the animals are raised? Try not to buy more than you actually eat. Every year a staggering 18 million tons of food is thrown away.

Convince others

Don't get discouraged: inform others about what you've learned, and start discussions on how much meat is enough.

You can also get together with others to try and establish a veggie day in your lunch room, cafeteria or canteen, or to suggest a shift to local organic food. Maybe there's somebody in your friend group or office who's willing to help?

Ask politicians to stop factory farming and support sustainable, small-scale animal husbandry

Use your democratic power to tell your local, national, and EU representatives that you don't want factory farms in Europe. You can do this by voting for parties who are against factory farms and support small-scale sustainable farms, as well as by participating in protests, and writing to/meeting politicians. The European Good Food, Good Farming Days of action are a good place to start if you want to take action and join a movement for sustainable agriculture. If policy's your thing, follow and have your say in political debates such as on the EU's water framework directive or, reform of the Common Agricultural Policy. Politicians are there to serve citizens and we need to show them that we don't want factory farms.

ABOUT US

Friends of the Earth Europe is the largest grassroots environmental network in Europe, uniting more than 30 national organisations with thousands of local groups. We campaign on today's most urgent environmental and social issues. We challenge the current model of economic and corporate globalization, and promote solutions that will

help to create environmentally sustainable and socially just societies. We promote environmentally sustainable societies on the local, national, regional and global levels. We work towards environmental, social, economic and political justice and equal access to resources and opportunities on the local, national, regional and international levels.

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