

## POWERING THE NEXT FRONTIER OF SOCIAL JUSTICE

**Billions of animals live in extreme confinement, subjected to mutilation** in industrial farms and slaughterhouses, and are tethered or caged 24x7. In the industrial age, animals are treated as commodities without any regard for their ability to feel pain or pleasure. They are subjected to the same processes as inanimate inputs such as iron, steel, or chemicals. To reduce costs and maximize yields, which is the natural & acceptable mode of driving efficiency, they are subject to progressively higher levels of confinement in shrinking spaces, and varying forms of mutilation which is leading to invisible cruelty at scale.

**The current state is not a result of individual choices, but of systems that have developed without fully recognising animals as sentient beings. That is the core issue – animal sentience and the right of animals to a life of dignity.** The issue transcends religion, dietary practices and preferences, culture and caste. It is **crucial for society to engage with the invisible cruelty** that the system has evolved to impose. It is equally crucial to avoid a polarising debate about dietary practices of individuals. **IKC seeks to shift the debate from individual dietary practices to the core issue of animal sentience and the invisible cruelty in the modern supply chains.**

**The India Karuna Collaborative (IKC) seeks to bridge this systemic gap—between growing evidence of animal sentience and the way food systems currently operate.** It is built on the conviction that large-scale awareness is the key to unlock talent, capital, and policy for kinder, future-ready food systems.

**We believe animal suffering can end in our lifetime.** Social justice movements of the past such as women's rights and equality, and the abolition of slavery reshaped our moral compass. Similarly, we believe that recognising animal sentience is the next frontier of social justice and human progress.

### Why is this important

This isn't just an animal welfare issue. **It's the missing layer in India's growth story – the hidden hinge linking climate action, public health, food security, and sustainable development.** Animal agriculture systems drive widespread antimicrobial resistance, cause higher instances of noncommunicable diseases (NCDs), and accelerate climate risk. Animal-based products directly correlate with public health and environmental devastation. **Annexure 2** lists the public health, environmental and climate implications of animal agriculture.

### What is the solution

The welfare of farmed animals needs to be **integrated into the national development agenda and existing public and private policy frameworks** to drive four key outcomes:

1. **Development and integration of welfare standards** meeting the 5-freedom framework (freedom from hunger, discomfort, pain & injury, fear and the freedom to express normal behavior), integrated into supply chains, backed by transparent humane certification infrastructure. The first crucial step would be integration into public and private policy.
2. **Scaling up the supply-side eco-system of 'Alternative Proteins'** to drive better public health & climate outcomes through Policy support & investments in protein-rich, affordable plant foods.

3. **Evidence-driven integration of Plant based nutrition into the healthcare system** for improved public health outcomes.
4. **Integration in the education system** of the concept of animal sentience and the intersections with public health and climate.

**IKC is a collective of 45+ NGOs with expertise ranging from animal welfare to sustainability to public health.** We believe that awareness building is the most foundational lever that will lead to greater inflow of talent, capital and favourable policy outcomes to **tangibly reduce animal suffering by 2047.** We believe that human welfare and animal welfare are synergistic, and both can be achieved through a gradual transition. **Annexure 1** lists IKC's position on key issues.

IKC operates as a collective through a **10-member Steering Council** consisting of organisations representing the movement to mitigate climate impact, improve public health and end animal suffering. IKC is funded by a small group of funders who are mission aligned.

## Annexure 1

### What does IKC stand for

*IKC is an initiative focused on recognising animal sentience and reducing animal suffering by developing solutions that do not ignore people's right to choices, farmers' rights to livelihood, the country's focus to sustain economic growth, and the future generations' right to a greener planet. It is about also acknowledging that animals have rights too and that it is important to respect them.*

**IKC is pro-animals:** IKC believes that the **core issue is animal sentience and the right of animals to a life of dignity.** We are working to enable the ecosystem for improving welfare standards and gradually replacing animals use in the food chain via alternative technologies.

**IKC is pro-choice.** We respect that individuals have the right to make choices that impact their lives. It is well-accepted that the freedom of choice is not absolute - we accept some restrictions to our choices where these could harm our fellow human beings. For instance, speed limits exist because reckless driving endangers other people on the road. It is our view that we should be willing to accept some restrictions on our right to choose if it harms other sentient beings. However, this needs to be voluntary and driven by behaviour change led by awareness, and by nudging mechanisms incorporated into state & private policies.

**IKC is pro-health.** We believe in evidence-based and science-based decisions and choices. There is evidence that generally plant-based diets are healthier, and it is possible to get adequate & diverse nutrition from plant-based sources. As a country, we need to address protein deficiency for the poor by developing sustainable and affordable plant-based protein sources.

**IKC is pro-sustainability.** It is well established that animal agriculture is one of the key drives of GHG emissions and uses disproportionate amount of natural resources. We believe that a gradual transition towards a plant-based food system will help us leave a healthier planet for our future generations. We also believe that mindful consumption of resources will minimise waste, lighten our ecological footprint, and protect the planet that sustains all life.

**IKC is pro-growth.** We believe that it is crucial to drive economic growth to eradicate poverty and to protect livelihoods. We believe that animal welfare should become a consideration and should be integrated into the national development agenda – this is not inconsistent with the growth agenda. Currently, animals are ignored and this is perpetuating and accentuating invisible cruelty. Instead, we should develop and integrate animal welfare standards into the public and private policy, and work on a just transition of farmer livelihoods to alternative farming vocations that enhance their incomes e.g. cage-free egg farms.

**IKC is pro-solutions.** As a society, we need to focus on the solutions which include:

- Development and integration of welfare standards in the agri-industrial supply chains, and
- A gradual and guided transition to plant-based nutrition, driven by voluntary behaviour change and supported by awareness building and nudging mechanisms in both public and private policy.

We believe the above approach is in complete harmony with the values of “Karuna” and “Ahimsa,” which were propounded in India and have provided guidance in times of stress and confusion in our country. Integrating animal sentience into policy and practise will build healthier societies and a more sustainable planet for generations to come.

## Annexure 2

A growing body of evidence shows that what we eat has a direct bearing on public health, environmental stability, and economic resilience. Animal agriculture, as currently organised, is a major driver of antimicrobial resistance, noncommunicable diseases and climate risk, yet these harms are the result of systemic evolution rather than the fault of any individual farmer or consumer. At the same time, well planned plant-based diets—while requiring attention to specific nutrients such as vitamin B12 and iron—are generally associated with better cardiometabolic outcomes, lower cancer risk and reduced dependence on medically important antibiotics. -communicable diseases and climate risk, yet these harms are the result of systemic evolution rather than the fault of any individual farmer or consumer. At the same time, well-planned plant-based diets—while requiring attention to specific nutrients such as vitamin B12 and iron—are generally associated with better cardiometabolic outcomes, lower cancer risk and reduced dependence on medically important antibiotics.

In this context, a plant forward transition is best understood not as a restriction, but as a forward transition and a high leverage opportunity to [integrate animal welfare, public health and climate action](#) into India's development agenda. By supporting affordable, protein rich plant foods, strengthening welfare standards in livestock supply chains, and embedding the science of animal sentience and planetary health into education and policy, **India can reduce invisible cruelty, cut agricultural emissions, and improve long term food and nutrition security**. IKC seeks to act as a catalyst in this transition— by championing dietary and agricultural choices that enable human wellbeing, ecological balance, and economic transformation—rooted in science, compassion, and pragmatic policy leadership. -forward transition is best understood not as a restriction, but as a high-leverage opportunity to -rich plant foods, strengthening welfare standards in livestock supply chains, and embedding the science of animal sentience and planetary health into education and policy, -term food and nutrition security

### Public health

Several studies show a strong correlation between [human health vis a vis consumption of animal protein](#). In addition, the inhumane conditions in animal agriculture/ factory farming are causing even more risks than were earlier reported. On the other hand, nutritionally sound plant-based diets are highly effective, provided attention is given to a few essential micronutrients —are generally associated with lower risks of cardiovascular disease, diabetes and certain cancers, and can help reduce antibiotic use in the food system, making them a pragmatic lever for strengthening population health.

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1. **Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR):** Approximately 70% of global antibiotics are used in livestock production, contributing to an estimated 10 million annual AMR-related deaths worldwide (Enshaie E et.al, 2025; WHO). [According to a study, by the year 2050, bacterial infections will outnumber cancers in terms of human deaths, owing to the fact that currently available antimicrobials will no longer be as effective in treating bacterial infections.](#)
2. **Cardiovascular Disease and Diabetes:** Red and processed meat consumption is associated with a 25% increased risk of heart disease and 20-30% higher incidence of type 2 diabetes (Li, Chunxiao et al., 2025; Enshaie E et.al, 2025; Sridhar et al., 2014). This is primarily

attributed to higher cholesterol and saturated fat content in animal products. On the other hand, vegetarian diets in the Indian context are associated with measurable improvements in multiple cardiometabolic risk factors and lacto-vegetarian diets associated with 33% lower odds of diabetes (Agarwal et al., 2014).

3. **Zoonotic Disease Emergence:** Roughly 60% of known infectious diseases and 75% of emerging infectious diseases are zoonotic (originating in animals) (UNEP report).
4. **Hypertension prevalence (ICMR INDIAB analysis):** Countrywide analysis estimated ~35.5% prevalence of hypertension (~315 million people) in India, alongside 28.6% generalized obesity and 39.5% abdominal obesity (Mohan et al., 2023).
5. **Cancer Risk:** Regular consumption of red and processed meat raises colon cancer risk by 18%, as established through multiple epidemiological studies (Farvid MS, et al., 2021). Whereas a meta-analysis found that higher adherence to plant-based diets was associated with a significantly reduced risk of overall digestive system cancers (Zhao et al., 2022).

## Climate health

Animal agriculture is a leading contributor to global warming and responsible for global greenhouse gas emissions through methane production and deforestation. By contrast, shifting gradually toward more plant-based food systems can dramatically reduce emissions and resource use per calorie, preserve vital carbon sinks and biodiversity, and support a low carbon development pathway aligned with India's long-term climate and sustainability goals.

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1. **Greenhouse Gas Emissions:** Livestock production accounts for 15-22% of global greenhouse gas emissions, with beef and dairy having the highest carbon footprints per kilogram among common food items (Santo, 2025; Ritchie, 2022). Life-cycle studies demonstrate that meat and milk products rank among the highest carbon footprints of common Indian foods (Pathak et al., 2024).
2. **Deforestation and Land-Use Change:** Animal agriculture utilizes nearly 80% of all global agricultural land (grazing + feed crops), yet it produces only 18% of global calories (Scarborough et al., 2023; IPCC, 2022). Intensive livestock operations release methane, ammonia, and other gases that cause local air pollution (Kapoor, 2019).
3. **Water Scarcity and Pollution:** Industrial animal farming is exceptionally resource intensive. It takes approximately 15,000 litres of water to produce just 1kg of beef, compared to ~300 litres for 1kg of vegetables. (Scarborough et al., 2023; United Nations, n.d.).

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