



A message of the Chair of the Global Agenda for Sustainable Livestock (GASL) on the COVID-19 Pandemic

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[The Global Agenda for Sustainable Livestock](#) (GASL) is a multi-stakeholder partnership that embraces the vast diversity of livestock agri-food systems globally, involving stakeholders from all parts of society in discussion and negotiation towards sustainable outcomes. Our vision is to enhance the contribution of livestock systems to sustainable development. Therefore, we recognize and participate in the dialogue concerning greater sustainability in food production and consumption patterns. GASL's approach to sustainable livestock is framed by the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

While the world faces the COVID-19 pandemic, one of the greatest challenges of the last 100 years, I find myself grateful for the GASL platform and the voice it grants me to share the latest reflections and observations from its stakeholders. This information is shared with full transparency and with the purpose to provide qualified views regarding the livestock sector and its role in this pandemic.

The sudden appearance of this new disease has affected numerous regions and countries in the world generating significant health, social, economic and political concerns. Due to the measures implemented by multiple governments to contain its spread, livestock systems, as other production means of the global economy, have experienced the virus' repercussions. Mitigation efforts have had an impact on the movement of people and the supply of goods, resulting in the disruption of supply chains, production deficiencies, food losses and misinformation regarding livestock's relation to this crisis.

Given its particular ability to contribute to the attainment of the SDGs and ensure both the economic incomes and wellbeing of countless families, it is vital we protect these important roles of the livestock sector, avoid any counterproductive mitigation measures and reflect on possible opportunities for sustainable development which could arise from this pandemic. GASL therefore recognizes that timely and assertive action is needed to address the range of interrelated factors that have emerged from the present crisis.

To that effect, we have been closely monitoring the development of the pandemic and its impact on the sector by means of interviews, input development, global information and evidence collection. Thanks to our stakeholders and partners worldwide, whose preliminary knowledge and indications regarding the livestock sector and COVID-19 are invaluable, we have aggregated the following information that may guide us for future action.

Measures and restrictions on movement implemented by governments worldwide are resulting in significant disruptions in national and international livestock value chains. Consequently, small and medium sized farms are experiencing production and income difficulties. Among them, disruptions of processing and marketing activities due to the closure of food services have led to the dumping, wasting and stocking of products. Additionally, farmers have encountered difficulties in accessing veterinary health services, basic inputs and human resources. Respondents to a GASL consultation on COVID-19 stressed the importance of livestock being considered essential and supported accordingly by government economic measures, in order to protect incomes and employment opportunities and to maintain the continuous operation of the value chains.

Further disruption of the value chains has been caused by consumer's rapidly eroding purchasing power triggered by rising unemployment rates and decreased household incomes. Regarding animal sourced products, lower purchasing power has translated into a drop in demand, especially for premium products. As such, some stakeholders have stressed the importance of strengthening local value chains as the most effective means of supplying basic, nutritious foods for the population.

Various stakeholders have indicated that misleading information signalling livestock products, both in wet and formal markets, as a direct cause of COVID-19 emergence and transmission have likewise affected



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demand. Consequently, clear communication to the wide public is imperative. GASL strongly believes that the implementation of hygienic measures as well as harmonized, international food safety standards, which would limit and regulate wildlife demand, will necessarily play a central role in the prevention of any future sanitary crises. Moreover, GASL acknowledges the significance of sustainable livestock systems to prevent future pandemics of zoonotic nature, despite the fact that no scientific evidence relates livestock to the present pandemic.

Some of our stakeholders discussed the centrality of supporting optimal production systems, such as extensive, organic, silvopastoral systems, over those based upon optimized production intensity. Likewise, respondents stressed the need to re-examine food systems, which promote regenerative and more resilient models of agriculture. Investments, better biosecurity practices and research efforts, in conjunction with a holistic implementation of the One Health approach will also be essential.

Also of note is that other stakeholders have emphasized important concerns for small producers in remote areas of Asia, Africa and parts of Latin America, where disease prevention recommendations by the World Health Organization (e.g. wash hands frequently with water and soap) are difficult to follow due to water scarcity, and in some regions, the lack of adequate information technologies.

Ultimately, COVID-19's socioeconomic repercussions are detrimental to the attainment of the SDGs. With governments' actions regarding the management of the disease posing a difficult burden on commercial activity, it is imperative that governments worldwide support livestock systems in order to protect the continuous activity of value chains and ensure the wellbeing of vulnerable households.

Despite no evidence associating animal sourced products to the transmission of COVID-19, the occurrence of a sanitary crisis of zoonotic nature in domesticated animals should not be ruled out. Therefore, it is vital to study such a possibility in order to limit the risks, while continuing to promote livestock's contributions to sustainable development. GASL takes the opportunity to encourage scientific-based assessments and decision-making. As such, GASL aligns and coordinates with several research efforts and initiatives including the Tripartite statement and G-20 communiqué on food security.

Furthermore, GASL encourages our technical Action Networks to remain open to new evidence as it becomes available, particularly, that which could be utilized to enhance livestock value chains' sanitary security.

The global ethical debate regarding animal welfare is acknowledged by GASL. Moreover, it is being currently addressed by one of our technical groups (the Animal Welfare Action Network). However, GASL considers this debate to be external to the current COVID-19 emergency.

What we encourage and foster is a dialogue between regions, political leaders and key stakeholders in the livestock sector. In that sense, GASL supports furthering the discussion in a [global multi-stakeholder meeting to be held in September 2020](#).

I would like to conclude by thanking all our partners and stakeholders for their invaluable contributions to GASL's consultation regarding COVID-19's impacts on the sector, mitigation measures, policy implications and livestock's role in the prevention of future sanitary crises. We firmly believe in developing more sustainable and resilient food systems in service of the environment and populations' optimal health. To that end, GASL will continue to facilitate dialogue, build and communicate evidence, and advocate for practice and policy change.

Fritz Schneider

GASL Chair