

## **An interview of Henning Steinfeld, chief of livestock information and policy analysis at the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)**

### **1) In 2011, FAO launched a Global Agenda of Action for livestock. What are the main objectives?**

I would like to clarify first that the process of building a Global Agenda of Action for a sustainable livestock sector development was initiated by a varied group of stakeholders from the sector in 2010. The resultant multi-stakeholder initiative targets improved natural resource use and sustainable growth in a comprehensive sense. FAO facilitates consultation and aims to catalyze action but the Agenda is owned by all its stakeholders, of which FAO is just one.

The purpose of the Agenda is to inform and guide the sustainable development of the sector. The livestock sector is facing numerous complex and interrelated problems: it needs, for example, to reconcile strong demand growth for livestock products with finite natural resources; it also needs to protect livelihoods and public health. The Agenda's objective is to lead to practice changes to ensure a more efficient use of natural resources such as land, nutrients, water and to lower greenhouse gas emission intensity while supporting livelihoods, long-term food security and economic growth. These efficiency gains can be attained through a combination of research and development, capacity building, policy and institutional change, and investments.

### **2) What practical outcome does FAO expect from the project for Europe and for France, for example?**

Once again, FAO is just one of the Agenda's stakeholders. The main outcome of this multi-stakeholder initiative will be a more efficient use of natural resources, globally. For Europe and France specifically, engaging in the sustainable livestock agenda can help build consumer confidence in the sector, as environmental issues are becoming ever more prominent. Secondly, in the longer term, the Agenda could also contribute to a leveling of the playing field globally through the harmonization of policies. Europe can also provide many sector policy and governance lessons, and has much to offer in science and technology related to sustainable livestock production.

### **3) What is the precise relationship between the Livestock Global Agenda and the public - private cooperation undertaken by the FAO in the context of the LCA partnership?**

The two multi-stakeholder initiatives focus on similar issues and are complementary. The Partnership, however, has a much narrower and more technical focus: the joint development of broadly recognized guidelines for measuring and monitoring the environmental impact of the livestock sector. Better assessment of the environmental impact of the sector are a necessary first step to reduce its impacts and to address its sustainability. The outputs from the Partnership feed directly into the work of the Agenda which focuses on the more efficient use of natural resources, and deals with the entire range of technical, policy and institutional issues that need to be addressed for practice change to occur. While the purpose of the Partnership is methodology development, the Agenda aims to achieve practice change.

<http://www.fao.org/ag/againfo/livestock-benchmarking/livestock-partnership/en/>

<http://www.livestockdialogue.org/>

**4) What does FAO consider to be the principal challenge for the EU livestock sector over the next 10 years?**

The EU livestock sector faces several challenges. The sector, for example, needs to address growing environmental concerns while maintaining the sector competitiveness. Emerging health issues and food safety are other continuing challenges, whilst the CAP reform needs to review its subsidy system with a view on sustainable resource use and to ensure a level playing field. Europe also needs to address its dependency on the import of vegetable protein feeds and look for alternative sources within Europe.

**5) For the ruminant sector specifically?**

The challenge of reconciling environmental performance whilst ensuring production system remain competitive is more acute for the ruminant meat sector. Under current conditions, the ruminant meat sector is inherently less efficient in its use of natural resources. Its carbon footprint is also much higher than that of other livestock production sectors. Higher beef prices, have also triggered a reduction in consumer demand. However the sector is realizing that producing less doesn't necessarily mean earning less. In addition, ruminants production systems have a key role to play in the management of marginal lands and the concomitant provision of ecosystem services.

**6) Does FAO work with EU institutions / agencies on this subject?**

FAO is part of the EC-funded Animal Change project which is developing climate mitigation and adaptation options for the livestock sector. In this context FAO works with major European research centers, the European Commission Joint Research Center (JRC) and the European Commission Environment and Agriculture Directorates General. In the framework of the multi-stakeholder partnership on the environmental benchmarking of livestock supply chains, FAO works with France, Ireland and The Netherlands. The European Commission, EU member states and numerous EU-based organizations and agencies are members of the Agenda's multi-stakeholder platform.

**7) Since the Livestock's Long Shadow report was published, it has received extensive media coverage, particularly the figures concerning the contribution of livestock to the GHG global emissions. However these figures fail to accurately reflect the complexity and multi-functionality of livestock, both in the EU and worldwide. Does FAO have any specific concerns about the way communicating on the subject occurs, and do you believe that the information could be better transmitted e.g. by preventing the dissemination of misleading information?**

The publication of the Livestock's Long Shadow report led to a passionate and emotional debate. Our figures have sometimes been misused or misreported by some interest groups. However what ultimately matters to us is to create the conditions for a constructive dialogue among stakeholders and to catalyze action towards practice change. Many producers and business have quickly understood that resource use

improvement does not only help the environment, but also makes economic sense and they have made sustainability part of their business models. We are much encouraged by this.

The 18% figure which represents the sector's contribution to the total emission of greenhouse gases (GHG) was the best available estimate at that time. This figure is an aggregation of widely different livestock production systems, from high-tech, climate controlled and automated "mass" production, to extensive grazing and scavenging systems. We are very aware of this diversity of production conditions. This is why we have worked on the production of disaggregated figures by region, sector, production systems, agro-ecological zones, etc. In 2010, FAO released a first report on the GHG emissions from the dairy sector. Two other similar reports, on the emissions from the cattle and small ruminants supply chains and from the pig and chicken supply chain, respectively, will be released in the coming weeks. A summary report will present the key findings of the three sector specific reports and provide an update of the livestock sector contribution to total GHG emissions. This updated figure will probably not be fundamentally different from the 18% estimated in 2006.

**8) What is your perception of cattle and sheep farming in France? Negative / positive impacts?**

I would prefer not to comment on a country's specific situation.

**9) Do you think it is important to integrate ecological services of livestock such as carbon sequestration to environmental evaluation? And how could it be integrated to FAO work?**

Yes, it is important. The potential to sequester carbon through changes in grassland management practices or through the rehabilitation of degraded grasslands is substantial. The IPCC estimates that carbon sequestration in grasslands represents 70% of the livestock sectors' total mitigation potential.

'Restoring value to grasslands' is also one of the focus areas of the Global Agenda of Action which aims to assess the global carbon sequestration potential and to develop reliable and affordable methodologies and institutional models to measure and monetize carbon sequestration in grasslands. FAO has already made progress in this area and submitted, last year, a new methodology called *Methodology for Sustainable Grassland Management* for validation to the Verified Carbon Standard Programme. The new methodology is currently being tested on a pilot project in China.

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