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Everything under control?
How we steer our lives
between autonomy and
dependence.

AUTOonomy



TÜVRheinland®
Precisely Right.

Veterinarian and mediator Dr. Anita Idel was a lead author of the global agricultural report. She teaches at universities and is the author of the book “Die Kuh ist kein Klima-Killer” (“The cow is not a climate killer: how the agricultural industry is ravaging the Earth and what we can do about it”). Her focus is on the untapped potential of sustainable grazing for soil fertility, climate, and biodiversity.





Wrong conclusions

VETERINARIAN DR. ANITA IDEL ALSO STUDIED AGRICULTURE AND BELIEVES THAT THE MAIN-STREAM THINKING IN RESEARCH AND EDUCATION IS DISASTROUS. SHE IS CALLING FOR A RADICAL CHANGE IN THINKING WITH THE AIM OF GENERATING SOIL FERTILITY IN ORDER TO FEED THE FUTURE POPULATION.

Ms. Idel, is agriculture well equipped for the future?

Not if we go on this way. We have imposed a capitalist system onto living, finite resources. Animals, plants, and soils are being exploited and destroyed instead of used for their symbiotic potential. There is a great risk in doing so, initially for farmers and ultimately for every national economy. We experts are well trained in repairing, which is all that's being done. But we are only able to delay the destruction of previously fertile soils at best rather than avert it.

But the yields are constantly increasing.

That's true, but studies claiming that organic farming is not the solution due to lower yields are comparing apples and oranges. If you compare a field of organic corn with industrial cultivation, the yield of one growing season is indeed lower. But the consequences are completely left out of the equation. As a result of mineral fertilizer and pesticide use in the USA, millions of hectares of arable land have been taken over by resistant weeds. The loss of these areas never appears in any yield statistics. Studies designed in this way are highly unscientific because they externalize the costs of the damage, yet promise productivity and growth...

Why is that?

There's more money in it than in farming! Since the 1970s, the message propagated by leading agricultural economists was that high-tech, synthetic chemical fertilizers and pesticides, along with genetic engineering and biotechnology, can be used to maximize the production of animals and plants without limits. This is why, according

to the world agricultural report, disaster is looming not despite of but rather because of mainstream thinking in science and teaching. If the study design is flawed, the math may be right but the conclusions will still be wrong. The idea now is to move the cow, branded as a climate killer, off the pasture and give it more concentrated feed so that it emits less methane.

What needs to be done instead?

A systemic research approach would include the impact of concentrated animal feeding operations on the environment and the climate. The cow is a ruminant. It shouldn't be turned into something that competes for our food when it can protect the climate by being on pasture. We need sustainable agriculture. All the efforts going into research, education, and practice must be devoted to our basic resource: Agriculture will only have a future if we maintain soil life and, moreover, restore fertility to the soils.

How should farmers pay for this?

With the many tasks that farmers can, should, and must carry out, the product price is of course not adequate as an income. Biodiverse ecosystems require considerable financial support. There is plenty of money available for this in the EU, for example. But as a result of extreme lobbying, 20 percent of businesses receive 80 percent of the subsidies. And it's not just the way funds are allocated in favor of major investors – regardless of how they farm this land – that destroys livelihoods. There is also the global market and free trade, which aims to produce goods wherever it is cheapest. Only qualified external protection can prevent ecological and social erosion. ☐