The IMS is a non-profit organization catering exclusively to the requirements of the worldwide meat and livestock sector

It is anti-livestock ideology, not unprocessed red meat, that is a risk to health

In preparation for the UN Food Systems Summit, the IMS Human Nutrition and Health Committee hosted (15 July) an informal presentation by Dr. Peer Ederer and Dr. Frédéric Leroy of the Scientific Council (SC) of the World Farmers' Organisation (WFO) paper, *Consumption of Unprocessed Red Meat Is Not a Risk to Health* (link to paper).

The key findings from a close and detailed examination of the latest high-quality research and data by the SC panel demonstrates that there is:

- *no significant associations between unprocessed red meat and poultry intake and mortality or major cardio-vascular disease*
- *no significant difference in overall (all-cause) mortality between the diet groups of low meat eaters, fish eaters, and vegetarians compared with regular meat eaters*
- *limited evidence in human beings for the carcinogenicity of the consumption of red meat*
- *the data very slightly lean toward an association of red meat consumption and protective health benefits.*

The panel's conclusion is that *adults can continue current unprocessed red meat consumption*. Moreover, the association between *processed* meats and health risks is also contested, while there are health benefits from the protein in processed meats in countries with poor refrigeration facilities, which often preclude safe consumption of fresh meat.

Is there a scientific consensus?

The interesting – and disturbing – question is how have studies such as the WHO-IARC, the Lancet-EAT and Global Burden of Disease studies come to the conclusion that unprocessed red meat consumption is causally linked to increased health and mortality risks? This is especially worrisome as it "would be wrong to assume that a scientific consensus exists to justify policies to reduce unprocessed red meat consumption in the general population for health reasons" according to the WFO.

The short answer is that there has been the selective use and misrepresentation of the data - "torturing statistical numbers", and not taking into account confounding factors or the complexity of the relationships. Context is everything, yet the health benefits of eating red meat are often ignored.

Global Burden of Disease Study Methodology Questioned

One of the most glaring cases is the change in the conclusions between 2017 and 2019 in the Global Burden of Disease studies. The 2017 study identified a global annual death burden of just 25,000 deaths due to high red meat consumption, out of a total 22 million deaths due to all 21 dietary risk factors, or only around 0.1% of the total. *Red meat would be a hundred times less dangerous than a diet low in fruit for instance*. In stark contrast the 2019 study reported that red meat consumption

5 rue Lespagnol
75020 Paris, France

Phone: +33 (0)1 4493 6020
Fax: +33 (0)1 4493 6001

www.meat-ims.org

had emerged as a significant dietary health risk, claiming to cause the equivalent of 896,000 deaths in the global population per year, which would represent a 36-fold increase over the 2017 estimates. What was the "scientific magic" here? The study (without providing the relevant data) assumes a theoretical minimum risk exposure level of red meat intake of zero. In other words, the first bite of red meat would already be toxic. In fact, only 1 % of the global population consumes more than 85 grams per day, above which the health risks increase.

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The anti-livestock lobby is powerful, being particularly vocal against ruminants in terms of both alleged harm to human health, the environment, and suppression of "animal rights". Substantial financial resources are raised from investors and the lobby has commandeered influential advocates (such as the Gates Foundation) and supports academics. It has the ear of the media, some international governmental organisations, and many national governments. Red meat consumption in richer countries has been on a slow, downward trend (relative prices matter!) but the public are not (yet) buying the anti-livestock story.

Key message, do not be mislead by the hype

However, this should not lead to complacency: the UNFSS risks being highjacked by ideology rather than led by robust scientific evidence. This message from the WFO report (and others) needs to be disseminated widely, especially to governments: *As there are no risks to general health to be expected, the consumption of unprocessed red meat at today's common levels should therefore be encouraged for all population groups as a significant source of dense and readily bio-available proteins, essential micro-nutrients and critically important bioactive substances and as part of an overall balanced diet combining different food groups.*