

We need to talk about industrial livestock production

Use these slides in presentations on industrial livestock production.

All references for data can be found in the [full resource](#).

Key messages



There is a positive future for animal agriculture in the UK, but only if it is rooted in sustainable systems, not in industrial models

Diets in the Global North are heavily reliant on meat and dairy, and in the UK we consume double the global average. This demand is both fuelled and enabled by the expansion of industrial livestock production and the consolidation of power by global scale corporations. To shift away from industrial livestock production and make 'better' practises the norm, the food system must be transformed to make healthy and sustainable choices more accessible. The 'less' in 'less and better' meat and dairy must come from phasing out our reliance on industrial livestock systems. We must actively make space for investment and growth in plant-based diets and better livestock farming practices, to enable a shift away from the consumption of industrially produced meat and dairy.



Industrial livestock production is an unjust system for people, animals and the planet

Industrial livestock production concentrates power, which displaces UK farmers and restricts access for those pursuing agroecological practices. It deepens inequality, undermines food security and fuels climate change - which is the greatest threat to our global food supply. ILP drives environmental destruction, biodiversity loss, public health risks and widespread animal welfare violations. Its impacts are cross-cutting in nature, and addressing them requires a systems-based view.



In order to rebuild a fair and equitable livestock system, we must dismantle the scaffolding on which industrial production relies

There is a strong appetite for change within the farming community, and many farmers have already adopted 'better' practices. However, industrial livestock production has created numerous barriers to achieving this transition. To truly support farmers in making these changes, we must focus on dismantling the structural supports on which the current system relies. The governments of the UK, corporations, retailers and other major players must be held responsible for their role in perpetuating these systems, and adopt transparent and sustainable practices that prioritise animal welfare, environmental health and social equity.

System drivers

The mass production of meat and dairy products became a driver of consumption, and entered a self-reinforcing cycle of demand and supply. This, along with a range of other drivers, has steered the UK livestock sector towards the industrial production of meat and dairy.



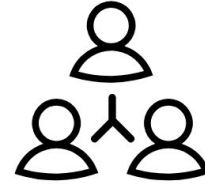
Structural characteristics of industrial livestock production



ILP is a linear economy with scale and high production volume as core objectives



Market consolidation and monopolisation concentrates power in the hands of a few corporations



Horizontal and vertical integration across the value chain centralises control and reduces competition



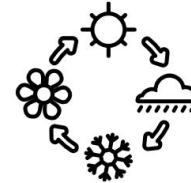
ILP is heavily dependent on international trade and global commodity markets



ILP focuses on production efficiency and cost minimisation



Farm businesses in ILP systems lack autonomy and independence in decision-making

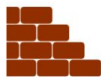


ILP lacks seasonal and local adaptability, prioritising uniform production year-round

Defining outcomes of industrial livestock production



ILP requires animals to be housed in confinement



ILP results in a lack of enrichment and natural environment for livestock



ILP results in animals being bred and reared for maximum growth rates



ILP relies on breeds with low welfare potential



ILP results in animals being subject to mutilations



ILP relies on antibiotic use for group treatments and due to welfare conditions and husbandry practices



ILP results in the overuse of antibiotics due to the use of highest-priority critically important antibiotics



ILP produces high GHG emissions per hectare



ILP drives land-use change through a reliance on the large-scale cultivation of feed crops



ILP imposes risk of local pollution through the production of concentrated animal waste



ILP imposes risk of pollution through the application of fertilisers and pesticides on monoculture feed crops and grassland



ILP results in livestock management that does not support or enhance biodiversity or soil health



ILP imposes risks to biodiversity and soil health due to the large-scale cultivation of non-organic, monoculture feed crops and grassland



ILP has a high indirect water footprint due to the use of irrigated feed crops

ILP in numbers



1.2 billion land animals were killed for meat in 2023 in the UK²⁴, 1.1 billion of which were chickens raised for meat, also known as broilers²⁵.

The extent of industrial livestock in the UK

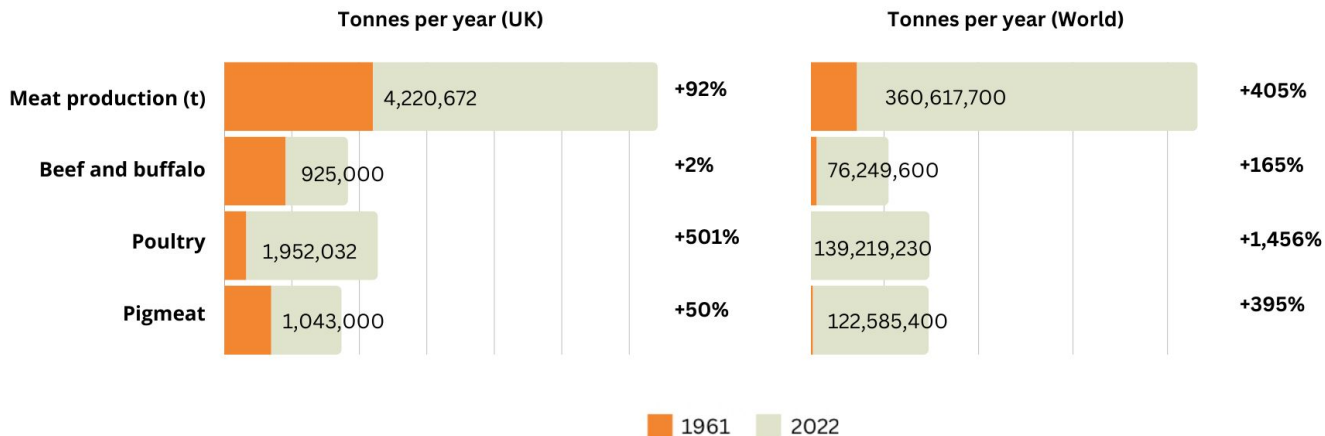
≈80% of broilers are reared in industrial conditions²⁶

20% of laying hens are housed in cages²⁷

60% of sows give birth or feed young in farrowing crates¹⁰

30% of pigs are housed and kept on fully slatted floors¹⁰

At least 6% of dairy cows are reared in fully-housed systems¹⁰



ILP in numbers

In the UK, **three companies are responsible for a total of 100 million chickens** at any one time, and just **two companies dominate pig production with three million pigs**²⁸.

In the dairy sector **producer numbers dropped by 14.9%** between April 2020 and April 2024, yet both **herd size and the volume of milk produced per farm increased** over the same time period ²⁹.

The livestock industry in the UK is consolidating:

12%

increase in 'factory farms' in the UK since 2016¹⁰

20%

increase in pig and poultry units 2016-2023¹⁰

85%

of farmed animals in the UK are housed in confined systems¹⁰

110,000

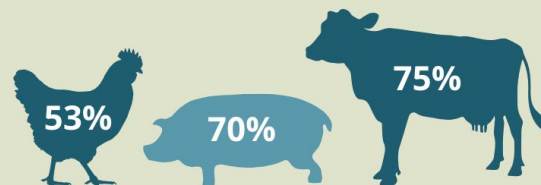
livestock and poultry farms went out of business between 1990 and 2016, a 34% decline...whilst over 800 Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations were established³⁰.

≈80%

of the UK's broiler production is in intensive indoor units³¹.

ILP is founded on horizontal and vertical integration, allowing a small number of firms to control huge portions of the value chain¹²:

The **top 10 global meat processing companies** control 75% of beef slaughter, 70% of pork slaughter, and 53% of chicken slaughter



8 firms control just shy of 80% of the **animal pharmaceutical market**

3 companies supply 95% of the **commercial breeding stock** for broilers

ILP in numbers

ILP is made possible by huge capital backing from financial institutions and investors. The "Big 6" UK banks³²:

- Provided **\$77 billion in financing** to industrial livestock companies between 2015 and 2022.
- Provided a total of **\$21.6 billion in finance** between 2015 and 2022 to five of the **highest-emitting industrial livestock companies** - JBS, Marfrig, Cargill, Tyson Foods, and Minerva.
- Owned nearly **\$1.2 billion in shareholdings** in these companies as of March 2023.

Industrial livestock companies, aka 'Big Meat and Dairy', control the regulation and impact of ILP³⁴:

- Between them, 22 companies had **close to 600 high level meetings with the European Commission** since 2014.
- Lobby groups, to which Big Meat and Dairy companies belong, disclose spending around **€10 million a year on lobbying at a European level**.
- **Only 1/22** of the world's biggest meat and dairy companies has made commitments to transformative action by **setting a methane reduction target**.



A case for change - health impact



More than one third of the pesticides sold by the top five companies are substances that are classified as 'highly hazardous' to human health, wildlife, or ecosystems⁶¹.



Poisoning by pesticides, many of which are used in animal feed production, is responsible for 14-20% of global suicides⁶².



Zoonoses are responsible for 2.5 billion cases of human illness and 2.7 million human deaths worldwide each year⁶⁵.



There are 385 million cases of Unintentional Acute Pesticide Poisoning annually worldwide, including around 11,000 fatalities⁶⁰.



Since the 1940s, it is estimated that 50% of zoonotic disease emergence has been associated with agriculture, namely through livestock production⁶³.



Antimicrobial resistance (AMR) has been declared one of the top 10 global public health threats facing humanity⁶⁶.



Agriculture is the single largest contributor of ammonia pollution, as well as an emitter of other nitrogen compounds (nitrous oxides)⁶¹.

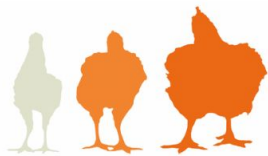


It is estimated that 60% of known infectious diseases and up to 75% of emerging infectious diseases are zoonotic in origin^{64, 31}.

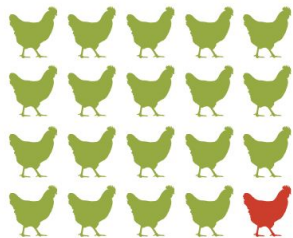


Shocks caused by AMR could have a global cost of USD 3.4 trillion a year by 2030, plunging an additional 24 million people into poverty⁶⁷.

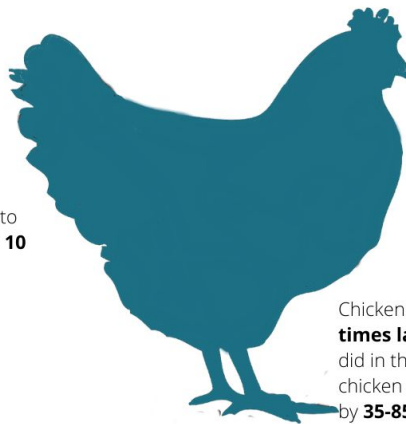
A case for change - animal welfare impact



Over the past 30 years, the time it takes to grow a 2kg chicken has gone down from **10 weeks to less than six weeks**⁹².



One in twenty highly genetically selected broilers are **culled or die of illness** on farm, double that of slower growing breeds⁸⁰.



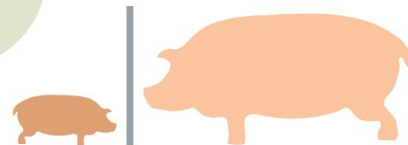
Chickens grow up to **four times larger** now than they did in the 1950s. The size of a chicken breast has increased by **35-85%**⁹³.



In the UK, the legal maximum broiler stocking density is **39 kg/m²**. This is **16 to 19** birds per m²⁹⁴. Each bird has less room than an **A4 sheet of paper**.



Over **70%** of pigs in the UK have had their tails docked⁹⁵.



60% of sows are forced to nurse their young through the bars of a "crate"⁹⁶.

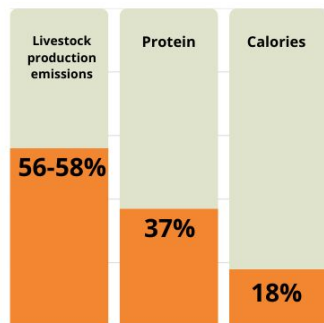


30% of growing pigs in the UK are kept on fully slatted floors⁹⁶.

A case for change - environmental impact



There are **385 million** cases of Unintentional Acute Pesticide Poisoning annually world-wide including around **11,000 fatalities**⁶⁰.



Livestock production accounts for **56-58%** of the food sector's emissions, despite providing only **37%** of our protein and **18%** of our calories¹⁰⁷.



Livestock are responsible for about 14.5% of the total annual anthropogenic (human-caused) GHG emissions globally¹⁰⁸.



ILP is the biggest driver of agricultural land expansion¹⁰⁹.



Roughly **55% of the 4.5 million tonnes** of pesticides applied globally each year are applied in agriculture, with corn and soy alone representing **49%** of the highly hazardous pesticide sales¹¹⁰.



10 livestock companies are responsible for **55,262 tonnes** of animal excreta per day²⁸.

The scaffolding of ILP

On the farm

- Inadequate policy on acceptable farming practices
- Insurance and risk management favours large-scale producers
- Lack of on-farm monitoring and enforcement
- Inadequate UK land-use policy, local planning, and permitting regulations
- Inadequate labour regulations

On the plate and in the shops

- Inadequate public food procurement standards
- Inadequate public health policies
- Poor retailer and food service procurement practices
- Opaque sourcing policies
- Marketing and advertising
- High margins for retail on processed and/or cheap meat
- Artificial or manipulated barriers to 'better'

In the market and supply chain

- Supply chain complexity and opaque processes
- Global commodity markets
- Investment in ILP value chains
- Concentration of power in the hands of a few corporations
- Exploited labour in feed and meat supply chains

In the mind

- Public acceptability and lack of awareness