

# BUILDING A GLOBAL AGENDA OF ACTION IN SUPPORT OF SUSTAINABLE LIVESTOCK SECTOR DEVELOPMENT



*This note describes the preparation of a Global Agenda of Action through a participatory process which focuses on consensus building among key stakeholders in the livestock sector for a subsequent operational phase.*

*Initially, a Global Agenda of Action will focus on the improvement of resource-use efficiency in the livestock sector to support livelihoods, long-term food security and economic growth while safeguarding other environmental and public health outcomes.*

Growing populations, income gains and urbanization have made livestock one of the fastest growing sub-sectors of agriculture. Growth in emerging economies has been particularly impressive and has been associated with a widespread transformation of the livestock sector. However, livestock sector growth has been largely unbalanced and often not been accompanied by concomitant adjustments and improvements in sector policies, governance and investments. Continuing demand expansion for livestock products and increasing resource constraints will likely exacerbate these trends.

The livestock sector has particularly come into focus as concerns about climate change, sustainability of food systems and public health protection and the urgency of poverty reduction through agricultural development continue to grow. This will be even more important as the world's food production needs to be doubled by 2050 to feed its then population of nine billion. Livestock are the world's largest user of agricultural land, directly as pasture and indirectly through the use of feed crops, and livestock source food requires more feed, energy and water

resources per unit product than most other food products. Meat, milk and eggs will therefore only be able to maintain their role as a provider of high quality food, if these higher resource needs will be brought in line with global resource availability. Currently, the livestock sector is a major contributor to climate change, land degradation, water pollution and the erosion of biodiversity. There is, however, large potential to reduce the sector's ecological foot print, and enhance its role in climate change mitigation, nutrient recycling and biodiversity conservation. This can be done by addressing existing policy failures such as access to land, subsidies on inputs (water, feed and energy), by aligning incentives to environmental outcomes, rewarding providers of environmental services and by promoting best practices. Previous experiences have shown that livestock farming can make a major contribution to carbon sequestration and the enrichment of the bio-diversity through the introduction of new technology and payment for environmental services. In other places, important reductions in water use and pollution have been achieved by reconnecting specialized livestock production with crop agriculture.

If the necessary policy changes, adjustments in the regulatory frameworks, and supporting investments are made, the livestock sector can contribute significantly to society's environmental, social, economic and health objectives. The development of a Global Agenda of Action responds to these opportunities.

## **BUILDING A GLOBAL AGENDA OF ACTION**

A Global Agenda of Action for Sustainable Livestock Sector Development is built on broad based, voluntary and informal stakeholder commitment to act towards the improvement



of resource-use efficiency in the global livestock sector to support livelihoods, long-term food security and economic growth while safeguarding other environmental and public health outcomes, factoring in regional differences, and linking to other related initiatives as appropriate. To ensure the constructive participation of countries, private sector, civil society, and international organization stakeholders in the development of a Global Agenda of Action, FAO, in close collaboration with the World Bank, have been involved in broad stakeholder consultations to create awareness and to discuss and agree the Agenda of Action's objectives, priorities, and conceptual framework.

The initiative is also linked closely to the FAO's inter-governmental processes of its Committee on Agriculture, which during its 22nd session (COAG, 2010) recommended the organization to actively engage in a global dialogue with a wide range of stakeholders to sharpen the definition of the livestock sector's objectives, taking into account the disparities between production systems, the proliferation of private standards, the countries' economic development, the role of smallholders, the importance of exports, and the status of natural resources.

Building on the above activities, two multi-stakeholder platform meetings have thus far been held: In Brasilia, Brazil (17-20 May 2011), and in Phuket, Thailand (1-4 December 2011).

## WHERE ARE WE NOW?

Stakeholders of the Agenda have agreed on natural resource use efficiency in the livestock sector, covering entire commodity chains, as the thematic focus of the agenda. Initially, the Agenda will be concerned with three focus areas, namely "closing the efficiency gap", "restoring value to grassland", and "towards

zero discharge". The relative emphasis and the approaches for each focus area will vary from region to region.

1. The focus area *Closing the efficiency gap* proposes that large gains in resource use efficiency can be made by using available technology to close the gap between attainable efficiency rates and those actually achieved. While the technological frontier will continue to expand towards attainable efficiency gains at the margin, the bulk of producers continue to apply practices that are often greatly inefficient. The agenda will focus on commodity chains and production systems where the efficiency gap is large and where upgrading of technologies is both technically feasible and economically viable. Public-private partnerships could play a central role in the transfer and adaptation of technology.
2. The focus area *Restoring value to grasslands* proposes that the widespread neglect of grazing land constitutes a missed opportunity. Such neglect expresses itself in a high incidence of poverty in many marginal areas, but also in low productivity of land and livestock, and widespread degradation. Grazing land, if appropriately managed and enabled by institutional and policy change, could play a better role and provide large and multiple resource benefits in the form of carbon sequestration, protection and provision of water services, and biodiversity protection. Carbon finance, and other forms of payment for environmental services, could be a key to raise productivity and enhance livelihoods as well as to provide environmental services at local to global scales. Institutional change, including REDD-type financing mechanisms, is seen as key.

3. The focus area *Towards zero discharge*, aims at recycling and recovering nutrients and energy contained in animal waste, particularly from intensive and confined livestock operation. Nutrients and energy are only partially converted by the animal, and between 50 and 90 percent of the nutrients, and about 30 percent of the energy are excreted and often lost to the environment, leading to nutrient overload and gas emissions. Recycled nutrients can help raise soil fertility and plant productivity and substitute mineral fertilizer. Recovered energy reduces climate gas emissions and substitutes fossil fuel. Central lines of action are spatial planning to create opportunities for the application of animal waste on crops, and public policies and the development of incentive structures.

The above agreement on focus areas was further distilled into the following main categories of activities that a Global Agenda of Action will support and promote:

- systematic mapping of initiatives and networks – and their portfolios – relevant to the selected focus areas;
- establishment of knowledge and dialogue platforms for the collation and exchange of data, information, experiences, recommended approaches, and lessons learned – advocacy and outreach;
- Development of methodologies, metrics and decision-support toolboxes;
- Livestock sector systems, policy and institutional analyses;
- Implementation of selected pilots and training;
- Investment to enable the mainstreaming of innovative approaches, methodologies, policies and institutional developments.

## NEXT STEPS

Focus area action programmes and proposals for oversight and the specific form the Global Agenda of Action will take, are being developed further through a series of workshops organized in collaboration with the Interim Preparatory Committee, stakeholder champions and other experts.

The resulting draft focus area action programmes and a proposal for oversight and form will be ready for submission to the multi-stakeholder platform by May 2012, after which individual stakeholder groups, organizations, regional bodies and commissions will report back to their broader membership for endorsement of a Global Agenda of Action.

At the same time, the FAO secretariat is organizing a formal presentation of a Global Agenda of Action in its Rome headquarters to member nations' permanent representatives in collaboration with the Committee on Agriculture's (CoAg) vice-Chair and private sector and civil society multi-stakeholder platform members before the end of March 2012. The FAO secretariat will submit a Global Agenda of Action proposal to CoAg in May 2012, for the endorsement of FAO's proposed role in the initiative.

The multi-stakeholder platform is expected to discuss and endorse finalized action programmes before the end of September 2012, to be quickly followed by the launch of the Global Agenda of Action on Sustainable Livestock Sector Development.

## FURTHER INFORMATION

Henning Steinfeld  
Chief, Livestock Information,  
Sector Analysis and Policy Branch  
Animal Production and Health Division  
Food and Agriculture Organization  
of the United Nations  
henning.steinfeld@fao.org

