

December 16th, 2021

Secretary of Agriculture Thomas J. Vilsack
United States Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.
Washington, DC 20250
Re: Agriculture Innovation Mission for Climate

BY ELECTRONIC MAIL

Dear Secretary Vilsack,

As you stated at the Agriculture Innovation Mission for Climate (AIM4C) launch at COP26, agriculture must engage and change significantly to remain below a 1.5° C global temperature increase. While we agree that climate action in the agricultural sector is long overdue, we are concerned that AIM for Climate is missing key elements and may set forth a dangerous path for the future of our climate, communities, and ecosystems. While some innovation is necessary, we believe the focus of the initiative should be to swiftly implement the sustainable, equitable, economical, and regenerative solutions we already have. We have identified the following gaps in the AIM4C framework:

1. AIM4C fails to support regenerative solutions and indigenous stewardship.

Many of the past “innovations” in agriculture are the reasons for the food insecurity we now face. Crop modification patents have wiped out genetic diversity, increasing the risk of crop failure from diseases. Fertilizers, pesticides, and fungicides have decimated pollinator populations and destroyed soil fertility by killing off microorganisms essential to plant growth, decreasing yields. Monocropping and soil infertility have deteriorated the nutritional quality of the food we depend on for optimal health. Animals raised for food have been modified to grow so large so quickly that not only do they suffer immensely, but the nutritional quality of their meat has also [decreased](#).

Regenerative solutions should be the pinnacle of any future-focused agricultural planning, many of which are readily available. Estimates suggest that restoring the world’s soil biodiversity using known practices could reduce atmospheric carbon to [safe levels within 10-15 years](#). In addition, restoring soil biodiversity [reduces costs](#) by increasing yields, reducing chemical applications, safely eliminating manure lagoons, and reducing veterinary bills by improving animal health. Many regenerative solutions also reduce fossil fuel inputs, further reducing emissions. For instance, raising cattle and lamb on quality pasture with forage diets instead of on feedlots with grain-based diets [reduces energy inputs by about 50%](#).

Indigenous peoples’ stewardship has also proven [essential](#) to climate preservation and sustainable food production through ecosystem management, enhanced resiliency to natural disasters and weather changes, and the use of centuries-old knowledge that has been curated and passed down for generations.

2. AIM4C ignores factory farmed meat reduction and increased protein diversification as climate solutions.

Scientific consensus identifies animal-sourced food reduction as [critical to climate change mitigation](#). The livestock sector represents [14.5% of all human-induced greenhouse gas emissions](#), more than the direct emissions from transportation. A 2018 report found that the top five meat and dairy producers combined emit [more greenhouse gases than ExxonMobil, Shell, or BP](#). The IPCC [identified](#) the near-term reduction of methane emissions—which mainly come from beef production—as vital to curbing climate change. In 2019, the EAT-Lancet Commission concluded that a [50% global reduction in red meat](#) consumption is required to stay within planetary boundaries. More recently, Compassion in World Farming led a conversation at the 2021 UN Food Systems Summit calling for [resizing the livestock industry](#) and reducing meat and dairy consumption.

The USDA has expressed concerns that meat reduction would compromise food security, but a growing body of research shows otherwise. The US livestock population outweighs the US human population by about five times and consumes over seven times as much grain as is consumed directly by the entire American population. The amount of grain fed to US livestock alone is sufficient to feed about [840 million people](#) who follow a plant-based diet, which is about 2.5 times the U.S. population and 11% of the world population. Additionally, [18.9 million tons of wild-caught fish are fed to factory farmed fish](#) and crustaceans, highlighting more inefficiencies in industrial agriculture.

Animal farming takes up [83% of the world's agricultural land, but delivers only 18% of the world's calories](#). For every 100 calories fed to factory-farmed livestock, we only receive 40 calories back from milk, 22 back from eggs, 12 back from chicken meat, 10 from pork, and 3 from beef. For every 1 kg of high-quality animal protein produced, livestock are fed about [6 kg of plant protein](#), indicating meat reduction would result in more protein abundance, not less.

3. AIM4C was launched without public input.

AIM4C provided no opportunity for the public to participate in its development or provide comments before its launch. The initiative only allows participation from governments increasing public investment in agricultural innovation, non-government entities increasing self-financed agricultural R&D, and private entities who already support AIM4C's objectives. These barriers to entry leave out smallholder farmers, environmental justice communities, indigenous peoples, and other groups who are disproportionately impacted by factory farming and who offer key solutions.

Moreover, the initiative allocates no funding to the aforementioned groups, championing industry and private research instead of local solutions that best serve the communities who can create them. By focusing on potentially costly solutions that require significant overhead and initial investment, AIM4C enables corporations to use government funding to develop expensive products and push them upon producers for profit, further driving out local economies and pushing ecosystems to the brink with potentially little climate benefit.

4. AIM4C lacks urgency and delays action.

This year's IPCC report signaled a "code red for humanity," highlighting the need for [immediate, decisive action](#). AIM4C calls for long, multi-year research that we simply don't have time for. Most of the solutions we need are readily available, i.e., restoring soil health, [reducing meat consumption](#), farming regeneratively, and [implementing indigenous knowledge](#). Taking time for more research enables

governments and corporations to delay action. As climate catastrophe looms, the focus now should be to implement humane, equitable, and regenerative solutions immediately.

For the reasons outlined above, we ask that AIM for Climate be expanded to commit to and implement the following measures:

1. Adopt science-based reduction targets for chemically based pesticides, fungicides, and herbicides, and adopt a science-based target to revert a proportion of agricultural land to its natural state.
2. Facilitate a just transition away from factory-farmed meat, dairy, egg, and fish production to diverse protein portfolios, and equitably shift to livestock practices that are scientifically verified humane and produce lower greenhouse gas emissions.
3. Remove barriers to entry from AIM4C and provide funding to maintain and expand the implementation of sustainable, regenerative, and localized practices. Additionally, ensure food sovereignty by protecting small communities, indigenous peoples, and other groups from land grabs and supporting smallholder access to land and resources.
4. Set measurable, incremental targets for the above expansions through 2025.

We would be happy to collaborate with the USDA and other AIM4C partners to provide insights, technical expertise, and execution assistance to achieve these expansions. We look forward to your response and hope to speak with you again in the coming year.

Thank you,



Ben Williamson
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Compassion in World Farming



Allie Molinaro
Campaigns Coordinator
Compassion in World Farming

Animal Legal Defense Fund

Aquatic Life Institute

Center for Biological Diversity

Eurogroup for Animals

Fórum Nacional de Proteção e Defesa Animal

FOUR PAWS USA

Friends of the Earth U.S.

Harvard Animal Law & Policy Clinic

Humane Society International

Lady Freethinker

Plataforma ALTO

Rodale Institute

SEED: Strategies for Ethical and Environmental Development, Inc.

Sinergia Animal

The Humane League

The New School

University of British Columbia

Vegan Hacktivists

Voters for Animal Rights

World Animal Protection US