STOP FINANCING FACTORY FARMING

THE DETRIMENTAL IMPACTS OF FACTORY FARMING ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND PUBLIC HEALTH

Evidence on the intersectional impacts on public health, climate, biodiversity, animal welfare, and food system equity

A briefing for the World Bank Spring Meetings 2025. For policymakers, Executive Directors, and World Bank stakeholders

emily@stopfinancingfactoryfarming.com

stopfinancingfactoryfarming.com

INTRODUCTION: A CRITICAL MOMENT TO LEAD RESPONSIBLY

World Bank bus shelter campaign
Washington D.C. Spring Meetings 2025

Factory farming is driving climate breakdown, deforestation, water pollution, biodiversity collapse, soil pollution and degradation, and escalating public health threats such as zoonotic diseases and antimicrobial resistance (AMR).

It causes enormous animal suffering, and entrenches gender inequality and contributes to social harms in communities located near slaughterhouses and industrial farms. At a time when the World Bank Group is poised to expand its agribusiness investments to $9 billion annually by 2030, and the IFC is reviewing its Environmental and Social Sustainability Policy, there is a pivotal opportunity for leadership.

The financing of destructive factory farming directly contradicts the Bank's commitments to the Paris Agreement, the Sustainable Development Goals, and the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework. **These impacts must be addressed to ensure the Bank's investments align with its development mandate and do not undermine long-term health, equity, and climate resilience.**

IS FACTORY FARMING WORTH RISKING THE NEXT PANDEMIC OR FUELLING THE CLIMATE CRISIS?

This briefing elucidates the mechanisms through which factory farming contributes to:

GLOBAL HEALTH RISKS

CLIMATE IMPACT

DEFORESTATION

BIODIVERSITY LOSS

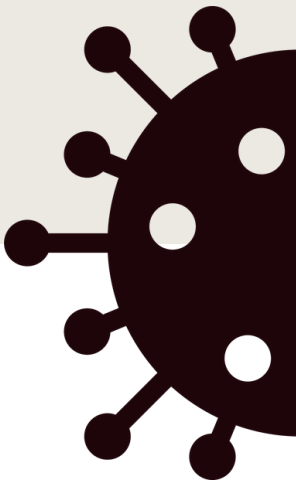
ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COSTS

ANIMAL WELFARE IMPACTS

The impacts of factory farming increasingly conflict with the narrative of inclusive and sustainable prosperity, and a growing number of MDB-funded projects illustrate how these harms play out in practice.

STOP FINANCING FACTORY FARMING

GLOBAL HEALTH RISKS



The intensification of livestock production creates ideal conditions for the emergence, spread and amplification of diseases, some of which are zoonotic.

In industrial systems, animals are kept in overcrowded, poorly ventilated enclosures that limit movement and natural behavior. This **high-density confinement increases stress and facilitates the spread of pathogens**. Studies have linked outbreaks such as avian influenza and swine flu to intensive farming, and public health experts consistently warn that such systems are breeding grounds for future pandemics.

In addition, excessive consumption of red and processed meat—enabled and encouraged by factory farming—has been **associated with** increased risks of cardiovascular disease and colorectal cancer. These diet-related health burdens place further strain on public health systems, particularly in low- and middle-income countries.

The World Bank's continued **financial support for these systems increases exposure to global health risks** that can undermine long-term development goals.

ANTIMICROBIAL RESISTANCE (AMR)

Alongside zoonotic threats, the routine, systemic and prophylactic use of antibiotics in factory farming has made industrial animal agriculture a key driver of antimicrobial resistance. In many operations, antibiotics are used not for treatment, but to compensate for the unsanitary conditions of confinement and to promote faster growth.

This systemic overuse leads to the development of drug-resistant bacteria, reducing the effectiveness of life-saving medicines and increasing the risk of untreatable infections. The World Health Organization identifies AMR as one of the top ten global health threats. Continued investment in factory farms exacerbates this problem, particularly in regions with weak veterinary oversight or insufficient public health infrastructure.

STOP FINANCING FACTORY FARMING

CLIMATE IMPACT

World Bank bus shelter campaign
Washington D.C. Spring Meetings 2025

Factory farming contributes to climate change through greenhouse gas emissions, deforestation, and soil degradation.

Livestock farming alone accounts for at least 16.5% of global emissions—more than all transport combined—and some scientists estimate it could be closer to 20%. These emissions come from methane released by ruminants, nitrous oxide from manure and fertilizers, and carbon emissions from land-use change.

The expansion of industrial farming drives deforestation, especially in South America, where land is cleared for monoculture expansion to grow the soy and cereals used to feed industrially farmed animals. Such environmental impacts make factory farming incompatible with the World Bank's commitments under the Paris Agreement.

Moreover, animal agriculture is a major user and polluter of freshwater resources, worsening regional water stress and undermining climate resilience.

BIODIVERSITY LOSS

Intensive animal agriculture drives biodiversity loss through habitat destruction, chemical pollution, and monoculture feed production.

The conversion of forests and grasslands into farmland—particularly for soy, wheat and maize/corn used as livestock feed—destroys ecosystems critical to planetary health. The Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework highlights the need to transform food systems to reverse nature loss. Yet **factory farming, by its design, is incompatible with biodiversity protection.** It threatens pollinators, reduces species richness, and **contributes to the collapse of aquatic ecosystems via nutrient runoff.** This ecological degradation has direct consequences for food security, public health, and local livelihoods.

STOP FINANCING FACTORY FARMING

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COSTS

Factory farming accelerates rural decline by concentrating ownership in the hands of multinational agribusinesses

Small-scale producers and Indigenous landholders are displaced by vertically integrated operations, often without adequate consultation or compensation. Factory farms have also been linked to **exploitative labor practices, including wage theft, dangerous working conditions, and gender-based violence** near slaughterhouses.

These harms are **disproportionately borne by women and marginalized communities.** Despite being promoted as efficient, factory farming imposes externalized costs on public health systems, local environments, and community well-being.

Factory Farming undermines the World Bank's goal of creating equitable, dignified, and inclusive economies.

ANIMAL WELFARE

Industrial systems raise billions of animals each year under conditions that cause prolonged suffering.

Scientific evidence confirms poor welfare conditions for pigs, broiler chickens, laying hens, dairy cows, and beef cattle — including extreme confinement, mutilations, barren environments, and selective breeding for traits that result in chronic pain and disease (EFSA 2012, 2022, 2023).

The International Finance Corporation's own Good Practice Note, Improving Animal Welfare in Livestock Operations, identifies these as material risks. FAO research also highlights poultry welfare challenges in developing countries. There is growing public demand and regulatory momentum for higher welfare standards.

Support for factory farming contradicts the ethical, reputational, and sustainability standards expected of development banks. Global guidance — including from UNEP — emphasizes the role of financial institutions in shifting capital toward safer, fairer food systems.

STOP FINANCING FACTORY FARMING

THERE ARE BETTER WAYS

Existing and emerging food system models offer sustainable, nutritious, and equitable alternatives to factory farming.

Sustainable Agriculture Tanzania.

As the World Bank Group considers the future of agricultural investment, it is essential to recognize that industrial livestock is not a sustainable or just path to development. Across the globe, organizations and communities are advancing models that prioritize food security, farmer livelihoods, environmental stewardship, and public health. Examples include:

Sustainable Agriculture Tanzania (SAT)

An agroecological model integrating education, applied research, and market access to support smallholder farmers in building resilient, diverse food systems.

Read more

Across diverse contexts, development finance can support models that shift away from industrial animal agriculture and toward more inclusive, sustainable systems.

EthioChicken (IFC Project)

A poultry outgrower scheme in Ethiopia that has improved distribution of income among smallholders and introduced incremental welfare improvements. While not an endorsed model, it illustrates how better practices can be introduced through development finance.

Read more

IFAD's Pro-Poor Value Chain Development Projects

These projects reach out to women and the very poor, apply a programmatic approach where needed, promote inclusive value chain governance, work with the appropriate expertise and partners, and build capacity for implementation.

Read more

While not all examples are perfect, they show how progress is being made through better design and delivery.

STOP FINANCING FACTORY FARMING

CONCLUSION: IS FACTORY FARMING WORTH IT?

Now is the moment for the World Bank Group to lead a strategic shift away from factory farming.

The **upcoming IFC policy review should be used to establish a formal exclusion for industrial livestock systems and to strengthen relevant safeguards.** Redirecting investments toward plant-rich, high-welfare, agroecological systems will help protect climate, biodiversity, and public health—while supporting dignified jobs and local food sovereignty.

Factory farming contradicts the World Bank's stated commitments to health, climate, and sustainable development.

Small-scale farming in San Pablo Huitzo, Mexico

The harms are well documented, immediate, and growing.

By phasing out its support for industrial animal agriculture, the **World Bank Group can lead the transition to food systems that are resilient, equitable, and aligned with the needs of the 21st century.**

STOP FINANCING FACTORY FARMING

About Stop Financing Factory Farming

The Stop Financing Factory Farming Campaign works in partnership with locally affected communities and organizations to shift development finance away from industrial livestock production towards healthier, more humane and sustainable food systems.

The campaign's global Steering Committee includes: the Bank Information Center, Compassion in World Farming, Friends of the Earth U.S., The Global Forest Coalition, International Accountability Project, Sinergia Animal, and World Animal Protection. The campaign has more than 30 organizational members and partners globally.

Acknowledgements

With thanks to the Coalition Steering Committee members, and with particular appreciation to Ladd Connell (Bank Information Center), and Peter Stevenson and Wendy Smith (Compassion in World Farming), for their contributions to content and review. Special thanks to Sustainable Agriculture Tanzania (SAT) for imagery, and to our global partners for campaign insights.

This briefing was compiled by Emily Randall, the Coalition Coordinator and contains hyperlinks to supporting sources.

For a full reference list or to schedule a meeting with the coalition's subject experts, please contact the Coalition Coordinator:
emily@stopfinancingfactoryfarming.com

stopfinancingfactoryfarming.com