fokusfleisch
Eine Initiative der Fleischwirtschaft

Bill Gates
Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation
1300 I St NW,
Washington, DC 20005
USA

**Fokus Fleisch**
**GAVF mbH**
**Adenauerallee 118**
**53113 Bonn**

**info@fokus-fleisch.de**

**Bonn, 24. Februar 2021**

**Dear Mr. Gates,**

We support your commitment to more climate protection. This commitment requires the greatest efforts from all social groups. Our industry, the German meat industry, reduces $CO_2$ emissions and water consumption in production every year through a wide range of measures and initiatives. Compared to many other industries, the sustainability figures in meat production show great progress. When you claimed that people in the richest countries on earth should move away from meat consumption and switch to synthetically produced products, you may not have been aware of these facts.

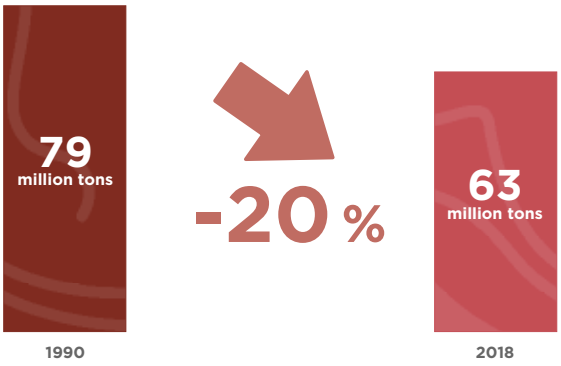
You invest a large part of your wealth in significant projects to save planet Earth. Your financial commitment to social projects, especially in Africa, is outstanding. The fact that you use your global fame to draw attention to social injustices is also quite honorable. However, in your current push to renounce meat, you must not conceal the fact that you invested millions of dollars in the launch of the alternative meat producer, Beyond Meat. This fact undermines your credibility in these claims to move away from meat consumption.

To make your plea for more climate protection stable and your argumentation secure, we are happy to provide you with neutral facts:

You are correct that the agricultural sector can make a significant contribution to reducing greenhouse gas emissions through climate-efficient production. This contribution is already happening, with figures improving every year. Take Germany, for example: Here, emissions from agriculture account for 7.4 percent of total $CO_2$ emissions extrapolated to $CO_2$ equivalents *(https://www.umweltbundesamt.de/daten/land-forstwirtschaft/beitrag-der-landwirtschaft-zu-den-treibhausgas#treibhausgas-emissionen-aus-der-landwirtschaft)*. To a large extent, this is a natural cycle of $CO_2$ uptake by plants (animal feed) and methane emissions. In contrast, transport and industry sectors predominantly use fossil $CO_2$ carriers. From 1990 to 2018, for example, German agriculture reduced greenhouse gas emissions by 20 percent, from 79 million tons to 63 million tons per year. Across Europe, this reduction even ranges around 40 percent.

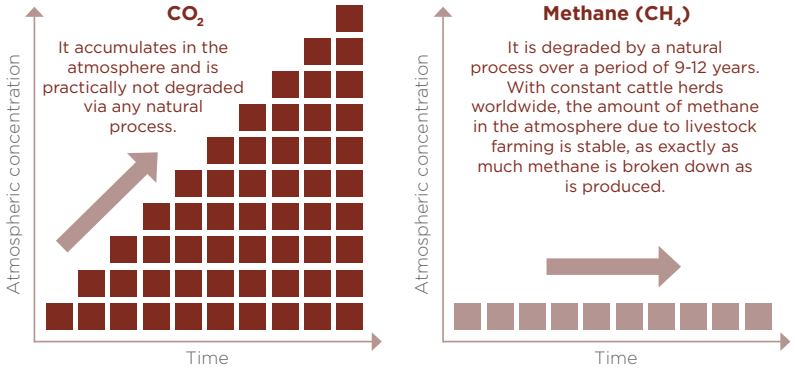
The FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations) has made extensive scientific data publicly available on the subject of climate change and agricultural food production. This shows that emissions in agriculture can be continuously optimized with modern methods. Meanwhile, emissions in other sectors continue to rise.

## Greenhouse gas emissions in German agriculture 1990-2018




One of the main gases released in agriculture is methane. However, methane behaves fundamentally different to $CO_2$ from fossil sources such as coal and oil. It decomposes into $CO_2$ in the atmosphere after nine to twelve years and is then converted again by plants as part of the biogenic life cycle. Therefore, if cattle herds remain constant, the amount of methane in the atmosphere caused by livestock farming also remains stable. It would be very interesting for you to contact Professor Dr. Frank M. Mitloehner. Prof. Mitloehner is one of the most important scientists in the world studying the relationship between climate change and agriculture. He is doing research in your neighborhood, at the University of California at Davis.

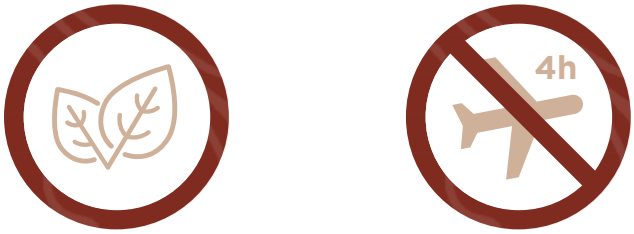
## Comparison of the degradation characteristics of $CO_2$ and methane




Sources: UC Davis Clear Center; Based on research by Myles R. Allen, Keith P. Shine, Jan S. Fuglastvedt, Richard J. Miller, Michelle Cain, David J. Frame and Adrian H. Macey. Read more here: https://racu.be/blt75

Agriculture and livestock farming make a large part of the available biomass usable for humans. That is because 82 percent of the world's agricultural land is not suitable as cropland (Raschka et al. 2012, nova-Institut). However, this pastureland produces many nutrients that only ruminants can convert into food for humans. Prof. Dr. Wilhelm Windisch from the Technical University of Munich-Weihenstephan has recently demonstrated this connection *(https://www.topagrar.com/schwein/news/nutztiere-machen-nicht-essbare-biomasse-fuer-uns-erst-nutzbar-12466684.html).*

**Abstaining from air travel does more for the climate than a vegetarian diet**




**0.45 t $CO_2$**
would be saved per person **per year** by switching to a vegetarian diet.

**0.68 t $CO_2$**
would be saved per person for **every 4 hours** of abstained air travel.

*Calculated on the basis of average values using the $CO_2$ scenario calculator of the German Federal Environment Agency.

Dear Mr. Gates, if you let all the facts sink in, avoiding meat is not the way to save the climate. With other methods, $CO_2$ could be saved much faster. In comparison: An average person in Germany would save 0.45 tons of $CO_2$ per year if they changed their diet to vegetarian. A four-hour flight would save 0.68 tons of $CO_2$. According to calculations by Lund University, your personal $CO_2$ emissions were 10,000 times higher than those of an average person due to your numerous private flights. The calculation is based on data from 2017 – have you cut back on your flights since then to reduce your gigantic carbon footprint?

The enormous energy consumption from global internet usage also contributes far more to $CO_2$ release than meat production. In Germany alone, internet usage in 2019 (when there was still a lot of flying), caused as many emissions as the entire air traffic. *(https://www.zdf.de/nachrichten/heute/klickscham-wie-viel-co2-e-mails-und-streaming-verusachen-100.html).*

Dear Mr. Gates, please consider the aforementioned facts and aspects when you continue to make recommendations on climate protection. We are certain that all sectors and production companies must make a combined effort to improve the $CO_2$ balance. This effort will not succeed with a general renunciation of meat. As you said in an interview, you yourself will not give up your beloved cheeseburgers.

We, the meat industry in Germany, are focusing on future-oriented meat production. Production that is more strongly organized in cycles and that ultimately – for example, through manure fertilization – makes the intensive cultivation of crops possible as well. If we want to feed ten billion people worldwide in the future, we must not lose ourselves in trench warfare and demonization. We need innovations to achieve progress for the sake of the climate and humanity. We are of one mind on that.

**Sincerely,**

**Dr. Heike Harstick**
**Fokus Fleisch**