# Dairy sector faces backlash over weak methane reduction commitments



Some of the world’s leading dairy producers are under scrutiny for their inability to effectively tackle methane emissions, a potent greenhouse gas that poses a significant threat to global climate stability. A recent assessment conducted by the Changing Markets Foundation highlights the inadequacy of methane reduction strategies among 20 major dairy brands and coffee chains that heavily rely on dairy products. While almost all companies acknowledge the impact of livestock-related methane on climate change, only two—Nestlé and Danone—claim to have successfully reduced their emissions.

The assessment scored these companies based on their targets, action plans, and transparency regarding methane emissions. Alarmingly, only six out of the 20 companies, including Arla and General Mills, monitor their methane outputs directly, with even fewer disclosing this crucial information publicly. Danone topped the evaluation with a score of 59 out of 100, but its achievement is dwarfed by the sheer scale of the industry problem. The report underscores a troubling trend: despite the sector generating over $420 billion annually, there is a glaring absence of concrete commitments to reduce dairy production or set specific methane targets.

Methane is known to be 80 times more effective than carbon dioxide at trapping heat in the atmosphere, making its reduction a critical element in global efforts to curb climate change. The Changing Markets Foundation asserts that agriculture accounts for nearly 40% of methane emissions, with dairy and beef production contributing over 70% of that figure. Such statistics underscore the urgent need for robust regulatory frameworks and actionable commitments from the dairy industry. Nusa Urbancic, CEO of Changing Markets, stressed that while firms may offer "fine words and a few voluntary actions," these are insufficient given the scale of action needed. “Governments must set science-based methane cuts for the agricultural sector,” Urbancic stated, emphasising the importance of concrete legislative frameworks to drive change.

The industry has faced significant backlash from both consumers and investors over this lack of accountability. Investors have highlighted that the absence of strict environmental regulations leaves the dairy and beef sectors exposed to reputational risks, especially in a landscape increasingly focused on sustainability and environmental ethics. Although initiatives like the Global Methane Pledge aim for a 30% reduction in methane by 2030, the reality is that only 16 countries have committed to such targets.

In the UK, Arla Foods' trial of the methane-reducing feed additive Bovaer revealed the complexities of bridging technological advancements with public sentiment. Despite evidence supporting Bovaer's efficacy in cutting methane emissions by 30%, widespread consumer misinformation has sparked resistance, leading to protests and calls for boycotts. Such dynamics illustrate that the adoption of innovative solutions in methane reduction also hinges on consumer acceptance and public trust.

Meanwhile, on a global scale, countries like India, the world's largest milk producer, grapple with similar challenges. Although the Indian government has not signed onto international methane reduction pledges, local initiatives are underway to improve bovine genetics and feed quality to enhance productivity while mitigating emissions. Experts insist that any measures to reduce methane emissions must balance environmental goals with the livelihoods of the farmers who depend on livestock for their income.

In light of these findings, the dairy industry is at a crossroads. Sustainable practices are more necessary than ever, not just as a corporate responsibility but as a cornerstone for a future where food production does not come at the expense of the planet. Without meaningful commitments and accountability, the promises made by major dairy corporations may remain just that—promises without the backing of substantial actions.

To achieve a sustainable dairy sector, stakeholders must unite, focusing on transparent reporting, specific emissions reduction targets, and the incorporation of innovative technologies that have not only demonstrable environmental benefits but also public acceptance. Only through collective effort can the dairy industry effectively combat one of the most pressing contributors to climate change: methane emissions.

### Reference Map

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.thegrocer.co.uk/news/dairy-giants-failing-to-cut-methane-emissions-data-reveals/704465.article> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.reuters.com/sustainability/decarbonizing-industries/blindspot-over-methane-emissions-put-dairy-beef-sectors-risk-say-investors-2024-06-17/> - Investors have highlighted a significant oversight in the dairy and beef sectors regarding methane emissions, a potent greenhouse gas with 80 times the warming power of CO2. Despite global initiatives like the Global Methane Pledge aiming for a 30% reduction by 2030, the agricultural sector remains a major contributor, responsible for nearly 40% of emissions. Notably, only 16 countries have concrete targets to reduce methane in agriculture. The dairy and beef sectors, producing over 70% of agricultural methane emissions, lack stringent regulations and comprehensive reporting. While some companies have initiated efforts to reduce methane emissions, many producers have yet to establish specific reduction targets. The article emphasizes the need for holistic approaches and transparent, measurable commitments from industry stakeholders to address this critical issue.
3. <https://www.reuters.com/sustainability/climate-energy/comment-why-we-should-all-be-crying-over-arla-spilt-milk-2024-12-09/> - Arla Foods UK's trial of the dairy feed additive Bovaer on 30 UK farms has sparked backlash, with consumers pouring milk down the drain and threatening boycotts. Bovaer, produced by DSM-Firmenich, has been shown to reduce methane emissions in dairy cows by 30%. Despite assurances from Arla, DSM-Firmenich, and regulatory approvals from various food safety authorities, misinformation claims about the additive's harm persist. This resistance risks inhibiting the adoption of methane-reducing technologies, which are crucial given agriculture’s significant contribution to human-generated methane emissions. The article underscores the need for comprehensive commitments from dairy companies to report and target methane emissions, while also addressing public concerns and misinformation.
4. <https://apnews.com/article/5aa77866e27f6d94e14e4e394e0b7201> - India, the world's largest milk producer, is home to 80 million dairy farmers and 303 million bovine cattle, resulting in significant methane emissions contributing to global warming. Methane is notably 80 times more potent as a greenhouse gas than carbon dioxide in the short term. Although the Indian government has not joined global methane-reduction pledges, national efforts are underway to address the issue. The National Dairy Development Board is promoting genetic improvements and better-quality feed to enhance cow productivity and reduce emissions. There's also a focus on repurposing crop residues as cattle feed instead of burning them. Experts agree that improving feed quality and promoting low-emission local cattle breeds can help. However, there's a shortage of good-quality feed, requiring further government support. Any emissions-reduction measures must consider the livelihoods of farmers, the integral role of livestock in farming, and the use of cow manure as fertilizer. Despite methane emissions, India's per capita emissions remain relatively low due to its large population. Dairy farmers like Abinaya Tamilarasu remain committed to their way of life, highlighting the need for balanced solutions that support both climate goals and farmer welfare.
5. <https://changingmarkets.org/press-releases/big-emissions-empty-promises/> - A report by the Changing Markets Foundation reveals that many meat and dairy corporations are promoting regenerative agriculture initiatives without delivering meaningful climate action. Companies like FrieslandCampina, Arla, and WH Group publicly back these initiatives but often use them to report offset emissions rather than reduce them directly. The report also highlights the impact of industry lobbying on national policies, including the weakening of the EU's Farm to Fork strategy and the removal of cattle from the Industrial Emissions Directive. The findings suggest that while companies claim to address climate change, their actions often fall short, and governments must set science-based methane reduction targets for the agricultural sector.
6. <https://apnews.com/article/c4c39b3519fce4219d76d17332e4aa8a> - In Pixley, California, residents struggle with air quality issues due to the pervasive smell and emissions from nearby dairies. These industrial-scale dairy farms are significant methane emitters, contributing to poor air quality in the San Joaquin Valley. Methane digesters, which convert manure into biofuel, are promoted as a solution to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. However, critics argue that these digesters could worsen ammonia and particulate matter pollution, adversely affecting human health. Despite their potential in mitigating climate change, environmental justice organizations urge a halt in funding for digesters, citing increased pollution in low-income areas. While proponents highlight the environmental benefits, such as reduced odors and cleaner vehicle fuels, there is contention over their impact on local air quality and community health.
7. <https://www.dairyherd.com/news/business/dairy-giant-danone-aims-cut-methane-emissions-30-2030> - Danone, one of the world’s largest dairy companies, announced plans to reduce absolute methane emissions from its fresh milk supply chain by 30% by 2030. The company aims to achieve this by collaborating with farmers, other companies, and governments on regenerative practices. Methane emissions have emerged as a top threat to the global climate, with scientists and policymakers calling for aggressive action to curb them. At the 2021 U.N. climate summit in Glasgow, Scotland, more than 100 countries pledged a 30% cut from 2020 methane emissions levels by 2030. However, few have since carved out clear plans to reach that goal. Danone, which works directly with 58,000 dairy farmers across 20 countries, expects to remove 1.2 million tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent of methane emissions by 2030.