



# **Dangerous** **Distractions:**

How agribusiness narratives continue  
to undermine climate action

# Table of Contents

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1. Introduction	4
2. World Meat Congress: Setting the scene for COP30	5
2.1 Attacks on EAT-Lancet	8
3. Narrative tracking at COP30	10
3.1 Data and measurements	12
3.2 Fulfilling demand and tackling food security	12
3.3 Meat is sustainable	13
3.4 Tell the story	14
3.5 Focus on small farmers	14
4. Conclusion: The good, the bad and the future	15
5. Annex	18
6. References	24

# 1. Introduction

The climate emergency is escalating, with increasingly alarming impacts on the food system.<sup>1</sup> Animal agriculture is both highly dependent on a stable climate system and one of the biggest contributors to climate change, primarily through methane and nitrous oxide pollution and indirectly as a major driver of deforestation and land-use change.<sup>2</sup>

Transformative changes are needed and shifting diets in many areas where meat and dairy are overconsumed is essential to bring down emissions and improve health. The 2025 EAT-Lancet report provides further evidence for how healthy and sustainable diets on a planet of 10 billion people are feasible, and how shifting to such diets would cut emissions from the food system in half and prevent 15 million premature deaths per year.<sup>3</sup>

The last UN climate conference, COP30, took place in November 2025 in Belém in the Brazilian Amazon, and hopes were high that transforming agriculture and food systems would finally make it into an official conference text. However, this did not happen. Instead, agribusiness voices focused on efficiency and concerns around food security featured prominently across

the conference, standing in the way of real change. While climate change is a real threat to food security, this narrative is reframed and exploited by meat and dairy industry actors to justify continued growth of animal agriculture.

Additionally, despite the scientific consensus that dietary shift<sup>4</sup> and agricultural methane reductions<sup>5</sup> are crucial to stay on a 1.5°C or even a 2°C trajectory, just 4% of national climate plans (nationally determined contributions, or NDCs) include quantified, time-bound agricultural methane reduction targets,<sup>6</sup> and fewer still include sustainable diets.<sup>7</sup>

This briefing will unpick some of the key industry narratives that are being used to prevent the inclusion of food systems on the climate agenda. It highlights arguments and key messages pushed by meat and dairy industry representatives and allies at both the World Meat Congress, a biennial industry event which last year was held in Brazil just before COP30, and at COP30 itself.

## 2. World Meat Congress: Setting the scene for COP30

The World Meat Congress is a biennial conference involving meat industry trade groups, producers, policymakers and academics. It is organised by the International Meat Secretariat, an organisation that seeks to represent the meat industry by engaging international bodies such as UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and World Trade Organization. International Meat Secretariat representatives have repeatedly tried to undermine or downplay the science on the meat industry's impact on climate change and biodiversity loss.<sup>8</sup>

The 24th World Meat Congress was held the week before COP30 on 28-30 October 2025 in Cuiabá in Mato Grosso, the agricultural capital of Brazil. It was stated there were 600 participants, 500 of whom were from Brazil, indicating a strong focus on the domestic meat industry. The previous conference was held in the Netherlands in 2023, when farmer protests against the country's nitrogen reforms were at their peak.<sup>9</sup>

Speakers at the event in Mato Grosso included prominent pro-meat advocates across academia and trade groups from Europe and US. They included Eric Mittenhal from the Meat Institute, an organisation known for its attempts to derail climate action,<sup>10</sup> and Frédéric Leroy from Vrije Universiteit Brussel, a prominent meat advocate and peddler of misleading narratives and conspiracy theories, who played a central role in undermining the launch of the first EAT-Lancet report in 2019.<sup>11</sup>

Brazilian industry and trade groups were represented in force too. They included major meat companies MBRF and Minerva; a farming trade group from Mato Grosso, Aprosoja-MT; and the Confederation of Agriculture and Livestock (CNA), Brazil's largest agricultural lobby group. Several state politicians were also in attendance. The role of trade groups, like Mato Grosso Meat Institute (IMAC) and Meat Institute, who had leading roles in this conference, is to represent the interests of their agribusiness members and the focus on engaging policymakers and even the FAO at this event indicates how these groups coordinate and influence the global policy agenda in the run up to COP30.

The theme of the World Meat Congress was *'The new era of meat'*, which the hosts declared included *'sustainability'*. Recordings, however, show much more of a focus on defending the importance of livestock than directly addressing the significant climate impacts from this growing industry. From talks and discussions, it seems that the industry sees its climate impact as more of a messaging and communication issue than a scientific fact and a problem that needs to be urgently addressed. A central call to action was that *"if [the meat industry] did not tell its story, someone else will"*, framing this as having *"an amazing story to tell on health and sustainability."* Communications consultants working with the industry featured prominently, offering their insights on how best to tell a positive story, details of which are in Annex 1.

The scene was set during the opening ceremony, with speakers focusing on celebrating high livestock production and consumption, including the health benefits of high meat diets. Caio Penido, President of the host organisation IMAC, highlighted climate change as a challenge for the sector - though it was not clear whether this was as a physical, material threat or a PR problem.

Light-touch references to the impact of climate change were peppered throughout the event, but the resounding call to action was not for these powerful industries to invest in mitigation and adaptation to the impacts of rapidly changing climate, but to *"perfect your messaging, tell your story and control the narrative."*

The key messages put forward at the conference were:

1. The meat industry has a positive story to tell: This framing suggests the industry is already sustainable and is simply doing a public service by responding to rising demand. It seeks to shift the narrative to focus on efficiency and vague sustainability claims (see point 2) while avoiding mentioning negative climate, animal welfare and wider environmental impacts of industrial animal agriculture, and negative health impacts of overconsumption of meat and dairy.
2. Meat is sustainable: This argument is centred around the pervasive narrative that meat is *'natural'*. It attempts to greenwash its impact by claiming that emissions from cattle are part of the natural *'biogenic'* cycle or exaggerating the potential of soil carbon sequestration. These arguments are sometimes used to claim that greenhouse gas emissions from animal farming, such as methane, are nothing to worry about due to these natural cycles.
3. Meat is essential for healthy diets: This narrative cherry-picks facts about

nutrient qualities of meat to distract from discussions about healthy consumption levels or even to suggest that a healthy diet is not possible with no or low meat consumption.

Some of the narratives around these three arguments and how they were raised at the conference can be found in Annex 1.

These narratives form part of a broader strategy, analysed in a previous Changing Markets report, where major Brazilian agribusiness companies ran a series of events and media collaborations in the lead-up to COP30 to present themselves as part of the solution.<sup>12</sup> This industry roadshow culminated in the AgriZone at COP30, an agriculture-focused exhibition and events space hosted by the Brazilian agricultural research body Embrapa, which was also represented at the World Meat Congress. The AgriZone showcased the supposed climate leadership of Brazil's powerful agribusiness sector, hosting over 400 events involving policymakers, government ministers, companies and trade groups, and to a lesser extent civil society. The space itself was sponsored by numerous agribusiness giants, such as Nestlé and Bayer, while other companies were present through displaying their promotional materials, for example Minerva had a large stand, while the media centre was sponsored by JBS. Analysis of some of the industry narratives pushed in the AgriZone can be found in section 3.

### **A new era sees the rollback of the Soy Moratorium**

The World Meat Congress took place in Mato Grosso, the agricultural capital of Brazil, shortly before the state brought in a new law eliminating tax benefits for companies that take part in the Amazon Soy Moratorium (beginning January 2026). The moratorium is an industry agreement not to purchase soy from land in the Amazon deforested after 2008 and was seen as the most successful deforestation policy to date.<sup>13</sup> With soy being a key animal feed crop, this incoming policy has major implications for the meat industry.

Since then, major animal feed companies including Cargill and Bunge have backed out of the moratorium, with reports suggesting the tax changes in Mato Grosso played a key role in the decision. Aprosoja, a farming association in Mato Grosso which was part of the World Meat Congress opening ceremony, *'had pressured companies for years'* on the moratorium and welcomed the rollback.<sup>14</sup> This highlights the contradiction between the *'positive story'* pushed at conference and the realities of backdoor industry lobbying to roll back one of the few voluntary industry agreements that was actually working.

## The FAO and meat industry partnership

There is mounting evidence that departments within the FAO have a bias in favour of the livestock sector, including as detailed in a case study by Changing Markets, research for which included interviews with five former and serving FAO officials.<sup>15</sup>

Thanawat Tiensin, the FAO's Assistant Director-General and Director of the Animal Production and Health Division and Chief Veterinarian, attended the World Meat Congress, highlighting the organisation's close engagement with meat industry trade and lobby groups. Excerpts from his contributions at the conference add to evidence of a strong pro-industry bias and illuminate a concerning tendency to downplay the science around the sector's climate impact. Much of Tiensin's talk focused on how the FAO is an ally to the meat industry, highlighting its growing focus on livestock in the last five years and declaring *"FAO is your friend"*.

He also referenced having shown *World Without Cows* (see section 3), a film made by an American feed company, at the recent FAO Global Conference on Sustainable Livestock Transformation, declaring the documentary *"reminds us that livestock values go beyond production of milk and meat. They shape our landscape, livelihoods, rural communities, ecosystem and culture."*

He acknowledged the challenge of greenhouse gas emissions but accepted as fact that *"the world needs more animal protein"* and said that *"When my stomach is empty, I don't have time to talk about sustainability,"* suggesting that sustainability is an optional afterthought rather than essential for maintaining food security on a rapidly heating planet. He declared a new era has arrived where the livestock industry will do better on sustainability as business as usual is no longer possible, but gave no details or concrete examples of how this would be achieved.

## 2.1 Attacks on EAT-Lancet

The EAT-Lancet commission's scientific reports are often a key area of attack for the meat industry and affiliated scientists. This is covered in depth in our report *Meat vs EAT-Lancet: The dynamics of an industry-orchestrated online backlash to the planetary health diet, and what it means today*, which looked at the backlash to the original EAT-Lancet report in 2019 and likely voices of dissent for 2025. Several speakers at the conference focused on attacking the EAT-Lancet commission and the updated report that came out in October 2025.

Carrie Ruxton, a consultant, made it a core feature of her talk. She claimed that the academics on the commission were not experts, and that farmers are the real experts. Ruxton said:

*"Now, it's my view that you don't need to worry about the actual report that was published this year. It didn't get a lot of media traction. What you do need to worry about is what happens next because they are going to go out and start talking to politicians, campaigners, policy people, charities, public procurement. They're going to be talking to all of these parts of society that will then have an impact on your industry."*

Ruxton repeated the conspiratorial idea that EAT-Lancet commissioners have a conflict of interest, because many are

vegetarian (though it's unclear if this is true) and are perceived to believe passionately in animal welfare. Such lines of attack were commonplace in the backlash to EAT-Lancet's first report in 2019.<sup>16</sup> Ruxton also described one portion of red meat per week, the recommendation of the update to the EAT-Lancet report, as “*shocking*”, a position that ignores the social, economic and cultural realities around red meat consumption, not to mention sustainability. Ruxton criticised EAT-Lancet for the impact reductions in livestock would have on jobs, though she provided no evidence for this.

Ruxton's call to action focused on EAT-Lancet's updated policy recommendations, telling the audience these are the areas they need to start thinking about through their trade bodies in order to make the opposite argument. She then brought the discussion back to the idea that the livestock sector is already improving massively on sustainability. She did concede the need for less and better meat, though didn't suggest what less might mean.

Frédéric Leroy, a well-known critic of EAT-Lancet,<sup>17</sup> also used his talk to try and discredit the scientific commission. He declared - to an audience that included some of the biggest meat companies in the world - that behind the commission are major agri-food interests who wish to capitalise on the promotion of plant-rich diets. Leroy also (as he has online before<sup>18</sup>) criticised EAT-Lancet's recommended meat intake for being similar to that of India and Bangladesh, which have high levels of childhood stunting. While admitting it was not possible to claim causality, he said this was something “*we have to be concerned about.*” He also referenced Ty Beal's research claiming that the EAT-Lancet's planetary health diet would require fortification to avoid nutrient inadequacies. He claimed humans need 20-30% of calories to come from animal-sourced foods, and that this is an “*ancestral diet*”, whereas the planetary health diet suggests around 12%. He drew on common narratives - popular online but with little scientific basis - that suggest ancestral hunter-gatherer diets are the gold standard, saying these consisted of 70% animal-sourced protein.

### Personal choice influencing 'expert' opinion

A memo by UK meat and dairy industry insiders on how the industry operates describes how '[a]t a personal level, those who lead major food companies tend to see meat as a core, critical and central part of diet. This feeds into how meat is treated within businesses. Personal tastes inform what senior leaders think people would or should want and lead to “*meat primacy*” within industry.'

The push for '*meat primacy*' from personal preferences also comes from people who present themselves as experts, who present the idea of reductions in meat consumption as an attack on personal choice. At the World Meat Congress, for example, Trine Thorkildsen, the Head of Nutrition and Sustainability at MatPrat (Norwegian Egg and Meat Council), declared she is personally eating a lot of meat, and had more red meat on her plate last night than the planetary health diet recommends in a week. The FAO's Thanawat Tiensin also celebrated having had milk, dairy and cheese for breakfast every day at the World Dairy Summit the week before and now “*juicy beef*” at the World Meat Congress. Rupert Claxton, a communications consultant, also suggested that animal rights organisations are an “*anti-lifestyle lobby*”, suggesting calls for less or better meat production are an attack on people's lifestyles.<sup>19</sup> At COP30, Lloyd Day from the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) suggested the protesters calling out Big Ag companies were attacking individual choice, declaring: “*There's people outside that don't like the fact that some of you eat meat and dairy.*”

### 3. Narrative tracking at COP30

COP30 saw a strong showing from agribusiness representatives, lobbyists and allies. DeSmog reported that more than 300 lobbyists for industrial agriculture were in attendance, a delegation larger than Canada's 220.<sup>20</sup> Many more industry representatives were present in the AgriZone. There were also several screenings of the industry-funded documentary *World Without Cows* (see box), some within the official zones and some across the rest of the city of Belem.

#### **World Without Cows**

A feature-length documentary entitled *World Without Cows* has been doing the rounds at international climate events, conferences, industry gatherings and film festivals. The film was produced by animal nutrition company Alltech, which has an annual revenue of US\$2.6 billion. Since 2024 the film has been shown in at least 30 private screenings across the world, including at the FAO livestock summit in September and several showings at COP30.

The film purports to 'examine the cultural and economic significance of cows, their role in nourishing the world and their impact on climate – and to answer the question, "Are we better off in a world without cows?"'. It features interviews with farmers, scientists and meat industry representatives, many of whom seem keen to downplay the negative environmental impacts of cattle-rearing on the climate and to promote the idea that livestock can be '*part of the solution*' to climate change. However, the provocative title plays to divisive narratives pushed by industry and pro-meat advocates that environmentalists are trying to eliminate cows, meat and dairy altogether. This line was even pushed by President Trump at the UN summit in September, in a speech where he called climate science a con.<sup>21</sup>

To promote the film, Alltech set up a subsidiary called Planet of Plenty LLC '*dedicated to science-led storytelling, advocacy and educational initiatives that amplify agriculture's vital role in creating a sustainable future*'.<sup>22</sup>

Tara McCarthy, Alltech's Global Vice President of ESG,<sup>23</sup> Mark Lyons, Alltech CEO, and the two filmmakers, Michelle Michael and Brandon Whitworth, have a background in journalism but also long-standing Alltech employees, have appeared in numerous events and podcasts to promote the film. They appear to be trying to push two main ideas: first, that methane pollution only lasts 12 years in the atmosphere, so it is not that bad for the climate; and second, that cattle are key to maintaining/restoring healthy soils.

At COP30, Lyons declared the intention to broaden the conversation and promoted a screening of *World Without Cows*, inviting people to join the discussion. However, when representatives from Changing Markets tried to register to attend one of the many screenings, we were denied entry '*due to limited space*'. One civil society participant who managed to get a ticket reported back that the venue was far from full,<sup>24</sup> suggesting the rejections were due to unwillingness for the film's narratives to be challenged. The documentary appears to be an industry propaganda vehicle, and there is little intent to have a genuine discussion with organisations advocating for reductions in emissions from major meat and dairy companies.

So far, the film has been shown to select, mostly industry-friendly audiences but is supposed to be released in full in 2026. A Brazilian short version was released before COP30, echoing the cattle industry's message that it is already sustainable and highlighting its role in restoring degraded land. This version also features a JBS representative, saying there is still a minority who deforest for cattle production but that the sector must stand up to this.

Industry representatives touched on solutions that would go some way towards reducing emissions from dairy and livestock production, such as feed efficiency or use of manure for biogas, but discussions about the key role of dietary change were few and far between. The strongest recognition we found of the importance of dietary shift from a meat or dairy industry representative came from Paolo Pianeze, Sustainability Director at MBRF, who said "*We have to believe that the market will still demand animal protein, ... it's extremely important ... that people go vegetarian and we have to have a balance, we can't eat meat every day, but it's part of a nutritional balance, and this is the premise of the plan that we are building.*"<sup>25</sup> In that same talk, MBRF announced a target to reduce methane by 33% by 2035, the first meat company to do so.<sup>26</sup>

Most contributions from industry were in keeping with the narratives and intentions that were evident from the industry's messaging in the lead up to COP30. In *The Meat Agenda*, Changing Markets analysed a series of events with ties to Brazilian meat and dairy companies, revealing how they were positioning the sector ahead of the global conference.<sup>27</sup> From presenting Brazilian agribusiness as an '*environmental powerhouse*' to journalist workshops promoting '*fair metrics*' for '*tropical agriculture*', these companies were keen to show they were part of the climate solution -messages that were repeated in the AgriZone at COP30.

## Meat industry mobilises influencers ahead of COP30

Industry narratives positioning meat as healthy or part of wellness trends were pushed by prominent influencers in the lead-up to COP30, complementing meat and dairy's more direct attempts to reposition itself within the actual climate conference. Ahead of COP30, a DeSmog investigation identified a variety of influencers, including news anchors, doctors and models, working with agribusiness companies, including major livestock companies, to legitimise this industry's actions and enhance its reputation. DeSmog found that agribusiness worked with at least 195 influencers in the year before COP30, compared to just 80 in the previous year. JBS, MBRF and Minerva generated the most, accounting for around three-quarters of these partnerships.<sup>28</sup>

Below are the key misleading narratives and examples of where they were used. All these statements were made at COP30 - a climate change conference, where the focus should be on science and emissions reductions. Researchers analysed the narratives presented by industry at a selection of events, by attending some in person at COP30 and watching some online. Due to the nature of live note-taking, some were captured as direct quotes while others were paraphrased.

### 3.1 Data and measurements

The need to prioritise data collection and measurements was a strong focus. While data is essential, industry can use data collection as a delay tactic, pushing to get complex modelling and data systems set up while sidelining actionable and evidence-based solutions such as dietary shift and agroecology. The data that is often left out of discussions is that the projected rise in consumption of animal

products and the reduction in emissions required to meet the 1.5°C temperature goal are incompatible. Instead of focusing on system change, industry is making sure that the conversation is kept to farm-level interventions:

1. Eric Mittenenthal, Chief Strategy Officer from the Meat Institute, celebrated work on measuring emissions on 40 farms - yet he also stated the Meat Institute is connected to 95% of the supply chain in the US, showing this is pitifully slow progress.<sup>29</sup>
2. Donald Moore, Executive Director of the Global Dairy Platform, spent a considerable part of a panel event talking about data and measuring, including stating, *"If you can't measure it, you can't report it"* - but devoted little time to proven solutions that would reduce emissions.<sup>30</sup>
3. Mark Lyons, CEO of Alltech, claimed that *"data will show that farms are often sequestering more carbon than animals emitting."*<sup>31</sup>
4. Jamie Burr, Chief Sustainability Officer from National Pork Board, USA, said data shows massively improved sustainability in the last 50 years,<sup>32</sup> but the data he was referring to was around emissions intensity and ignored the impact of rising consumption and production rates on total emissions.

### 3.2 Fulfilling demand and tackling food security

By tactically positioning increased demand for animal-sourced food as inevitable, the industry is able to portray itself as simply responding to demand and even helping *'feed the world'*, as if it's carrying out a public service and not itself pushing demand up through marketing and other tactics. In a briefing for Inside

Track, senior figures in the UK meat and dairy industry claimed that while the sector doesn't yet acknowledge that it shapes demand, it is clear that it does 'reinforce behaviour, help shape culture and inform buying decisions' through marketing and product choices.<sup>33</sup>

The FAO livestock report Pathways towards lower emissions was often referenced at COP30 as evidence for the inevitable increase in animal protein demand and production. This report has been heavily criticised for several methodological failures, which misrepresent the emissions saving potential of dietary shifts and underestimate the mitigation potential from farming less livestock by a factor of between 6 and 40.<sup>34</sup> The FAO's position on increased demand for animal-sourced food by has been criticised for going against the scientific consensus that herd numbers need to peak by 2025 to meet the goals of the Paris climate agreement<sup>35</sup> and the evidence in the EAT-Lancet report showing how reduced consumption in certain countries would have health benefits while reducing emissions.<sup>36</sup>

1. Eric Mittenthal, Meat Institute:

*"One thing that gets lost in the discussion around animal ag is the fact that consumer choice is really critical and consumers are continuing to choose animal protein and it's our responsibility to produce our products as sustainably as possible, with as little impact as possible, providing the best possible nutrition."*<sup>37</sup>

*"Demand for animal protein continues to go up around the globe. We know that people are seeking protein, nutrition, nutrient-dense products."*<sup>38</sup>

*"...animal sourced food is uniquely nutrient-dense and not easily replaced."*<sup>39</sup>

2. Huberto Ribeiro Bizzo, Senior Research at Embrapa: [paraphrased] FAO have mentioned similar things... Brazil will respond to worldwide increase in meat consumption.<sup>40</sup>

3. Jamie Burr, National Pork Board, USA: *"Let us not forget that there is nearly 1 billion people who are malnourished."*<sup>41</sup> *"[We] feed the world."*<sup>42</sup>

### 3.3 Meat is sustainable

Attempts to greenwash the animal agriculture industry are longstanding, and the meat industry went to great lengths to position itself as part of the solution at COP30. Highlighting discreet examples of environmental benefits from certain types of farming - while ignoring the industry's absolute and growing emissions - served to downplay the overall climate impact of these vast companies. Many of the statements were deliberately vague or unproven - for example, there was little data to support claims that much of the land used for livestock is not suitable for non-animal agriculture or nature restoration.

1. Eric Mittenthal, Meat Institute: *"We use land that is often not able to be used for other types of agriculture. Animals are critical to food systems and must be included in conversations."* *"Livestock are contributing to livelihoods around the world... they are uniquely nutrient dense, our products, and not easily replaced."*<sup>43</sup>
2. Ana Carolina Zimmerman, Brazilian rancher: *"We can also help with climate change [...] we are already doing good practices and not being rewarded for it."* She cited the use of cover crops as evidence that the system is sustainable.<sup>44</sup>
3. Jamie Burr, National Pork Board, USA: A project looking at 2 million head of hogs showed *"net carbon reduction in US pork production. We actually sequester about a quarter of ton of carbon per acre in the US."*<sup>45</sup> However, it is not clear what the emissions per acre are from pork farms or how those reductions are measured.

4. Mark Lyons, Alltech: Talked about the company “*feeding animals to feed the soil*”<sup>46</sup>, despite soil carbon sequestration being hard to monitor and an often overinflated solution for an increasingly industrialised animal agriculture industry.
5. Lloyd Day, IICA: “*According to FAO, livestock accounts for 12% of global GHG emissions and they provide critical nutrients that are not easily replaced. You probably hear a much larger number when people talk about emissions, but that’s not true.*”<sup>47</sup>

*“We have examples of agriculture, livestock, and plants are reducing emissions in ag whereas the world is saying, we’re the big problem. Even though we’re only 12%, I think it’s less than 12%... I don’t know what data that is, it’s the FAO... I don’t think it’s correct, it’s, you know... statistics.”*<sup>48</sup>

### 3.4 Tell the story

This key theme from the World Meat Congress also came up at COP30, with several speakers emphasising the importance of the animal agriculture industry telling its story. Clearly, the industry feels threatened by the evidence and scrutiny of its climate impact - yet instead of actioning proven solutions, it seeks to reframe the discussion. The quotes below are specific examples of where ‘storytelling’ is the priority but the intention of flipping the narrative was evident throughout the other themes as well.

1. Alltech CEO, Mark Lyons claimed that “[*t*]he story [*about how sustainable the industry is*] isn’t out there”,<sup>49</sup> a gap he sought to address with his propaganda film World Without Cows.
2. Ana Carolina Zimmerman, young rancher: “*My personal role I like to do is tell the good stories of Brazilian agriculture, so we can tell the world that we can be a part of the solution rather than the problem.*”<sup>50</sup>

3. A representative of CIRAD, the French agricultural research for development organisation: “*If you look at IPCC reports, there is an evolution in the narrative on livestock - we moved from a technical approach, emissions to a more subtle comprehension of livestock with ecosystem services, social services, economic services... I think it’s very important to put this message in the COP.*”<sup>51</sup>

### 3.5 Focus on small farmers

Besides telling a positive story, the industry is also giving attention to who is the best messenger and the most trusted source. Here, companies and industry bodies love to focus on farmers, implicitly conjuring images of struggling small-scale farmers who are disadvantaged by the system and climate policies - even though these very companies and bodies are part of a system that is increasingly putting small farms out of business.<sup>52</sup> Jamie Burr from the U.S. National Pork Board, for example, stated how there has been a dramatic decline in pork farmers in his home state of Missouri, yet instead of analysing how that situation came about, he used it to present the difficulties around tackling the industry’s climate impacts.

1. Lloyd Day, IICA: “*We have three principal premises for these COPs, first that farmers need to be part of these discussions, second that science - not political science - needs to be the foundation for policy, and third that agriculture is part of the solution, not the enemy.*”<sup>53</sup> On the panel was one farmer, Zimmerman, who in reality is a large ranch owner, and the World Farmers’ Organisation, who agreed that policy needs to be ‘bottom-up’ - but this organisation works with agribusiness and large-scale farming trade groups more than small-scale farmers.
2. Ana Carolina Zimmerman, rancher: “*If we’re not at the table, we’re on the menu. So it’s very, very important that, as farmers, we’re at the table discussing things and the farmers are at the centre.*”<sup>54</sup>

[paraphrased]: If sustainability measures take up time and money, how can we expect farmers to do it well? Complex and expensive process, hard to do with small scale. Need to also consider other environmental services.<sup>55</sup>

Not only does this contradict the argument that the Brazilian livestock sector is already sustainable but it undermines the focus of COP30, which is to navigate the complexities and find a way forward given the escalation of the climate emergency.

3. Mark Lyons, Alltech - In discussing the lack of trust in the industry that supposedly comes from discussion about its climate impact, he said: *“We are actually one of the most trusted industries, particularly when we have farmers at the forefront. People can connect with them.”*<sup>56</sup> Most emissions are in the supply chains of huge corporations, including those Alltech work with, yet the industry tries to present it as if most food is produced by small farmers.

In the Insider’s Guide to Meat and Dairy published in the UK, the anonymous industry authors state *‘There are many who seek to frame any conversation connected to meat and dairy reduction as an attack on choice, an attack on health and an attack on farmers. This frame is being used to make serious conversations about the issue untenable’*.<sup>57</sup> They also state the current trajectory of choices being made by the sector will in fact lead to the *‘[d]esertion of smaller scale, family farms and... eroding livelihoods of farmers and those working in farming’*. Both statements back up the juxtaposition in evidence at COP30 and the World Meat Congress, of large agribusinesses using concern for farmers as a distraction technique - knowing that genuine solutions like dietary shifts and agroecology would undermine the current industrial models that these businesses profit from.

## 4. Conclusion: The good, the bad and the future

No matter how the cards fell, 2025 was a pivotal year for food system transformation. With COP30 taking place in the global agribusiness powerhouse of Brazil, the release of EAT-Lancet 2.0 and the wait for the updated US dietary guidelines, many working in food policy saw the stakes were high. Behind this, there has been mounting lobbying from agribusiness interests and social media misinformation aimed at keeping climate action on food systems off the agenda.

Inside Track Insiders’ Guide to Meat and Dairy briefing, a deep dive into industry communications strategies by people who have worked in the industry in the UK, reveals how any conversation around meat and dairy reduction is framed as an attack on choice, health and farmers, and how this is done intentionally to sow divisions and delay reform.<sup>58</sup> We see similar industry tactics across the world: they are intended to create division and polarisation and present the industry as already ‘doing its bit’ based on a limited number of pilot projects. However, the story they tell the public about farmers and farming is increasingly untrue.

Food system reform has been gaining ground in the public and political agenda, with recognition of the links between food and climate growing. However, Big Meat and Dairy narratives and the lobby power they deployed gained traction with policymakers. The issue is still not recognised in official COP agreements and not properly addressed in many countries' climate commitments. Furthermore, many green policies that covered food and farming, for example the EU's Farm to Fork strategy, have been significantly weakened due to industry influence.<sup>59</sup> Recent research on media narratives has also shown that just 3% of climate stories cover meat or agriculture, and just 1% mention dietary changes as a climate solution.<sup>60</sup>

The COP30 agenda had several areas that could have furthered food system transformation. These included the Mutirão text, the overarching package from the Presidency itself, as well as the Sharm el-Sheikh joint work on the implementation of climate action on agriculture and food security (SJWA). The Mutirão did not mention food nor agriculture at all, a stark omission given it was the project of a country that prides itself on being an agribusiness leader and whose emissions largely stem from food systems. The SJWA negotiations ended abruptly and were delayed until UN Climate Meeting in Bonn, which will take place in June 2026, reportedly due to *'corporate greenwash'* such as precision agriculture and AI being pushed in negotiations, straying from the remit of *'systemic and holistic approaches'* to climate action on food and agriculture.<sup>61</sup>

On the positive side, COP30 was dubbed the *'COP of Truth'* with the launch of the Declaration on Information Integrity on Climate Change by the UN's Global Initiative on Information Integrity, with 22 countries signed up, including the Brazil.<sup>62</sup> While the rhetoric around the initiative and the declaration focus more on fossil fuel-related climate disinformation, there is ample scope to also address misleading agribusiness narratives.

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## Misleading evidence and industry influence on the US dietary guidelines

The US dietary guidelines were set to be updated in 2025 but launched in early 2026. The original scientific review panel's recommendations, based on extensive research into dietary needs in the US, suggested increased consumption of plant proteins over animal protein. However, under the Trump administration these recommendations were ignored. The new guidelines were instead rewritten by a panel of reviewers, the majority of whom had ties to the meat and dairy industry or other business interests, such as the supplements industry. The end result is a new inverted food pyramid which puts animal products at the top. The outcome was presented under the headline 'eat real food' to highlight the recommendation to eat less processed foods - but the guidelines were criticised for being contradictory and a big win for the meat, dairy and alcohol industries.<sup>63</sup>

Of the nine hand-picked reviewers, six declare financial ties to the meat, dairy (including infant formula), pharma or growing wellness-tech industry, including ties to the National Cattlemen's Beef Association, Nutricia (a subsidiary of Danone), General Mills and Dairy Management Inc.<sup>64</sup> The extent of the panel's industry ties only became public knowledge after the guidelines were published. This conflict of interest has prompted a formal petition by the Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine to the Offices of Inspector General for the Department of Health and Human Services and the U.S. Department of Agriculture, calling for the guidelines to be withdrawn.<sup>65</sup> Experts highlighted that most Americans already overconsume protein, and if they

increase consumption of meat and full-fat dairy this might lead to higher intake of saturated fats, exceeding the guidelines' own recommendations.<sup>66</sup>

The guidelines do not consider any climate or environmental issues, which are increasingly being included in other countries. The World Resources Institute calculated that if the new guidelines led to a 25% increase in protein intake, assuming the same ratio of animal to plant protein, it would require *'100 million acres of additional agricultural land each year – an area larger than Michigan, Ohio and Pennsylvania combined – and increase annual emissions by hundreds of millions of tons of carbon dioxide equivalent'*.<sup>67</sup>

The move was celebrated by several online misinfluencers who advocate for carnivorous or high-meat keto diets and promote conspiracy theories. Shortly after their release came the Whole Milk for Healthy Kids Act, which states full-fat milk must be consumed in schools, with allowances for plant-based milks if a child has a note from their doctor and parent.<sup>68</sup> This law overturned Obama administration policies to tackle obesity by serving lower-fat options in schools.

Their success in the US will likely encourage the meat and dairy industry to lobby governments around the world to put animal products at the centre of dietary guidelines, despite the growing scientific consensus in favour of more plant-based whole foods.

**Nina Teicholz, PhD** @bigfatsurprise

One of the key parts of the new US Dietary guidelines: a warning the public about the very real nutrient deficiencies that come with vegetarian and especially vegan diets. People on these diets don't realize (bc authorities have never told them) that they are risking their health eating this way.

**Vegetarians & Vegans**

- Consume a variety of whole foods, especially protein-rich foods, such as dairy, eggs, beans, peas, lentils, legumes, nuts, seeds, tofu, or tempeh.
- Significantly limit highly processed vegan or vegetarian foods that can include added fats, sugars, and salt.
- Pay careful attention to potential nutrient gaps when consuming a vegetarian or vegan diet. Vegetarian diets often fall short in vitamins D and E, choline, and iron, whereas vegan diets show broader shortfalls in vitamins A, D, E, B<sub>12</sub>, and B<sub>6</sub>; riboflavin; niacin; choline; calcium; iron; magnesium; phosphorus; potassium; zinc; and protein. Monitor nutrient status periodically, especially for iron, vitamin B<sub>12</sub>, vitamin D, calcium, and iodine.
- To avoid nutrient gaps, prioritize targeted supplementation, diversify plant protein sources for amino acid balance, and enhance mineral bioavailability through food preparation techniques.

11:21 PM · Jan 7, 2026 · 144K Views

**Dr Shawn Baker** @SBakerMD

Hats off to all those involved in reshaping our dietary guidelines! @bigfatsurprise @TyBealPhD @BenBikmanPhD and the many others!

To all the carnivore diet supporters, your experiences undoubtedly helped to influence these guidelines as well! From the fact that @SecKennedy frequently talks about carnivore to the fact that a ribeye steak is featured prominently in the new "pyramid"- this wasn't put there randomly. Keep up the great work, continue to share your successes and we will continue to have an impact!

Last edited 6:07 PM · Jan 8, 2026 · 20K Views

**Ken D Berry MD** @KenDBerryMD

If every American will follow the New Pyramid, at least 60% of chronic diseases will disappear.

**HHS** @HHSGov · Jan 7

Introducing: The New Pyramid

10:09 PM · Jan 7, 2026 from Tennessee, USA · 533.2K Views

**Frédéric Leroy** @fleroy1974

Nice. Pretty much like my own diet! Eat real food, prioritize nutrient-density, chose the right fats, & stay away from refined carbs and ultraprocessed junk. Essentially very compatible with what we published on the Nourishment Table: [academic.oup.com/af/article/15/...](https://academic.oup.com/af/article/15/)

**Rapid Response 47** @RapidResponse47 · Jan 7

Introducing The New Pyramid

RealFood.gov

Last edited 7:27 PM · Jan 7, 2026 · 3,149 Views

There has been some progress on food systems transformation at national levels. Denmark has been leading the way in Europe with its Action Plan for Plant Based Foods, which plans to reduce meat consumption and increase healthy, plant-rich diets. The *'plant-based diplomacy'* behind this cross-sectoral effort was discussed in many events at COP30, with the intention of inspiring similar action elsewhere. Analysis by WWF of the 58 NDCs 3.0 that had been submitted at the time found 16 (28%) included diet and sustainable consumption, compared to just 3% of previous NDCs.<sup>69</sup> While 28% is too low, this is a marked improvement.

While many countries have embarked on a transition to renewable energy and transport systems through a variety of fiscal measures and policy interventions, the lack of similar measures in the food sector is glaring. Without action to transform food systems, net zero targets and the goals of the Paris Agreement will be missed. Governments must incorporate sustainable diet and consumption measures in their NDCs and call time on companies attempting to undermine climate policies and greenwash their way out of climate action.

# 5. Annex

Name, Organisation	Message	Quotes from World Meat Congress	Why this matters and how its misleading
<b>Eric Mittenthal,</b> <i>The Meat Institute</i>	Meat industry has a positive story to tell	Eric Mittenthal said audience members planning to attend COP should “ <i>seek out</i> ” the International Meat Secretariat (IMS), an industry non-profit that organises the WMC, <sup>70</sup> so that they can “ <i>unite behind a positive message from the sector</i> ”. <sup>71</sup>	The Meat Institute and IMS have continually sought to downplay and undermine the science on the industry’s impact on climate change and biodiversity loss.
<b>Rupert Claxton,</b> <i>Gira, research and strategy consultancy group</i>	Meat industry has a positive story to tell	In discussing challenges facing the animal protein industry, Claxton said the solution lies in controlling “ <i>the narrative about cattle production</i> ”.	Suggesting that challenges like climate change can be solved by controlling the narrative is a clear form of distract and derail tactics.
<b>Carrie Ruxton,</b> <i>dietician and communications consultant who works with the meat industry</i>	Meat industry has a positive story to tell	It’s the role of the meat industry to “ <i>make the consumer feel comfortable with the fact they want to eat meat</i> ”, including by showing them that it is sustainable. <i>The audience should “stand up and defend your industry”,</i> and there’s a “ <i>fantastic story to tell about how nutritious meat is, all the things you’re doing for the environment</i> ”.  One way they could do this, she suggests, is to demand the use of ‘ <i>net carbon</i> ’ in emissions measurements.	No evidence of the sustainability story is given; in fact, scientific consensus points to harmful impacts of the meat industry, particularly from industrial livestock production and the impact of increased consumption.  Science on soil absorption, which most net carbon arguments are based on, is highly uncertain.

Name, Organisation	Message	Quotes from World Meat Congress	Why this matters and how its misleading
<b>Professor Michael Lee, Harper Adams University</b>	Meat industry has a positive story to tell	Unless the sector wants “ <i>the eye of Mordor</i> ” (a reference to the evil power in The Lord of the Rings), “ <i>we need to change the narrative.</i> ”	Suggesting that challenges like climate change can be solved by controlling the narrative is a clear form of distract and derail tactics. Lee brings his standing as an academic to add credibility to the meat industry’s arguments.
<b>Professor Michael Lee, Harper Adams University</b>	Meat industry has a positive story to tell; Meat is sustainable	The industry has a good story to tell on how it’s bringing emissions into line with the Global Methane Pledge of 30% reduction by 2030.	This isn’t backed up by any data. This industry, at the time the statement was made, had no methane targets and very little transparency. Since the conference, one meat company, MBRF, <sup>72</sup> has set a target for reducing its methane emissions but is not entirely transparent on how it will achieve this.
<b>Gustavo Spadotti, representative from Embrapa, Brazil’s agribusiness research organisation</b>	Meat is sustainable	Presented the meat industry in Brazil as already sustainable, referencing research by Embrapa published in 2018 which suggested 66% of Brazilian territory was designated for preservation or occupied by various forms of native vegetation. <sup>73</sup>	This study comes from a group of researchers, led by Dr Evaristo de Miranda, a famous climate denialist, <sup>74</sup> which exerted ‘ <i>significant political influence and systematically produced content used by the agribusiness caucus and Bolsonaro’s government to dismiss concerns about deforestation in Brazil</i> ’. <sup>75</sup> The data is based on the Rural Environment Registry (CAR), which has been weakened by agribusiness influence and poor oversight, allowing millions of hectares of forest to be illegally registered or erased from records. <sup>76</sup>

Name, Organisation	Message	Quotes from World Meat Congress	Why this matters and how its misleading
<p><b>Professor Michael Lee,</b> <b>Harper Adams University</b></p>	<p>Meat is sustainable</p>	<p>Repeated commonplace narratives that livestock have a great ability to make use of land not suitable for crops, but did stress the need to use more land for crops for humans. He also emphasised the potential use of byproducts and food not suitable for humans for feed.</p> <p>Lee seems to caveat his declarations for increased production of livestock by saying “<i>in some high consuming countries we should consume less which will allow more of Asia and Africa to increase livestock production systems</i>”, but this is brushed over swiftly as just a small piece of the picture.</p>	<p>Estimates vary but around 10% of beef globally comes from grazing systems.<sup>77</sup> Additionally, around a third to 38% of cropland is estimated to be used for animal feed.<sup>78</sup> Combined grazing and animal feed, land use is estimated to be 80% of agricultural land.<sup>79</sup></p> <p>Cattle farming is a leading driver of tropical deforestation, responsible for 41% of forest loss, particularly in Latin America.<sup>80</sup></p>
<p><b>Professor Michael Lee,</b> <b>Harper Adams University</b></p>	<p>Meat is sustainable</p>	<p>Referenced a paper he was involved in as part of the Dublin Declaration looking at “<i>more balanced attribution of livestock’s environmental impacts</i>”<sup>81</sup> He said agriculture is part of a natural cycle, highlighted the potential for circularity and the bioeconomy and the need to focus on “<i>getting in balance with nature</i>”, whereas the focus for fossil fuel industries is decarbonisation.</p>	<p>This paper was published in Animal Frontiers, a predominantly invite-only journal, publishing articles which emphasise the nutritional, economic and societal importance of animal-sourced foods while critiquing plant-forward frameworks. The journal has published at least five articles explicitly challenging the EAT-Lancet report with special features on the Dublin and Denver declarations, led by American Meat Science Association.</p>
<p><b>Ernesto Viglizzo, Instituto de Ciencias de la Tierra y Ambientales de La Pampa (Institute of Earth and Environmental Sciences of La Pampa, INCITAP) in Argentina, formerly a lead author for the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change)</b></p>	<p>Meat is sustainable</p>	<p>The data showing meat’s greater emissions factors “<i>gives rise to vegan activism, to environmentalist activism, to the media, to consumer perception and their own policies</i>”. He then presents alternative data, including using GWP* and showing carbon sequestration potential if the emissions from meat supply chains are measured per hectare rather than by weight of the meat product. He advocates viewing meat’s sustainability metrics in relation to its nutritional qualities: “<i>beef has values very superior to the rest the grasses, the corn and wheat and well, a little higher in the soybean case... Here we are incorporating a qualitative factor to the metric.</i>”</p>	<p>GWP* is a controversial method to measure methane emissions, which tracks changes in methane levels over time – unlike the IPCC’s standard metrics (GWP20 and GWP100), which assess its total warming effect over 20- and 100-year periods. The danger is that GWP* enables false claims of ‘climate neutrality’ simply by stabilising emissions.</p>

Name, Organisation	Message	Quotes from World Meat Congress	Why this matters and how its misleading
<p><b>Professor Michael Lee,</b> <b>Harper Adams University</b></p>	<p>Meat is sustainable</p>	<p>Stated that the key issue he was specifically asked to speak on by the organisers was metrics for measuring emissions, specifically methane. He echoed the previous speaker, Viglizzo, who criticised studies on emissions because of the ways emissions are measured, stating:  <i>“Ernesto described brilliantly the fact that this [GWP100] is a linear metric, and linearity does not define the benefit and the role of livestock in a sustainable agri-food system. Circularity defines the role of livestock in a sustainable agri-food system.”</i></p> <p>Lee advocated reporting using GWP*, alongside GWP100, in both national and corporate reporting. He also advocated for disaggregated reporting of emissions because <i>“knowing more about methane can help our farmers produce a plan for its removal”</i>.</p>	<p>Disaggregated reporting can be vital to understanding climate impacts of agriculture. However, Lee and others in the industry attempt to downplay the role of methane in heating the planet. For example, Lee stated that biogenic and natural methane <i>“is balanced with the ability of hydroxy radicals to break it down”</i>, and that if we didn’t have fossil fuels no one would care about methane from cow burps.</p> <p>He acknowledges that we do have fossil fuels, but the underlying tactic here has been to distract from the climate impact of overconsumption and production and industrial animal agriculture by diverting the focus to fossil fuels.</p>
<p><b>Caio Penido,</b> <b>President of IMAC</b> <b>(Mato Grosso state Meat Institute)</b></p>	<p>Meat is sustainable</p>	<p>Penido downplayed the impact of the meat industry in Brazil. He said fossil fuels <i>“are the real culprits behind climate change, behind all of humanity’s concerns about climate”</i>.</p> <p>He also said that in Brazil <i>“We have 66% of our territory dedicated to biodiversity and conservation, we have low-carbon production due to our tropical climate and pasture-based production systems ...and even so the target never leaves our side.”</i></p> <p>He suggested that Brazil is perfect for carbon credits because of the biodiversity, so polluting countries and companies can offset their emissions.</p>	<p>Scientific consensus is that dietary shift<sup>82</sup> and agricultural methane reductions<sup>83</sup> are crucial to stay on a 1.5 or even a 2-degree trajectory. Agriculture accounts for 74% of Brazil’s emissions and methane, mainly from meat and dairy, has been going up.<sup>84</sup></p> <p>Carbon credit projects are repeatedly found to have issues and are not a reliable climate solution, including in Brazil, with money even being found to go to illegal loggers.<sup>85</sup></p>
<p><b>Rupert Claxton</b></p>	<p>Meat industry has a positive story to tell; Meat is sustainable</p>	<p>Advocated for GWP* as a way to control the narrative, as part of presenting credibility against criticism from <i>“an anti-lifestyle lobby”</i>.</p>	<p>GWP* can accurately be applied at the global level to assess changes in methane levels but it is not applicable to individual countries or companies, and doing so is misleading.</p>

Name, Organisation	Message	Quotes from World Meat Congress	Why this matters and how its misleading
<b>Professor Michael Lee, Harper Adams University</b>	Meat is sustainable; Meat is essential for healthy diet	Stated CO2e doesn't include <i>"the importance of farming systems within social communities. The importance of a family meal"</i> , and that emissions measurements per kilo are wrong because <i>"We don't eat food because it weighs a certain amount [but...] because of its nutritional density, and therefore should assess its environmental impact with that metric."</i>	Metrics looking at the impact of meat on climate change are not a comment on lifestyle; this argument is an attempt to stoke up division that climate based calls for reducing overconsumption are an attack on people's health.
<b>Lucas Weber, Aprosoja (soy industry association)</b>	Meat is essential for healthy diet	Advocated treating autoimmune diseases with a meat-based diet.	There is no clear evidence of this: in fact the Global Autoimmune Institute suggests avoiding red meat as part of an anti-inflammatory diet. <sup>86</sup>
<b>Frédéric Leroy, Vrije Universiteit Brussel</b>	Meat is essential for healthy diet	Asserted that dietary guidelines do not focus enough on meat and that has negatively impacted people's health, suggesting the need to return to a diet <i>"that nourishes and respects the people consuming and producing these foods"</i> . Leroy suggested a correlation between dietary models that suggested limits to meat consumption and a surge in obesity and other related diseases. He then contradicts himself by admitting it is not clear if diet-related harm is linked to dietary guidelines, but regardless states that policy has failed and so a fresh look at the human diet is required.	Leroy undermines his own bold claims with caveats and concessions. He states that you can get the nutrients you need from a diet with less meat but need to consume more of foods like beans than you would of meat (but doesn't suggest this would mean excessive calorie intake) and these require processing (which can be as simple as canning and soaking). He also states that there is no way to say how much red meat is required for healthy diets as there are perfectly healthy options without and emphasised diversity of choice within diets, falling in line with one of the key messages from the update to EAT-Lancet itself that diversity in food is key. It is also clear that dietary guidelines are not a cause of health conditions as adherence to these is generally low. <sup>87</sup>
<b>Frédéric Leroy, Vrije Universiteit Brussel</b>	Meat is essential for healthy diet	The focus around health should be on nutrient density and processing levels because <i>"that's what makes us human"</i> . He briefly summarises ancient diets and the development of the neolithic farming diet having health implications, and pushing common misinformation narratives that suggest the diets of hunter ancestors with high meat consumption are the gold standard for human health.	Evidence on what ancestral diets consisted of are not comparable to what is healthy for a modern human or lifestyle.

Name, Organisation	Message	Quotes from World Meat Congress	Why this matters and how its misleading
<p><b>Thorkildsen,</b>  <b>Head of Nutrition,</b>  <b>Sustainability and Animal</b>  <b>Welfare, MatPrat - Norwegian</b>  <b>Egg and Meat Council</b></p>	<p>Meat is essential for healthy diet</p>	<p>Stated that plant-based food is packed full of chemicals and that people should eat “<i>whole foods</i>” instead.</p>	<p>There is a growing effort to align ‘<i>whole foods</i>’ and ‘<i>real foods</i>’ with meat and dairy, and ‘<i>plant-based</i>’ with processed. However, whole foods have been the food of vegetarians for decades, with wholefood shops predominantly selling ranges of pulses, legumes and wholegrains. This turning on the head of commonly used terms is reflected in the prioritisation of meat in the US dietary guidelines update in 2026.</p>

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