

Written evidence from Richard Boden (MET0014)

Richard Boden: Environmental campaigner, farmer.

I wish to answer two of the questions you ask:

11) What are the advantages and disadvantages of available metrics used to report and compare methane emissions including GWP100 and GWP*?

Enteric methane is a natural part of the carbon cycle. Cows were belching before we were here, and they will be belching long after we are gone. The current handwringing over livestock's role in climate change is, frankly, all a bit silly. We need to stop it, and instead focus on addressing the real driver of climate change: fossil fuel use.

Government should adopt GWP*, as the experts tell us that it is a more accurate measure of the role of methane in climate change. However, whichever metric is used doesn't matter so far as cows are concerned. Livestock simply need to be excluded from any policy decisions regarding climate change.

16) Are there emerging technologies, such as methane suppressant feed products or approaches to slurry management, that could aid with methane emissions reduction in agriculture? What impact could they deliver ?

The overriding objection to methane suppressants is that it is a solution to a problem that doesn't exist. Enteric methane is irrelevant to man-made climate change, so why pretend otherwise? The answer to that question lies in another question: Who is demanding that methane suppressants are fed to cows ? The supermarkets. Why? Because they have identified cows as their 'get out of jail card' with regards scope 3 emissions.

The major retailers have been told they must reduce emissions in their supply chain. This presents them with a problem, as the key emission points in that supply chain - transport, refrigeration, packaging - are fundamental to their day-to-day operation. The supermarket business model is based on consolidation and centralization. It is a business model that only 'works' because they are, in economic terms, free riders; they make no financial contribution to compensate for the environmental damage caused by hauling food ever greater distances. The requirement to reduce scope 3 emissions is Governments laudable attempt to address this free rider issue.

Telling farmers to medicate their cows feed is the supermarkets way out. Farmers reduce methane from cows: scope 3 box ticked. So much easier than actually addressing the real cause of climate change, fossil fuel use in the food chain.

That is the main reason why methane reducing feed supplements need to be rejected; they allow business as usual for a fundamentally unsustainable food system.

Meat and milk have had to work hard to restore their reputation after previous ill-advised meddling and short cuts with the cows diet. Feeding compounds unnatural to the cows normal diet is asking for trouble, at best in terms of public image, at worst in unintended consequences.

The cow and the sheep are environmental marvels. They turn vegetation inedible to humans into tasty, nutrient rich meat and milk. A sustainable food system will embrace the cow, not abuse it by shoving medicated feed down its throat.