

## **Meat the Truth: Third World hunger is on our very own plates**

*The documentary Meat the Truth will premiere this week in London. This film draws attention to the many hidden problems associated with the consumption of meat; these are problems for our climate, nature and the environment, health and the global distribution of food. The latter is especially topical in view of the current global food crises and attempts to identify the culprits for world grain shortages. For Marianne Thieme, the first animal rights activist to be elected to a national parliament, it is crystal clear: in the not too distant future, meat consumption will be viewed as anti-social behaviour, in much the same way as smoking is becoming now.*

It is rather touching to discover just how deeply affected people are by what is happening to our environment. In the debate on biofuels, people are finally beginning to wake up to the fact that we should be producing for mouths, rather than motors. Biofuels are now blamed for stealing the bread out of poor people's hands, the destruction of rainforests and being a major contributor to the global food crisis.

In reality, this increasing ethical awareness can be regarded as a severe form of selective indignation. While it is good that the global food crisis has given us this wake-up call, it would be a mistake for this crisis only to be used to denounce irresponsibly produced biofuels. Biofuels are, however, not the only major contributors to the global food crisis; livestock farming is too.

Just 1% of agricultural land worldwide is used for biofuels, whereas 80% is used for livestock production. Nearly 50% of the global grain harvest thus ends up in the stomachs of farm animals. This ultimately means that 85% of plant-based proteins are wasted. This not only leads to the unequal distribution of food, but also creates another major global problem.

According to scientists, such as Louise Fresco, our planet is capable of producing enough food to feed at least 40 billion people using the land currently available for agriculture. However, we would have to feed these people with beans and grains, not meat.

The livestock industry produces more greenhouse gas emissions than all transport and traffic added together, it places a great strain on freshwater supplies and is a major cause of deforestation and the loss of biodiversity. The enormous amount of manure, which is produced by billions of livestock animals, also leads to the large-scale pollution of soil, water and air.

The truism that we should be producing for the mouth and not the motor, should actually be "producing for the mouth and not the muck."

There lies the rub. Policymakers seem to be completely deaf, dumb and blind when it comes to the livestock industry and the meat on our plates. European

leaders are doing nothing to restructure the livestock sector or to encourage the switch to a more plant-based diet.

A transition from animal to plant-based proteins could indeed feed two birds with the same seed. Arable farming is capable of producing sustainable biofuels from waste vegetable matter. In Europe, two-thirds of the agricultural land is currently used for livestock production. There is, therefore, massive potential to regionally produce biomass without destroying any rainforests or competing with food crops. This could yield up to 50% of our transport fuels. Although it should be noted that clear sustainability criteria would have to be established to achieve this.

The society of the future must be a far more plant-based one that does not experience food shortages and can produce biofuels, which pose far fewer environmental, price and distribution problems. If that is what we want.

Within ten years, it should no longer be necessary to use food to produce biofuels. In the meantime, we should consider how we can best eradicate the massive wastage of high-quality plant-based foods by feeding them to livestock animals rather than eating them ourselves.

The challenge of solving the global food crisis lies in a drastic change of policymaking. This will not only entail an end to the destruction of rainforests for the production of biofuels or animal feed, but also a transformation of the animal feed industry into one that grows food crops for people and processes the waste products into clean fuels for people.

Marianne Thieme is a Member of the Dutch Parliament and the world's first elected representative of a political party for non-humans.