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COMPASSION
in world farming 
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EUROGROUP
FOR ANIMALS

EU SCHOOL SCHEME

TOWARDS A MORE ETHICAL,
ECO-FRIENDLY AND INCLUSIVE
FOOD DISTRIBUTION AT
SCHOOLS





INTRODUCTION

European diets are unsustainable in environmental and human health terms and are very often also nutrient-deficient. The consumption of meat and dairy is too high to meet Europe's climate and health targets and comes at the expense of vegetables, fruits, legumes and nuts. It has been [reported](#) that a third of Europeans aged 15 and over do not consume any fruits and vegetables daily. Even more alarmingly, only 12% of Europeans eat the recommended minimum of five portions of fruits and vegetables a day. As diets determine our future health (and thus impact the health sector as well), this gap needs to be addressed. Children should be encouraged from a very young age to eat plenty of vegetables and fruits as the basis of a healthy and nutritionally adequate diet.

The Farm to Fork Strategy and Europe's Beating Cancer Plan both acknowledge this shortcoming and stress the need to shift to more plant-rich diets. Adapting the EU school scheme for fruit, vegetables and milk would be a simple way to encourage the shift towards healthier and more sustainable foods and could engrain these new dietary habits in future generations. It is therefore crucial that the revised school scheme targets this goal by promoting the consumption of healthy plant-based foods. That includes increasing support for fruits and vegetables and extending the scheme to plant-based alternatives to dairy milk, also considering that animal-based milk is not suitable for many children due to their health conditions or ethical beliefs. In this briefing, we present our recommendations for the revised EU school scheme to make it more animal welfare- and eco-friendly, more inclusive and more educational.

SUMMARY OF OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1** Include fortified plant-based alternatives to dairy milk in the school scheme
- 2** Significantly increase support for fruits and vegetables
- 3** Limit the support for dairy products to only those coming from organic farming due to environmental footprint and animal welfare concerns
- 4** Raise awareness of animal welfare in food production and the impact of our food system on climate change, the environment and nature conservation
- 5** Increase the participation by civil society organisations in the educational measures

I.

MAKE THE SCHEME

MORE WELFARE-FRIENDLY



The dairy sector is linked to some of the most serious animal welfare shortcomings in the EU. Some of the common practices of the industry include:

- stressful separation of calves from their mothers shortly after birth
- confinement of calves in tiny individual pens
- long-haul transport of calves as unwanted by-products of the industry, usually at a very young age
- unsuitable housing conditions of dairy cows, including tethering, lack of space to exercise, and a lack of bedding
- selective breeding for higher milk production, which puts incredible strain on cow's health and promotes incidence of metabolic and reproductive disorders, lameness, and mastitis

At present, the 20 million dairy cows kept on EU farms are not protected by species-specific legislation and the standards for their husbandry are set by the industry. Therefore, if dairy milk is to be supported by the school scheme, it should **only originate from higher welfare systems such as organic farming** that takes greater account of animals' physiological and behavioural needs.

Moreover, **the scheme should also include fortified plant-based alternatives to milk** such as oat, soy, rice or nut drinks. This would give an option to children who do not consume dairy for ethical reasons as well as children who prefer plant-based milk because of their health, cultural heritage or taste preference while promoting plant-based foods that are more sustainable than their animal-based counterparts.

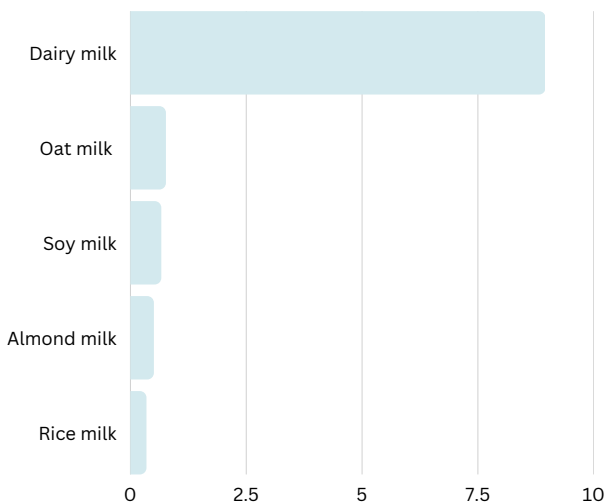
II.

MAKE THE SCHEME MORE ECO-FRIENDLY



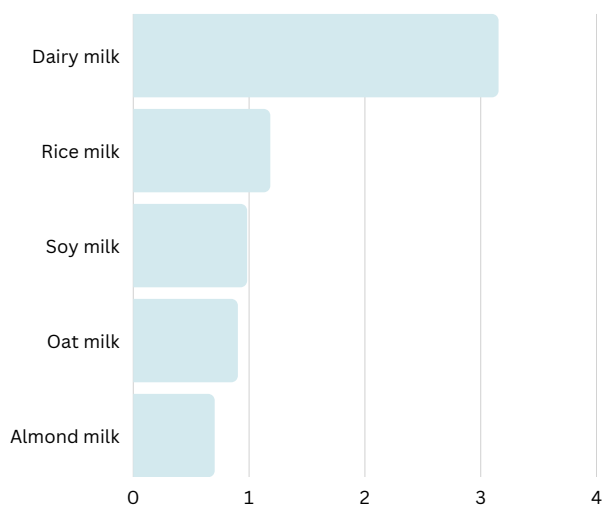
LAND USE*

(M²/L)



GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS*

(KG/L)



Dairy milk has a heavy environmental footprint and is also far more resource-intensive than plant-based alternatives. It generates significantly more greenhouse gases, especially methane. Therefore, **extending the scheme to more environmentally friendly plant-based alternatives would be in line with the goals of the Farm to Fork Strategy and is an opportunity to promote a shift towards more plant-based diets.** Soy milk offers the best protein-quality to carbon-footprint ratio. While soybean cultivation is often linked to the deforestation of the Amazon, research by ProVeg confirms that mostly European soy is used for soy milk on the EU market.

At the same time, the **scheme should significantly increase support for vegetables and fruits**, which should make up half of our diet, according to EAT-Lancet, a diet model that is healthy for people and the planet alike.

*Source: Poore, Nemecek (2018). Reducing food's environmental impact through producers and consumers, Science.

III.

MAKE THE SCHEME MORE INCLUSIVE



Until the end of the 19th century people outside Europe did not typically consume dairy. Dairy consumption started to spread to other parts of the world with European colonialism. Lactose intolerance is highly prevalent among Asian and African communities, making **the promotion of plant-based drinks crucial for the inclusion of these minority groups in the EU.** Depriving children from these ethnicities of the choice of plant-based milk alternatives, which have also been a part of many cultures for centuries, is not in line with the EU's antidiscriminatory values. Even for children from cultures traditionally linked to milk consumption and with a lower incidence of lactose intolerance, being able to choose based on their preference is vital.

"Lactose intolerance occurs in about 25% of people in Europe; 50-80% of people of Hispanic origin, people from south India, black people, and Ashkenazi Jews; and almost 100% of people in Asia and American Indians."*

While outdated assumptions that plant-based alternatives are nutritionally deficient or even unhealthy persist, a multitude of studies have proven that fortified plant-based drinks (i. e. those with added vitamins and minerals) are an **adequate substitute for cows' milk and a good source of protein and calcium.** It is important to ensure that all children, especially those who cannot digest lactose, are offered a nutritious plant-based alternative.

III.

MAKE THE SCHEME MORE EDUCATIONAL



The scheme should also be used to educate children and young adults about the **impact of our food system on the environment, our health, and animal welfare and to increase awareness of alternative diets that are nutritionally rich but also more sustainable.** Civil society organisations should be included in such educational measures. There is an information gap that partly prevents consumers from making better choices. That is why it is important to start educating children and young adults so that they can follow the positive dietary habits they learned in school in their future lives as adults. Teaching such habits to children from an early age will help us raise healthier and more conscientious future generations and increase the demand for products that perform better on public health and environmental criteria.

It is also important to consider that many children and young adults do not have any contact with farmed animals and are largely separated from the food production system. However, educational measures that would remedy this should not be limited to commercial farm visits, where children see animals solely through the prism of their utilisation as production units. Including visits to **sanctuaries for farmed animals** can give children a new perspective and enable them to see and interact with animals in natural settings, without the strain of agricultural production. This could in turn spark an interest in animals' well-being and positively influence their future behaviour as consumers and their approach to sustainability and the much-needed reform of our food system.



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