



Global warming: less meat = less heat

Everyone can fight climate change by not eating meat one day a week, urged Sir Paul McCartney at a European Parliament public hearing on "Global Warming and Food Policy: Less Meat = Less Heat" on Thursday. The panel of global warming and food policy experts, including Chairman of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Dr Rajendra K. Pachauri, urged legislators to encourage people to do more individually to fight climate change.

Livestock account for 18% of total greenhouse gas emissions, which is double the share of transport, according to the 2006 UN Food and Agriculture Organisation report "Livestock's Long Shadow". Many speakers also highlighted the inefficiency of producing meat, rather than crops, to feed the world.

Less meat = better health

"Time is against us. We need a global binding agreement in Copenhagen, and Europe has taken the lead. We call on developed countries to significantly reduce their emissions collectively - at the high end of the 25-40 % range by 2020", said European Parliament President Jerzy Buzek, who opened the hearing. The "Meat free Monday" campaign, founded by Sir Paul McCartney, "is a good idea, as the impact on the climate of overproducing meat is becomes clear. To paraphrase the famous song: "Here comes the sun, and we must make sure it's all right!"

Livestock's share of greenhouse gas emissions is not just an environmental problem, but also an agricultural and development one, said Parliament's Vice-President Edward McMillan-Scott (NI, UK), who initiated the hearing. This share will grown, because developing countries consume more meat as their income rises: in China, per capita meat consumption has more than doubled in the past 20 years.

Environment Committee Chair Jo Leinen (S&D, DE), noted that 70 MEPs and 60 US Members of Congress will be in Copenhagen for the climate change conference. Although they will not negotiate the deal, they will act as "watchdogs to ensure their governments stick to promises and do more" to reduce emissions.

Dr Alan Dangour from the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine estimated that in the UK, where adults eat a kilogram of meat each week, a 30% cut in consumption of saturated fats would reduce premature deaths due to heart disease by 18,000 a year.

Mairead McGuinness (EPP, IE) advocated moderation, stressing that European farmers have taken steps to reduce emissions, and pointed out that in the developing world, meat is often a very important source of protein in an otherwise poor diet. "Don't suggest that if the world goes vegetarian we will stop the climate change," she concluded.

Kriton Arsenis (S&D, EL) focused on uncertainties: "we still don't know enough about our planet to evaluate how our individual actions, like switching on the light or a car engine, interconnect and affect the global climate", he said. To reduce meat consumption, he advocated sticking to local produce and local diets, especially those, such as the Mediterranean diet, which do not include meat every day.

Less meat = more food for people

Press release

Farmers' representatives pointed out that 80% of EU livestock is raised on land that is unsuitable for growing grain or vegetables. Other speakers agreed that the biggest problem with using arable land to grow animal food is that it takes 8 kg of corn to produce 1 kg of meat.

On current trends, by 2050 about 1.45 billion tonnes of cereals a year will be used for animal feed - enough to meet the calorie needs of about 4.5 billion people, estimated UN special rapporteur on the right to food Oliver De Schutter.

Less meat = brighter future

Livestock is just one factor in climate change but it accounts for 9% of CO₂, 37% of methane and 35% of NO_x emissions - which makes it the second or third most significant polluter, noted Dr Rajendra K. Pachauri, Chairman of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. "Cutting down meat consumption is good for health; it's simple, effective and short-term delivery measure which everybody could contribute. We are all on one spaceship Earth and every mean to cut emissions counts", he said.

Sir Paul McCartney stressed the urgent need to do something to limit the damage caused by meat production, given that it contributes not only to greenhouse gas emissions but also to deforestation, increased water consumption and water pollution.

One meat-free day a week could become "as obvious as recycling or hybrid cars", he said, noting that Ghent civil servants and Baltimore schoolchildren are already doing it. He urged European lawmakers to encourage, guide, inform and help people in making a relatively easy decision, but also to help farmers to adapt, as human society has adapted throughout its history. "It can be done and it should be done for our children who will inherit this planet", he concluded.

N.B. :

With the Lisbon Treaty, in force as of 1 December 2009, the European Parliament has important new lawmaking powers. Virtually all EU legislation is now decided by the European Parliament and the Council of Ministers together - including agriculture, immigration, energy and the EU budget. As the only directly-elected EU institution, Parliament's position in making sure the EU is accountable to its citizens is also strengthened, for example by MEPs having a bigger say in appointments to many of the EU's top jobs.

Contact :

Janez VOUK

ITRE

Press service

BXL: (+32) 2 28 31053

STR: (+33) 3 881 74897

PORT: (+32) 498 98 33 37

EMAIL: indu-press@europarl.europa.eu