

**Responsible food consumption for all**  
***A simple and transparent food compensation system for offsetting animal welfare and environmental effects***

The Oxefa concept of the foodoffset.org project

foodoffset.org is a project launched in 2015 by Oxefa, with the aim of improving animal welfare and environmental sustainability in the food system. To this aim, core activity of the project is the sponsoring of higher animal welfare standards at suitable places in the food system, as well as to sponsor directly or indirectly environmental protection projects, all in places where the economic system would have otherwise warranted lower standards. We further offer a platform for discussion of topics related to these core activities in order to support the debate on these issues.

#### 1 Our vision, our mission, our values

Our vision is a world in which our service is no longer necessary, as animals for food consumption are most generally protected from abusive conditions in every phase of their life. Where environmental implications of agriculture and animal farming taken care of by producers and fully accounted for in consumers' choices (i.e. priced in). The modern food system has the huge merit of delivering more than enough food for the 7 billion people of the planet – if only its proceeds were better distributed! Our vision is one where the negative side-effects of this plentiful production are contained to an adequate level.

The mission of foodoffset.org is to bring the world one small but decisive step closer to our vision. Towards this aim, on the one hand we want to draw attention to and increase the awareness of the conditions of food animals in the modern food industry, and the environmental effects of our food consumption habits. On the other hand we want to enable individuals to directly make a distinct contribution towards improving the system. In the short-run it seems impossible to change the food sector fundamentally, and it seems equally implausible to completely change the basic food preferences of most people. We therefore focus notably on solutions compatible with the current food economy and with people's tastes. Specifically, we pursue our mission in two ways:

- We provide a platform that allows individuals to compensate for the otherwise sometimes difficult to avoid negative animal welfare effects of their food consumption, as well as for the undesirable environmental consequences of food consumption habits. We think reducing meat consumption in the first place is the most effective way to limit our 'foodprint' – the footprint of our food consumption – on animal welfare and the environment. But as it today appears difficult for many to fully give up eating animal products, we consider care for improved treatment of animals as the least one should do – and this is what our platform is to facilitate.
- We provide a platform to support the discussion and awareness of the implicit choices between animal lives, environmental protection and our human short-term human pleasures that we tend to make on a daily basis almost unconsciously, to the detriment of animals and environment.

The work of foodprint.org is guided by three core values:

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- Sustainability
- Empowerment
- Transparency and no gimmicks

### Sustainability

In presence of mostly indifferent or easily mislead consumers, food producers' profit-seeking and exposition to price-competition result in billions of food animals being utterly exploited, living and dying under the worst imaginable conditions. Furthermore, food, and in particular animal based food, is one of the largest contributors to climate change and desertification, especially if induced land-use change and energy usage are properly accounted for, to name only a few environmental problems associated with our way of feeding the current population. And not only the increasing population but maybe even much more their growing appetite for meat as societies become richer, risk to aggravate the problem further in future if nothing changes. We want to show how one can avoid contributing to these problems, helping the system to become more sustainable for all involved; from an animal, environmental and human perspective.

### Empowerment

Any non-vegan with a minimal amount of concern for animal welfare and the world will regularly, or at least occasionally, have the feeling that she cannot eat certain food products that she might have enjoyed if it were not for the amount of animal cruelty almost certainly contained in it. Furthermore, with more than a minimum of concern one may wish to contribute to alleviate food animal suffering independently of one's own consumption. We want to bring this possibility to the fingertips of anyone. Sorry everyone, no excuses left for simply not caring for caged animals & co.! Ultimately we think major political and cultural changes are necessary to put the food industry in order. As an individual group we are infinitely too small to ourselves make a significant dent in the food sector's negative externalities, but by empowering the public to contribute, we see the possibility for something substantial to happen.

### Transparency and no gimmicks

The modern food industry tends to advertise even the worst-held animals as being of superior standards. The worst for our project would be to follow the same route. Everyone who cares a bit about animal welfare knows that the area is full of controversies, not only because campaigners in the area can distort studies and opinions, but simply also because it is difficult to understand what is important for animals and how one might reasonably weigh animals quantitatively against humans or even the environment. We can only embrace discussions in this area and commit to being transparent about all our activities in order to deserve trust and to become a valid contributor to the discussion and improve the system's conditions.

## 2 Why it is useful to compensate

We are convinced that the atrocities in food animal treatment are among the urgent matters of modern society. Equally, in many places in the world, the growing usage of land and resources for food production leads to large scale local, regional, and global environmental problems. Therefore it is necessary to repair the food sector as soon as possible. To achieve this goal, we believe that individual citizens and firms must contribute to the cause. In theory, policies could do more in this direction, by providing sensible incentives, but unfortunately experience shows that it is difficult to make solutions politically viable.

The problem is that even if vegetarianism and veganism are becoming more popular in the very affluent societies, for most people it is still difficult to consider a diet without any food animal ingredients. And even if we prefer foods from higher animal standards in individual purchases, it is not always for all products possible to find the equivalents with a high animal welfare standard: independent of how highly priced, our preferred restaurant – or that where our friends or colleagues lure us to – likely offers products from strongly abused animals. Vegetarian options are not always plentiful, and even those will contain eggs, milk products – again from similarly badly treated animals. Animals themselves eat a lot of food, leading to a large environmental and resource ‘foodprint’ when we eat animal products, not least in terms of greenhouse-gas emissions. Furthermore, holding animals with a higher welfare standard tends to require more resources than production of similar quantities of food products in highly rationalized factories with caged hens and similar atrocities. There is thus a dilemma that is difficult to avoid in a society whose food system is centred on animal consumption. On top of all, while healthy eating as a vegan seems possible and maybe the best solution, it is not necessarily trivial from a nutritional perspective, even if strongly reducing our animal food intake would be perfectly healthy for most of us. Finally, from some utilitarian perspectives, animals reared under good conditions may even be seen as a good side-effect of our way of eating if the killing is done carefully – except that such good conditions are currently rare exception rather than the standard.

Here is where compensation comes into play as a possible solution. In the long term, society hopefully provides convenient solutions to reduce or avoid the reliance on mistreated food animals, and on externalized pollution. But the animal and environmental atrocities happen now with each bite or sip of low-standard food. Therefore, the logic is to offset as much of the negative effects as possible, to increase welfare and to limit pollution and climate impact. The instrument of compensation thus does not replace the careful selection of the food we eat, but works alongside it.

In the public eye, compensation has been criticized, and considered a modern sale of indulgence. The aim of foodoffset.org is not to increase concerned people’s consumption of low-standard food products. On the contrary, the goal is very much to make people think more about the negative impacts and hidden costs of the food they consume, leading to restraint in consumption. But at least when one lacks the strength to avoid animal consumption from suboptimal places, compensating in order to improve the life of animals and ensuring that one does not have the worst net effect on the system, seems the very least animals should be able to expect from each of us.

foodoffset.org does not want to put the lives of animals over that of humans – instead we find it very difficult to quantitatively compare lives of various species including humans – as well as their living-conditions –, against each other. If you choose to limit your original animal food intake, and give all your wealth away for the benefit of the poorest humans of the world, we embrace your choice.

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Realistically, however, for virtually all in the plentiful rich world at least, the trade-off regarding the question whether to compensate or not, is between improving animal welfare vs. indulging in inessential activities for personal benefit. The fight against animal abuse and food-induced environmental problems surely stands the moral test in this case. It would be utopian to expect many people to devote most of their resources to the cause of animal welfare improvement. We thus cannot count on everyone to become a very active abolitionist in this modern way. But it should be the least to expect everyone to limit as far as possible the personal net contribution to the modern, cruel way of enslaving animals. We do not demand anyone to do this. But we offer anyone a way to voluntarily go in this direction.

### 3 The approach of foodoffset.org

foodoffset.org serves as a platform to bring offsetting of harmful impacts of food consumption to the fingertip of any animal welfare and environmentally conscious consumer and institution.

Participants can choose from a menu to donate for particular animal welfare or environment enhancing projects, improving the lives of a well-defined number of animals, or reducing a well-defined number of greenhouse gas emissions, and therewith offset in these categories harm equivalent to their own food consumption – or more – from possibly lower standards.

For any particular category of compensation, the platform indicates the per-unit offsetting cost. That is, for animal welfare compensation, we indicate the incremental cost for raising (to the desired level) the animal welfare standard of the corresponding types of food per quantity of animal food product, and for environmental offsetting we indicate the cost for reducing greenhouse gas emissions in the amount equivalent to the emissions typically ‘contained’ in a unit of the chosen food category. The next section details the mechanisms used for this compensation.

### 4 Compensation mechanisms

#### 4.1 Guiding principles

The most important aim of our compensation platform is the reduction of aggregate amounts of harms – animal cruelty and environmental degradation – stemming from the food system. This reduction is the guiding factor in our assessment of different compensation options.

Tightly interlinked with the principle of reduction of the total harm, is the principle of ‘additionality’ of our measures. Our compensation measures have no benefit if they merely displace the occurrence of animal cruelty, rather than reducing it overall: If we sponsored the avoidance of animal cruelty in one place, just to increase it by a commensurable amount at another place, the project had no major benefit, as it would not lead to a reduction of the net harm. Additionality means that whatever harm reduction our projects achieve in one place, be not reverted by indirect consequences in other places.

We strive to implement measures of which we are convinced that one can expect a high degree of additionality. Nevertheless, experience in the climate sector shows that even in very carefully constructed CO<sub>2</sub> compensation projects, additionality isn’t always easy to assess or even to define in all details. As a principle we intend to search for solutions where we can expect the net impact of the improvement projects to have at the very least no larger counteracting consequences than the

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consumer could have expected when choosing the higher standard product directly in his original consumption choice.

Theoretical harm reduction and additionality is nothing if practical implementation is not in line with our expectation. It is thus key that we only work with trustworthy project partners and verifiable measures.

#### 4.2 Animal welfare compensation

The look, taste, or macro-nutritional composition of an animal food product will not tell you much about the conditions of the animal's life. Eventually this means that in nobly posh restaurants or shops you have to be equally vary of the animal conditions as in the random, shabby take-away or supermarket around the corner. Absent a particular label, most often you'll simply be served food originating in animal conditions you'd find intolerable when really thinking about them. Because people will in practice often not take the effort to strictly limit choices to products from higher welfare standards in all daily situations, our animal welfare compensation scheme provides an alternative solution.

We use our funds to implement projects in partnership with caterers or other suppliers of animal food products. We only implement projects where our sponsorship allows raising the applied welfare standards compared to the status quo, and verifiably so. We only implement projects with partners whose standard absent foodoffset.org involvement is clearly the usage of animal products of lower standards, so that there is a clear improvement if we sponsor the usage of higher welfare animal products.

By choosing the projects they wish to donate for, donors guide our work: If a person donates for improving the living conditions of a certain type of animal up to a particular standard, we make sure what we implement projects in line with this donation. In fact, we only offer compensation categories for which we have already found project partners, and we offer only compensation units up to the equivalent of animals whose welfare our projects increase to the project standard. Therefore, by donating towards a particular animal welfare or environmental compensation category, one increases the amount of welfare increases that foodoffset.org achieves by exactly the donated-for amount in exactly the donated-for category on average.

In defining the welfare standard categories, we consider two complementary approaches. Implementation of the first is simpler, but we strive to provide projects for the second approach which gives more certainty about the details of the welfare improvement. The first approach consists of seeking options for raising the standard applied to that of a commonly known label, such as that of free-range chicken, for eggs or meat depending on the donor's choice, in the European Union. If a caterer would have normally used caged hens' eggs, we may sponsor his adoption of the free range standard, i.e. his switch to free range. This simplifies communication and verification, as we mainly have to define and verify that our partner uses products from the corresponding label.

The second approach means we ourselves specify the details of desired welfare standards. Ultimately, it may be that we search for food producers that are willing to implement exactly the welfare measures we desire. We may instead also identify which producer's existing practices are worth being supported. Either way, we can sponsor partners for switching to the use of food from

corresponding producers. As there is no well-known label defining the achieved welfare level, we specify the key welfare aspects in the projects description directly available to the donors who decide which project/category to support.

#### 4.3 Emissions compensation

There exist a number of established commercial or charitable greenhouse gas compensation institutions. They either implement their own projects for the reduction of carbon or methane emissions anywhere in the world, such as done by [myclimate](#), or – like [TheCompensators](#) – they buy and delete certificates from existing emission trading schemes in order to reduce the total amount of allowed emissions within the economic system covered by the scheme.

Rather than reinventing the wheel, it seems effective to implement emission compensation through the services of such existing services, as far as they function in line with our principles. If donors wish to offset the climate impact of their food consumption, we thus implement the corresponding emission reduction measures in partnership with existing, general climate compensation organizations, selecting those we deem most appropriate in terms of additionality, trustworthiness, cost-effectiveness, and ease of use.

At the time of writing, EU ETS certificates are very cheap, suggesting an oversupply of emission allowances. In this case, purchasing EU ETS certificates to delete them can be of limited use, as it does not necessarily reduce emission occurrence even in the short-term: the economy has been granted enough emissions to be largely unconstrained. In such situations it seems advisable to rely on independent emission abatement projects such as those by [myclimate](#).

We are not aware of specialized food climate offsetting services, so we use available indicators and own calculations to estimate the amounts of emissions typically related to the food production practices used in our food compensation projects.

#### 5 Addressees of foodoffset.org

foodoffset.org primarily addresses persons who want to lighten their foodprint, be it that they want to help reducing the amount of animal cruelty in the food sector, or that they want to limit the environmental impact, especially climate change. For those who would ideally want to avoid contributing to animal cruelty with their food consumption, but who find it difficult to strictly avoid cruelty-related products in some occasions in their life, foodoffset.org offers a unique platform to offset the animal harm originally induced with direct consumption choices.

As project partners from the supply side of the market we seek persons and firms with an intrinsic motivation to help avoiding unnecessary harm for animals, who ideally participate without requiring a net financial gain from participation, or for whom a possible modest monetary margin is only a side-benefit.

Especially for animal welfare compensation, the additionality requirement described above means, it may in some cases be beneficial if project partners do not publicly advert their project-related use of higher standard animal products, in which case we may include corresponding non-disclosure provisions in project agreements. Ultimately the project seeks transparency about all its affairs so

that possibly required non-disclosure provisions are to be expiring after a limited cooling-off period following the end of the partnership period.

## 6 How foodoffset.org work

### 6.1 Project framework

foodoffset.org is a project of Oxefa, a charitable non-profit organization with the aim of using market-based processes to increase the sustainability of the way we consume food, by reducing the negative effects on animal welfare and environmental pollution.

### 6.2 Personnel

The core team of foodoffset.org consists of currently 4 active members that work voluntarily. There are no full-time employees. All stakeholders have several years of project experience in the academic and corporate sector. They have done work on a broad range of sustainability issues.

### 6.3 Financing

The regular expenditures for the foodoffset.org project are covered through donations and membership fees. The extensive voluntary involvement of the active members avoids direct personnel costs. Funds are thus entirely used to finance the cost of sponsoring the welfare increases and the CO<sub>2</sub> avoidance certificates, besides small costs for the website and banking.