

American Society of Animal Science

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<http://www.asas.org>

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New Mexico State University
glenn@nmsu.edu

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Kansas State University
mtokach@ksu.edu

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ekegley@uark.edu

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meghanwr@asas.org

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justinb@asas.org

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shawn.archibeque@colostate.edu

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jadaniel@berry.edu

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The Honorable Michael S. Regan
Administrator
Environmental Protection Agency
1200 Pennsylvania Ave NW
Washington, DC 20460

Dear Administrator Regan,

Congratulations on your recent confirmation as Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). As President of the American Society of Animal Science (ASAS), I am writing on behalf of our 5000 member scientists to express our concerns with EPA's activities promoting plant-based foods and criticizing animal production and consumption. It has come to our attention that EPA is actively involved in sponsoring "Plant Forward Menus for the Planet" programs at universities across the nation. ASAS is deeply concerned with EPA's involvement in these programs and the lack of balanced information regarding the role of animal products in a healthy diet, sustainable environment, and strong economy.

ASAS supports science-based public health policies. The messaging included in the Plant Forward program runs counter to peer-reviewed findings on animal agriculture's role in improving nutrition and conserving environmental resources. Animal producers supply our country with healthy meat products while protecting animal welfare and the sustainability of animal agriculture.

ASAS agrees that meat, like any other food, should not be eaten in excess. However, meat in appropriate portions is an essential part of a healthy diet and an excellent source of nutrients such as zinc, B-12, iron, and protein. Meat is a rich source of high quality protein that provides a balanced mixture of essential amino acids to support optimal growth and development of children¹, maintenance of muscle mass in adults², and prevention of sarcopenia in the elderly³. The form of iron found in meat is more readily absorbed⁴ by the body than the form of iron found in plant-based products. That is why the 2020-2025 Dietary Guidelines for Americans⁵ recommends serving red meat to infants starting at six months of age.

Discouraging meat consumption can have serious consequences. A 2017 report^{6,7} shows that over half of infants do not receive the recommended two servings daily of iron-rich foods in their diets, putting them at risk of anemia. In fact, iron deficiency is the most common nutrient deficiency, affecting one in four people worldwide and 30 percent of pregnant women and children, with long-term consequences for learning and memory⁸.

Plant-based foods are simply part of a healthy diet, and any menu initiative needs to reflect that. Focusing on plant-based diets ignores well-documented risk of a plant-based ingredient: sugar. Researchers have documented a rise in obesity rates linked to sugar consumption, not meat intake. In fact, meat consumption is linked to reduced appetite.²

Together, animal scientists and producers across the United States have also worked to make animal agriculture more sustainable—with substantial results. Advances in animal nutrition, breeding, and waste management means meat today is more sustainable than ever.¹⁰ Today, just 3 percent of greenhouse gas emissions¹¹ in the country come from livestock production, compared with 28 percent of emissions coming from transportation and 27 percent coming from the electricity sector.

Cattle also play a role in environmental conservation. Around the world, cattle allow humans to make the most of land that is unsuitable for growing crops. These regions, called rangelands, are home to trees, soil, and deep-rooted perennial plants that act as a significant carbon “sink.”¹² Through responsible management of cattle on these lands, food can be raised while keeping more than 30 percent of the world’s carbon safely sequestered.

Rather than vilifying animal production and consumption, the ASAS supports several simple, science-based ways we can reduce the environmental impact of the livestock industry. We can support policies that reduce food waste. This would have the added benefit of helping households suffering from food insecurity. We can also keep farms operating efficiently by supporting research into animal health and nutrition. A recent study¹³ from the University of California-Davis scientists shows that adding seaweed to cattle feed could reduce methane emissions from beef cattle by as much as 82 percent. This is just one example of the endless innovations that make American farms sustainable sources of nutritious meat products.

As you take on your new role as EPA Administrator, we urge you to review the agency’s policies and activities related to animal production and consumption and call on you to take a more balanced and science-based approach moving forward. ASAS and its member scientists stand ready to work with you and be a science-based resource as we strive towards the shared goals of sustainability, health and economic vitality. Thank you for your consideration and please let us know if we can be of assistance.

Sincerely,



Glenn Duff, PhD
President, American Society of Animal Science