



Stock can safely graze (and contain Greenhouse Gas Emissions), says RASE Report

Grassland farmers can make a considerable contribution to food security while continuing to reduce their environmental impact and make a contribution to climate change, according to a report released by the Royal Agricultural Society of England (RASE).

The report, *Reducing Emissions from Livestock*, has been written by independent livestock scientist, Dr David Garwes, and published by RASE's Practice with Science group. In it, Dr Garwes calls for a "robust" response to those who claim that livestock are the biggest contributors to climate change and that consumers should abandon meat eating as a response.

"There is a public perception, encouraged by some interest groups, that livestock farming is the major source of greenhouse gas (GHG) emission in the UK. There have even been calls to stop eating meat and dairy products in order to reduce livestock numbers. This is a gross exaggeration that must be met with a robust challenge and corrected.

"More than 60% of British agricultural land is grassland and much of it, particularly the hills and uplands, is unsuitable for other crops. Semi-permanent rough grazing and improved grasslands play a vital role in locking up carbon dioxide and regulating the flow of rain into water courses. Without livestock farming, those natural resources would be abandoned and the landscape would soon change beyond recognition.

Dr Garwes points out that, for many years, farmers have been increasing efficiency and reducing livestock numbers, so maintain output while cutting GHG emission.

"These lower livestock numbers have not reduced output thanks to increased efficiency from improved genetics. The key measure is not the emissions generated by each animal but the carbon footprint of each unit of final product.

"A dairy cow producing 8,000 litres of milk a year produces less methane than two 4,000 litre/year cows, because maintenance of each cow produces methane over and above that needed for milk production. Breeding for efficiency in the pig and poultry industries has greatly improved feed conversion, with more nutrients converted into meat and eggs and less lost to the environment.

"Slower genetic improvement in beef cattle and sheep is reflected in lower decreases in their carbon footprints. Livestock farming is expected to continue to reduce its environmental footprint with GHG emissions from each tonne of product reducing 0.8 – 1.2% each year as genetic selection is applied in the pig, poultry and dairy sectors," he said.

RASE Director of Agri-Science, Dr Ian Smith, welcomed the pamphlet and its sensible defence of livestock production.

"Grazed livestock are a key part of UK Agriculture providing the majority of the country's dairy products and red meat and providing a key component in the management of grassland landscapes and biodiversity.

“The questions raised about the future of livestock have to be answered in the context of the GHG their production causes and the consumption of their products. Dr Garwes’ report highlights that, through improved efficiency, GHG from livestock has drastically reduced over the last 30 years and, with further research in this area, it will be possible to produce the food the country needs, maintain the unique grassed landscape we have and continue to reduce the GHGs.

“There is great scope for further reductions, but more applied research is needed to continue the increases in efficiency. Once developed the best practice production techniques need also to be actively demonstrated to the industry.

“This report highlights that if farmers continue to improve the management and efficiency of their livestock businesses it will not only improve their profitability but will also reduce their GHGs and allow people to go on consuming meat and dairy products with a clear conscience.”

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