

The Letter for LESS and BETTER for livestock farming in the Grand Est

Rédaction
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We take the liberty of writing to you from time to time, dear elected representatives, decision-makers and other stakeholders, on subjects relating to livestock farming.

Our starting point is a strong consensus. In fact, nobody wants to harm farmers, (almost) nobody wants to see the end of livestock farming in the Grand Est¹, and nobody wants future generations to suffer from a chain of natural disasters and hunger.

We hope that the nuances we will bring will facilitate a rational and benevolent consideration of the issues and impacts. So we insist on **urgency**. In fact, "urgency" was the theme of the St Dié International Geography Festival. It is strongly perceived by scientists and the public alike. History is accelerating.

At its plenary session on 29 and 30 June 2023, **the majority of the Conseil Régional du Grand Est adopted a motion calling on the government to disregard the report by the Cour des Comptes: [Public support for cattle farmers](#)** (22 May 2022).

The report demonstrates the **ineffectiveness of public support for cattle farming, which amounts to more than €4.3 billion per year, and recommends a reduction in livestock numbers**, which is absolutely essential if France is to meet its climate commitments.

Let's add that the same applies to other countries and continents; Europe needs to set an example.

Has the regional majority read this report? Does it really believe it has to defend farmers against this report and against the climate?

The Court of Auditors is sympathetic in its analysis of farmers' difficulties. But **public money** is coveted. It is distributed by the Regions, among others. Our taxes should serve the public interest. But who is at the helm of the regional commissions?

The motion by the regional majority declares itself to be **"the promoter of mixed farming (polyculture-élevage) and of a calm debate to promote the attractiveness of the agricultural professions"**.

We would ask you to look more closely at the question: **what mixed farming ?**

What kind of farming conditions? What numbers and densities of animals? How ambitious are we in terms of animal welfare? What biodiversity? How much extensive grassland? What stocking rate per hectare? What crop rotations? What new sectors? When will we stop using pesticides? We also need to come up with criteria for allocating subsidies that are sustainable and ethical; do you agree?

Our concerns correspond to a strong demand from society, an environmental emergency and a public health rationale. **We want to be listened to and heard.**

To begin with, let's set out a rational vision for a cattle industry of the future.

¹ You can find the position paper of the Collectif Nourrir [on its website](#). The Collectif Nourrir brings together [54 major organisations](#), including France Nature Environnement.

The cattle industry: for a more sober and happier future

FNE Grand Est shares the beef industry's opposition to the absurd importation of beef (including under the Mercosur agreements, but also from Europe) and **wishes to promote the consumption of products from French meadows.**

FNE Grand Est considers, in full agreement with the farming profession², that all imported agricultural products must **comply with minimum European standards, with credible controls.**

However we still need to respect animal welfare and biodiversity here. This is not necessarily the case. We'll come back to this later. However, modern cattle buildings in France can be better than those in other parts of Europe, and grazing is still more widely practised. Fortunately, France has its strengths to defend. If the farming profession says that things have already been done, that's true. But it's not enough.

Let's remind ourselves of the known causes of the difficulties faced by cattle farmers. Grazer production has low added value. Demand for beef is falling. The French would rather eat females than males. There is little contractualisation. Investment is high. Public subsidies are captured by the upstream and downstream sectors. There is competition between beef and dairy farming. The downstream sector, particularly the catering industry, is putting pressure on prices and using imported meat. Trading animals involves long journeys. If the balance of trade is positive, it is thanks to the export of live animals, which are fattened very intensively. The climate heats up. Harvests are becoming uncertain. And we still have to spend €4.3 billion a year to maintain this deleterious nonsense?

The French government (unlike Germany) is opposed to **abandoning the export of live animals,** even though the risk of unbearable suffering during transport and slaughter is well known³. Do French livestock farmers deserve such a devaluation of their work? Take the measure of the horror instead of being satisfied with a few reassuring photos of litter in a boat. And stop being complicit in the deleterious productivism of Spain, Ireland, Poland and other neighbouring countries... and the indefensible transport to third countries and also within Europe (calves...).

4.3 billion a year for the beef industry! We could do wonders with less!

- Create a major **"Information for Future"** offensive to show consumers, distributors and farm advisers that what counts are **farming conditions, animal welfare, the climate, nature, the landscape, fairness and sobriety** for all. Let's take a closer look at "One health" and "One welfare", instead of enshrining the habits of the past with deleterious marketing arguments.
- **Priority should be given to living things, animals and biodiversity:** raising and fattening animals on pasture, reintroducing grass-fed steer, keeping calves on the farm where they have been born, extensifying meadows. We'll come back to this later.
- **Organising market opportunities for LESS and BETTER,** bringing added value to the farm
- develop **export of carcasses,** and frozen meat.
- **Build a sustainable and ethical food system** based on solidarity. The cattle sector has valuable assets (more so than pigs and poultry), provided that the herd is properly reduced⁴.

We expect our elected representatives to give strong, proactive support to the European Green Deal and the Farm to Fork strategy, to the restoration of nature and to animal protection.

**Tragically, Europe is in danger of giving in to the lobbies.
but global warming will not give in to empty rhetoric!**

² See [conférence](#) du 31 octobre 2023 par Interbev, Fondation pour la Nature et l'Homme et Institut Velben

³ See [Commission d'enquête du Parlement européen](#), [Rapport Cour des Comptes Européenne](#), [Animals Angels](#), [Welfare](#), [CIWF](#), [Eyes on animals](#), [L214](#)

⁴ Afterres 2050, TYFA, EatLancet, NutriNet, ADEME, Future Nordic Diets, Europ Nitrogen Assessment, Cour des Comptes...