



Slow Food®

# **BEYOND WELFARE: WE OWE ANIMALS RESPECT**

Slow Food's Position Paper on Animal Farming

SYNTHESIS

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## WE OWE ANIMALS RESPECT

For years, Slow Food has been reflecting on the human-animal relationship, the one between the wild world and the domestic one, between food and health (our health, that of animals and the planet) where several subjects are involved (breeders, shepherds, cheese makers, charcuterie producers, veterinaries, companies, institutions, universities, agriculture schools, small and large-scale distribution, cooks, the catering industry, citizens) to look for shared solutions and promote a fairer and more sustainable system, based on reducing consumption and animal product waste, supporting and valuing respectful animal farming, those who look after soil, biodiversity, landscape, and, consequently and necessarily, on consuming and wasting less animal products.

The slow farming practices we have in mind for the future will look at soil, water, animal, shepherds, breeders, citizens, technicians, cooks.. once again. A path leading towards a different livestock farming and a new value we have to give to food and, especially animal by-products (meat, milk, cheese, eggs, honey, wool). The welfare status of animals is not detached from either that of the farmers rearing them or the humans eating their by-products, and must have an eye on the ecosystem health as well. These three aspects are interconnected with each other (OneWelfare).

In summary, **“slow” farming should entail:**

### SOIL

Any form of farming needs soil. Really sustainable farming implies a healthy soil, full of life and biodiversity. Fodder and hay are fundamental food for ruminants, however, grazing in pasture and outdoors farming are beneficial for pigs and poultry too. The animals' diets should be integrated just with locally grown grain and cereals, through agricultural practices that are respectful to the soil, keeping it fertile.

Last but not least, a healthy soil – especially covered in grasslands – is fit to store carbon.

Farming and pastoralism are just perfect to preserve marginal lands, where other crops cannot be grown and, animal feed production is thereby not in competition with human food one.

Respecting a land means that part of the planet is not polluted to feed another one. Therefore, we are strongly against intensive monocultures and the import of feed-related crops over long distances or across continents.

### BIODIVERSITY

The biodiversity in permanent meadows and high-altitude pastures must be preserved and to do this, ruminants should be mainly (at least 70%) fed with polyphyte grass and graze in pasture anytime the context allows to. The resulting excellent by-products from an organoleptic point of view, are also healthier and higher in antioxidants.

Making this decision helps promote animal biodiversity, thereby giving credit to the many local breeds that have adapted to different contexts over the centuries - hardy, frugal breeds that can graze in hardly inaccessible areas with a harsh climate. This kind of farming also helps decrease or totally get rid of specific preventive treatments, since animals hardly fall sick in these conditions and their meat is, consequently, far healthier.

Rearing animals and respecting biodiversity at the same time, is a way to protect pollinators, which really need pristine environments, and safeguard the wildlife that – as well as birds- are key to keep harmful insects under control.

## RESPECT FOR ANIMALS

Slow Food prefers using the word “respect” rather than “animal welfare”.

Our point of view on animals is nothing but anthropocentric, and we need to realize that we know very little about animal ethology and the real meaning of the “welfare” concept, that is not merely the absence of disease or infirmity, as it is stated by the WHO. When farming animals, their ethological needs must be taken into accounts. Animals should be farmed so that their basic needs are met; they need to socialize and move around as well as comfort, and their offspring should be living with their mothers longer and have a positive and daily relationship with whom is looking after them. We are strongly against the idea that animals are merely production means and believe that farming animals means living “with” animals.

We are against cages, mutilations, transport of live animals across long distances, slaughter in big facilities where the last part of the life of an animal may become a moment of utter panic and suffering. These places can do a great deal of harm, both psychologically and physically, also to the people working there. Animals should be slaughtered in the same farms where they have lived, without them knowing, or in small local slaughterhouses.

## RESPONSIBILITY

Farming animals and respecting the soil fall under the responsibility of breeders, but consumers too need to know how important their part is. Their responsibility translates into having less meat and animal by-products, and when high-quality meat is paid the right price, this will compensate a kind of farming respecting the animals and the environment.

National and international policies should reward those working for the common good instead of the ones practising a form of animal husbandry generating environmental, social and economic damage. The labelling system must be way more transparent so to give precise information on the whole production chain, from feed ingredients all the way to by-products manufacturing.

The topics that this document tackles are the cardinal points of one of the most important campaigns that Slow Food will be developing in the years to come: “Slow Farming”, joining its network’s forces around some action lines;

- Safeguarding grasslands, with the new “Let’s save permanent grasslands and pastures” project
- The mapping of breed and products that needs saving (Arca del Gusto – Ark of Taste)
- The start of new Presidia to save native breeds and promote their products (meat, milk, cheese, eggs, wool)
- The involvement of virtuous producers (breeders, shepherds, cheesemakers, and charcuterie producers) in Slow Food events (Cheese, first of all and Terra Madre), in the Earth Markets, in Slow Food Travel project and in many direct purchase experiences with producers.
- Awareness-raising initiatives aimed at citizens of any age, promoting more conscious buying, via educational activities in schools and communication and formation activities on all Slow Food media.
- The promotion of advocacy activities, in collaboration with many other stakeholders from the civil society, with the aim to influence national, European and international policies on topics like livestock farming, production and consumption of animal products.

**Please download the complete version of the document [here](#).**

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