



Vegan Australia
301/49 York Street, Sydney 2000
Email: info@veganaustralia.org.au

Web: veganaustralia.org.au

2 December 2020

Inquiry into long-term sustainability of the NSW dairy industry

Hearing 4 November 2020

Answers to questions on notice for Greg McFarlane, Vegan Australia

Below are answers to questions on notice arising from Vegan Australia's appearance as a witness to the hearing of the NSW Parliamentary inquiry into the long-term sustainability of the dairy industry.

Question 1: The Vegan Australia submission mentions that in the US there are already organisations that are helping dairy farmers to transition into plant-based farming. Are you able to give us a little bit of information about those programs that are already happening in the US?

Answer:

A growing number of organisations in the US and elsewhere are working with animal farmers to help them transition out of animal agriculture (including the dairy industry) to other forms of agriculture.

The Transformation Project[1] is a US charity actively working to help farmers transition. Examples they discuss include transitioning a pig farm to mushroom farming, a cattle farm to organic vegetable farming, a chicken farm growing hemp plants for CBD oil.

The Agriculture Fairness Alliance[2] advocates for changes in US agriculture policy to support farmers who practice non-exploitative and sustainable farming practices. One focus is on raising awareness of the lobbying by animal agribusinesses for massive bailouts, subsidies and insurance schemes. They are lobbying for legislation[3] to assist animal farmers transition to growing plants for human consumption or to other sustainable businesses. An example of transition they provide is of a Wisconsin dairy farmer[4, 5] who moved into hazelnut farming after realising the environmental impact of dairy was unsustainable. He supports the Alliance's call for the government to help farmers switch to sustainable plant farming or green energy production.

The Rancher Advocacy Program[6] in the US assists farming families wanting to transition from animal agriculture to a financially stable, compassionate, environmentally-friendly way of life while preserving their culture and history. They assist farmers who see the reasons - health, ethical, environmental, financial, social - for abandoning the practice of raising animals for slaughter and want to transition away from animal agriculture and the practices associated with factory and family farms.

In November 2020, the Rancher Advocacy Program held a summit[7] to discuss the question "what can farmers do, on their land, to thrive without using animals?" The summit was attended by farmers, ranchers, scientists, food and agriculture experts, business leaders, activists and technologists.

US non-dairy brand Miyoko's Creamery and Farm Sanctuary have partnered to help California dairy farms transition to plant-based operations. They think it's a win-win opportunity for a sustainable future.[8]

Farm Transformers[9] is a small US initiative helping to build sustainable, plant-based business solutions for farmers transitioning out of animal farming.

The Farm Transformation Institute[10] is another small US group promoting the shift of farms from industrial animal agriculture to plant-based alternatives to improve social welfare for farmers, to ensure animal welfare and to contribute to a positive environmental impact for our future.

US plant based yogurt maker Halsa Foods is helping New York dairy farmers convert to grow organic oats[22]. They say "Oats are one of the most environmentally friendly ingredients for making plant-based milks and other products. We are currently importing our organic oats from Scandinavia because we cannot find the quality that meets our standard in the United States. At the same time, U.S. dairy farms are struggling due to slumping milk sales. So we thought, why not come up with a solution that benefits both of us and our planet?"

In the UK, a coalition of organisations[11] are calling on the government to support the transition of dairy farms to plant-based farming, stating that the UK dairy industry is in decline and urging the government not "bow to the continued demands from dairy industry representatives for financial support" but to support "a progressive transition over to more sustainable, healthier and planet-friendly, non-animal-based agriculture or into other sustainable forms of land management".

The UK Vegan Society runs the Grow Green: Solutions for the Farm of the Future campaign[12]. They have published an Alternatives to Commercial Grazing report and held a Grow Green conference to discuss the scale of the climate emergency, how farming is key to the solution, and how policy can support sustainable plant-strong farming. It discussed a vision of a plant-based UK farming system which would reduce emissions and even achieve negative emissions by reforesting a portion of land currently used for animal agriculture.

Reform'd[13] is an organisation in Europe that is assisting dairy farmers to move into plant agriculture, including oat crops for oat milks[14]. They "believe that by uniting together with farmers and providing them with the tools they need to move away from the animal trade, we are offering a viable new opportunity for their businesses to be part of the growing plant based movement." [15, 16]

The Vegan Sustainability Magazine[17] is an Irish research group that has written a comprehensive report on the Transition to an Irish Vegan Agricultural System[18]. They say "A vegan agricultural system feeds three times the number of people currently being fed with meat and dairy products while leaving enough land for biodiversity and climate change mitigation and other vital ecosystem services. Many dairy farmers already grow kale, beans and maize to feed their cattle and so the skills for horticulture are there. But now these foods would be eaten directly by people or used to produce meat substitutes. Substantial further investment would still be needed to ensure a fair transition to a vegan agricultural system."

Nature Rising[19] is a European campaign to end subsidies for animal agriculture and to move these subsidies to plant-based agriculture to restore biodiversity and reverse climate change.

Farmers For Stock-Free Farming[20] is a Scottish based group established to inspire and support farmers in the transition to animal-free agriculture, through shifting to growing crops for human consumption, carbon farming, restoring ecosystems, and diversifying into a non-traditional agricultural enterprise. The group has put together 100 stock-free initiatives[21], from growing crops for human consumption to nature based tourism.

Question 2: Water consumption of plant foods.

Answer:

Studies carried out by researchers in Australia and overseas show that over 20 times more fresh water is required to produce animal products compared to the same weight of plant products. Animal agriculture puts a huge strain on our water resources and compromises our water security.

For a summary see the below graph. For more details see Vegan Australia's review of the research[23].

While whole almonds require 16,095 litres of water per kg, "water use is higher for cow's milk: 628 litres of water for every litre of dairy, compared to 371 for almond, 270 for rice, 48 for oat and 28 for soy milk" according to researchers at Curtin University.[24]

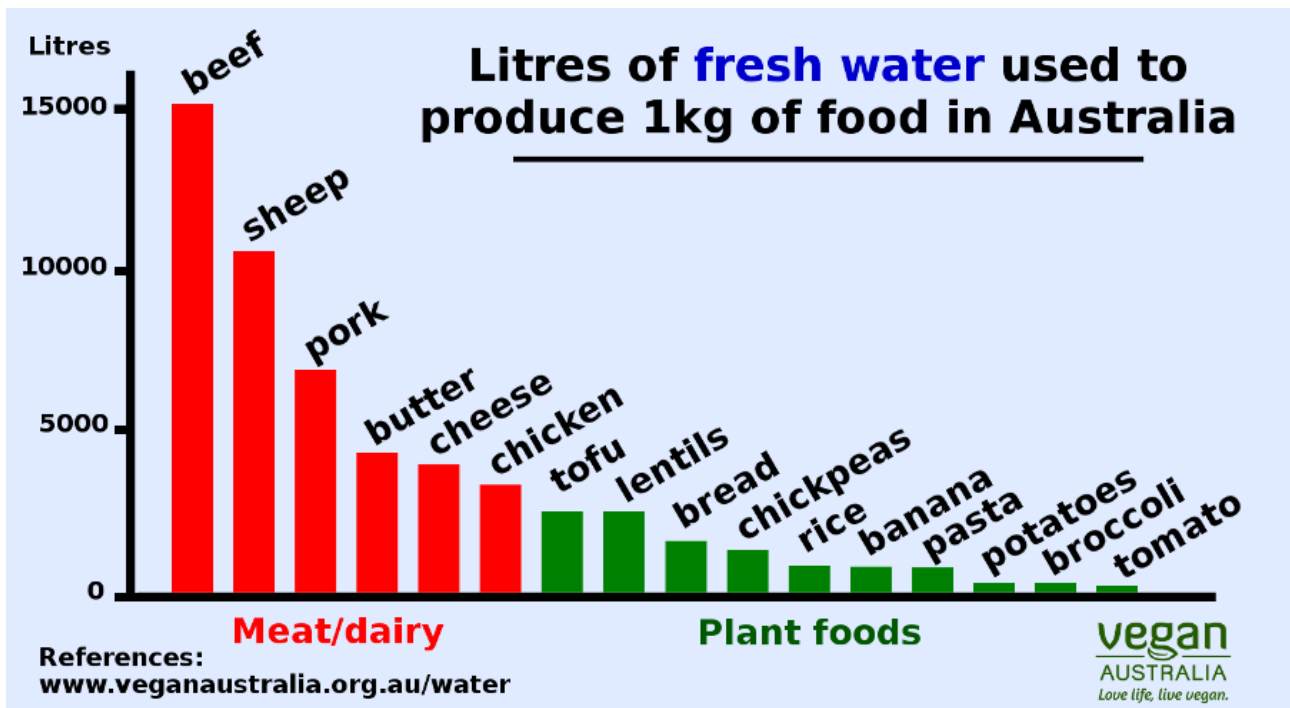


Figure for Question 2

Question 3: Is there any modelling of the costs to government to fund the transitioning of NSW dairy operations to other uses of the land?

Answer:

Vegan Australia has not done any modelling in this area, but we have some comments on how this could be implemented.

A first low cost step could be to finance CSIRO and other agricultural bodies to research alternative (non-animal) uses of dairy land. The results of this research could then be used to provide a practical service to farmers by giving tailored advice for alternative uses suitable for their area. This could be followed up with training of farmers.

Note that the Australian government's Rural Financial Counselling Service[25] is already providing free financial counselling to farmers. This service could be enhanced by training their Farm Liaison Officers to provide advice in transitioning out of animal agriculture.

The Australian government also provides the Farm Household Allowance[26]. This package includes the opportunity to undertake a Farm Financial Assessment and Financial Improvement Agreement. Again, this could be modified to help farmers transition out of animal agriculture.

Other grant & support programs that could be modified are listed by Dairy Australia[27].

A second stage in funding could be for the government to offer a Farmer Plant Based Transition Assistance Package to those who want to transition out of animal farming. This would be a one time payment which could cover expenses such as hiring consultants to help with the transition and buying new equipment or plant stock.

Such an assistance package would help the NSW economy as the farmers will be spending money on the new equipment, increasing diversification and creating jobs.

Vegan Australia intends to look for case studies of animal farms here and overseas that have already transitioned and research the costs to transition and the benefits of the change. We will let the committee know if we have any updates.

As mentioned at the hearing, assistance in transitioning dairy farms to other uses would have to be in step with a decline in the public's demand for dairy products. The government, though environment, health and animal welfare departments, has a role to play in this as well.

References

1. <https://thetransformationproject.org/>
2. <https://www.agriculturefairnessalliance.org/>
3. <https://www.agriculturefairnessalliance.org/legislation>
4. <https://www.agriculturefairnessalliance.org/news/environmental-impact-of-dairy/>
5. <https://www.agriculturefairnessalliance.org/news/lobby-with-afa/>
6. <https://rancheradvocacy.org/>
7. <https://rancheradvocacy.org/summit/>
8. <https://www.dairyreporter.com/Article/2019/11/11/Miyoko-s-Creamery-wants-to-turn-dairy-farms-to-plant-based-The-economy-is-changing>
9. <https://farmtransformers.com/>
10. <http://farmshift.org/>
11. <https://www.animalaid.org.uk/joint-letter-calling-on-government-to-support-a-transition-to-plant-based-farming/>
12. <https://www.vegansociety.com/take-action/campaigns/grow-green>
13. <https://en.refarmd.com/>
14. <https://vegconomist.com/interviews/refarmd-transitioning-farmers-out-of-dairy-we-want-to-give-back-the-power-to-farmers/>
15. <https://en.refarmd.com/biohof-huebeli>
16. <https://en.refarmd.com/bradley-nook-farm>
17. <http://vegansustainability.com/>
18. <http://vegansustainability.com/transition-to-an-irish-vegan-agricultural-system/>
19. <http://naturerising.ie/>
20. <https://farmersforstockfreefarming.org/>
21. <https://farmersforstockfreefarming.org/one-hundred-ways/>
22. <https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/halsa-announces-program-to-convert-dairy-farmland-to-grow-organic-oats-in-the-scandinavian-tradition->

- 301002824.html
23. <https://www.veganaustralia.org.au/water>
 24. <https://theconversation.com/which-milk-is-best-for-the-environment-we-compared-dairy-nut-soy-hemp-and-grain-milks-147660>
 25. <http://www.agriculture.gov.au/ag-farm-food/drought/assistance/rural-financial-counselling-service>
 26. <http://www.agriculture.gov.au/ag-farm-food/drought/assistance/farm-household-allowance>
 27. <https://www.dairyaustralia.com.au/farm-business/grant-and-support-programs>