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The share of agri-food systems in total greenhouse gas emissions

Global, regional and country trends

1990–2019

>> FAO Statistics Division

HIGHLIGHTS

- → In 2019, global anthropogenic emissions were 54 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent (CO_2eq), of which 17 billion tonnes CO_2eq, or 31 percent, came from agri-food systems.
- → In terms of single gases, agri-food systems generated 21 percent of carbon dioxide emissions, 53 percent of methane emissions and 78 percent of nitrous oxide emissions globally in 2019.
- → Farm-gate emissions were the largest component of agri-food systems emissions in 2019 with roughly 7 billion tonnes CO_2eq, followed by pre- and post-production processes (6 billion tonnes CO_2eq) and land use change (4 billion tonnes CO_2eq).
- → Emissions from agri-food systems increased globally by 16 percent between 1990 and 2019, but their share in total emissions decreased, from 40 percent to 31 percent, as did the per capita emissions, from 2.7 to 2.1 tonnes CO_2eq per capita.
- → In 2019, the composition of agri-food systems emissions varied between developed and developing countries. Pre- and post-production processes accounted for more than half the total in developed countries, while in developing countries farm-gate activities and land use change dominated agri-food systems emissions.
- → In 2019, agri-food systems represented more than 70 percent of total anthropogenic emissions in Africa and South America, the highest among all regions.
- → In 2019, the countries with the largest emissions from agri-food systems were China, India, Brazil, the United States of America and Indonesia, though none of them figured as top emitters per capita.
- → Emissions from farm-gate activities and supply chains were the main drivers of food systems emissions in several developed and emerging economies, including the United States of America, China and India. Conversely, land use change was the largest component in Brazil and Indonesia.

FAOSTAT EMISSIONS SHARES

INTRODUCTION

Emissions from agri-food systems are those generated by farm production activities (crops and livestock), land use change and pre- and post-production processes. The first two components result in emissions generated on agricultural land, while the third refers to emissions from supply chain processes including transport, processing and input manufacturing, as well as from household consumption and waste. Emissions on agricultural land are well characterized in the literature, with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) disseminating annual updates (FAO, 2021) that are widely used and inform the periodic assessments of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPPC). They include non-CO_2 emissions from crop and livestock production, generated within the farm gate, as well as carbon losses from land conversion processes needed to make room for new cultivations – mainly tropical deforestation and peatland degradation.

Conversely, the quantification of emissions generated in agri-food systems beyond the farm gate is a more recent endevour, with global estimates of the total share of food sytems in total anthropogenic emissions estimated at 27–39 percent (Rosenzweig *et al.*, 2020). Estimations of such emissions by country have only been produced very recently (Crippa *et al.*, 2021; Tubiello *et al.*, 2021a).

This analytical brief presents results of the first such database developed by FAO. Statistics on absolute emissions and their shares are disseminated at the country, regional and global level, over the period 1990–2019, in the FAOSTAT Emissions shares domain. The domain covers, in addition to emissions on agricultural land, pre- and post-production processes in agri-food systems, such as those linked to: i) the production of inputs (fertilizers, materials for food packaging); ii) energy generation and consumption in food supply chains (food processing, transport and retail) and at the household level (cooking and refrigeration); and iii) waste disposal (such as in landfilling, incineration and wastewater management). In order to quantify shares of agri-food systems emissions in the total economy, the FAOSTAT Emissions shares domain also includes information on emissions from all sectors, as classified by IPCC (2006) for use in country reporting to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). These sectors include: agriculture, land use, land use change and forestry (LULUCF), energy, industrial processes and product use (IPPU), and waste.The database covers emissions from all sectors, for the three major trace gases – carbon dioxide (CO_2), methane (CH_4) and nitrous oxide (N_2O) – and fluorinated substances (F-gases), as well as their cumulative effects expressed in carbon dioxide equivalent (CO_2eq). Data are provided in both IPCC and FAO classifications, in support of multiple reporting processes needs and facilitating a range of analyses in relation to agri-food systems and emissions (Figure 1).

GLOBAL

In 2019, global anthropogenic greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, from all economic sectors including LULUCF, totalled 54 billion tonnes CO_2eq (Gt CO_2eq) and 52 Gt CO_2eq without LULUCF emissions. The largest contributor to world total emissions was the energy sector, with a total share of 70 percent, due to the burning of fossil fuels. The next significant contributor to global emissions was the agriculture, forestry and other land use (AFOLU) sector, which combines IPCC sectors Agriculture and LULUCF, at 14 percent of total emissions. Industrial processes and product use were responsible for 9 percent of the total, and waste for 5 percent. The remainder was covered by other sectors, including international tranport.

Figure 1: Mapping of agri-food systems from IPCC to FAO categories

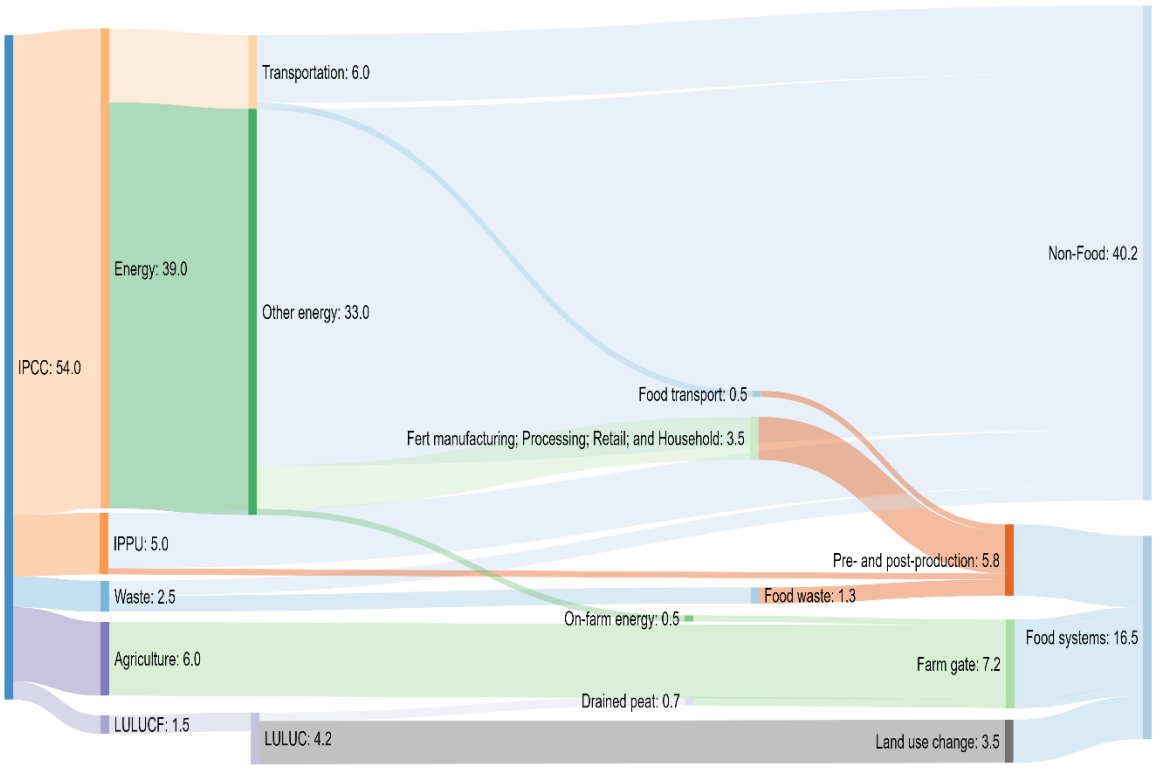
IPCC		Agri-food systems activity	GHG			FAO		
			CH_4	N_2O	CO_2			
AFOLU	LULUCF	Net forest conversion	x	x	x	LAND USE CHANGE	AGRICULTURAL LAND	AGRI-FOOD SYSTEMS
		Tropical forest fires	x	x	x			
		Peat fires	x		x			
		Drained organic soils	x		x	FARM GATE		
	AGRICULTURE	Burning – Crop residues	x	x				
		Burning – Savanna	x	x				
		Crop residues		x				
		Drained organic soils		x				
		Enteric fermentation	x					
		Manure management	x	x				
		Manure applied to soils		x				
		Manure left on pasture		x				
		Rice cultivation	x					
		Synthetic fertilizers		x				
ENERGY		On-farm energy use	x	x	x			
		Fertilizer manufacturing	x	x	x	PRE- AND POST-PRODUCTION		
		Processing	x	x	x			
		Packaging	x	x	x			
		Transport	x	x	x			
		Household consumption	x	x	x			
		Retail – Energy use	x	x	x			
INDUSTRY		Retail – Refrigeration	x	x	x			
WASTE		Solid food waste	x					
		Incineration			x			
		Industrial wastewater	x	x				
		Domestic wastewater	x	x				

Source: Tubiello *et al.*, 2021b.

Emissions from agri-food systems were 17 Gt CO_2eq (31 percent of total emissions), composed of 7.2 Gt CO_2eq (13 percent) from activities within the farm gate, 3.5 Gt CO_2eq (7 percent) from land use change processes such as deforestation and peatland degradation, and 5.8 Gt CO_2eq (11 percent) from pre- and post-production processes. For the latter, the largest contributors were methane emissions

from waste disposal (1.3 Gt CO_2eq) and CO_2 emissions from fossil fuel combustion for energy used in households (1.3 Gt CO_2eq), retail (0.9 Gt CO_2eq) and transport (0.5 Gt CO_2eq) (Figure 2).

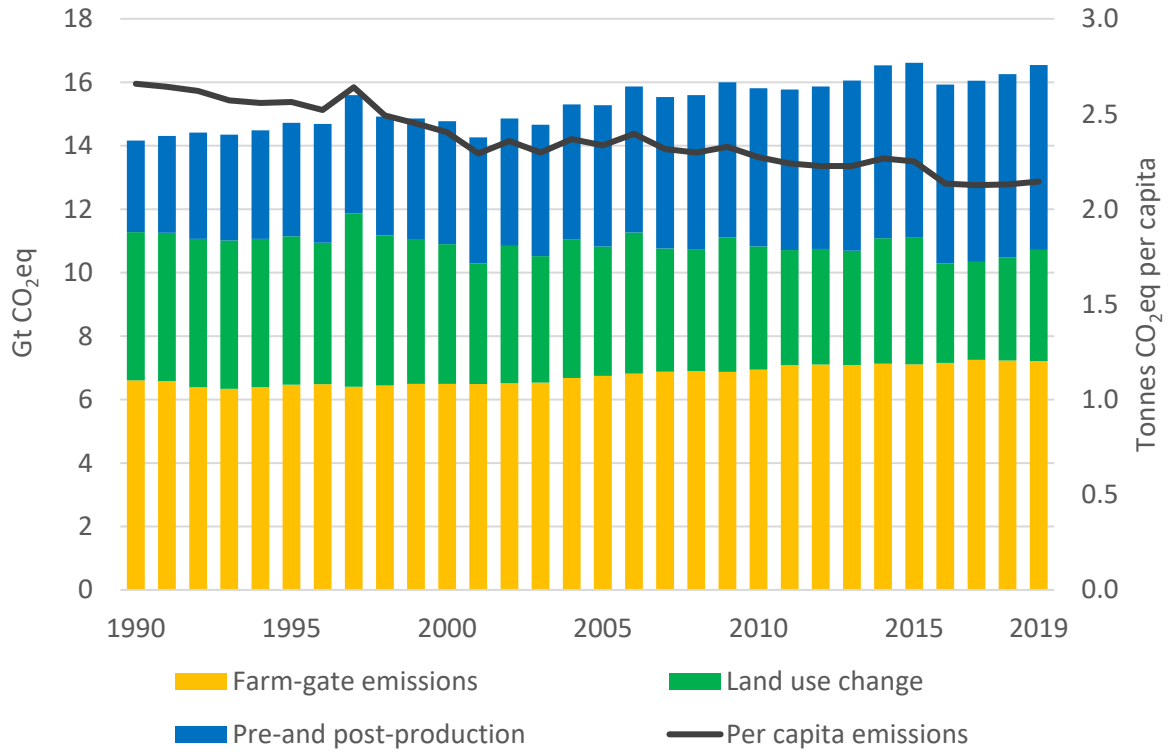
Figure 2: World total anthropogenic emissions flows from IPCC sectors to agri-food systems and non-food sectors, 2019 (Gt CO_2eq)



Source: FAO, 2021.

World total GHG emissions from agri-food systems increased by 16 percent between 1990 and 2019. Overt the same period, emissions per person decreased by over 25 percent, from 2.7 to 2.1 tonnes CO_2eq per capita (Figure 3).

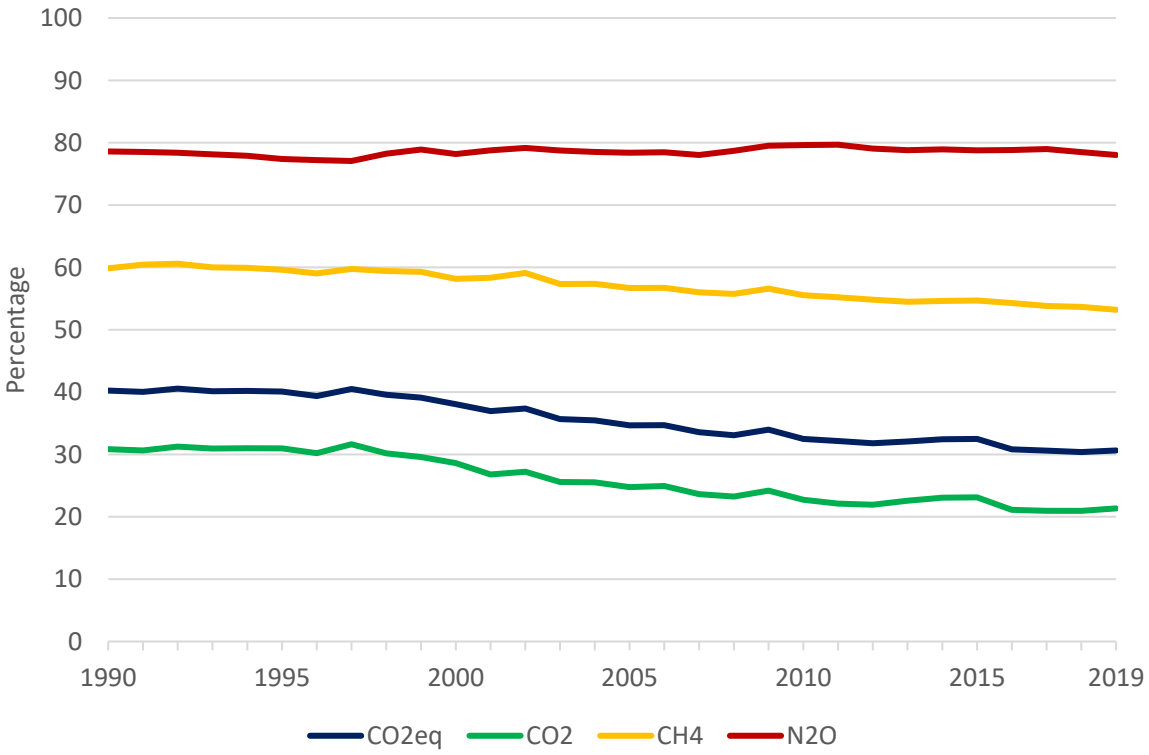
Figure 3: Global agri-food system GHG emissions by life-cycle stage, and per capita emissions



Source: FAO, 2021.

When breaking down agri-food systems emissions by GHG, CO_2 emissions increased between 1990 and 2019 from 7.6 to 8.4 Gt (+11 percent), CH_4 emissions from 171 to 195 Mt (+14 percent) and N_2O emissions from 6.8 to 8.6 Mt (+26 percent). At the same time, the share of agri-food systems in total anthropogenic emissions decreased, from about 40 percent to 31 percent when measured in CO_2eq. This corresponds to decreases from 31 to 21 percent of the total for CO_2 and from 60 to 53 percent for CH_4, while it remained at around 80 percent for N_2O over the entire period (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Global agri-food systems GHG emissions shares by gas



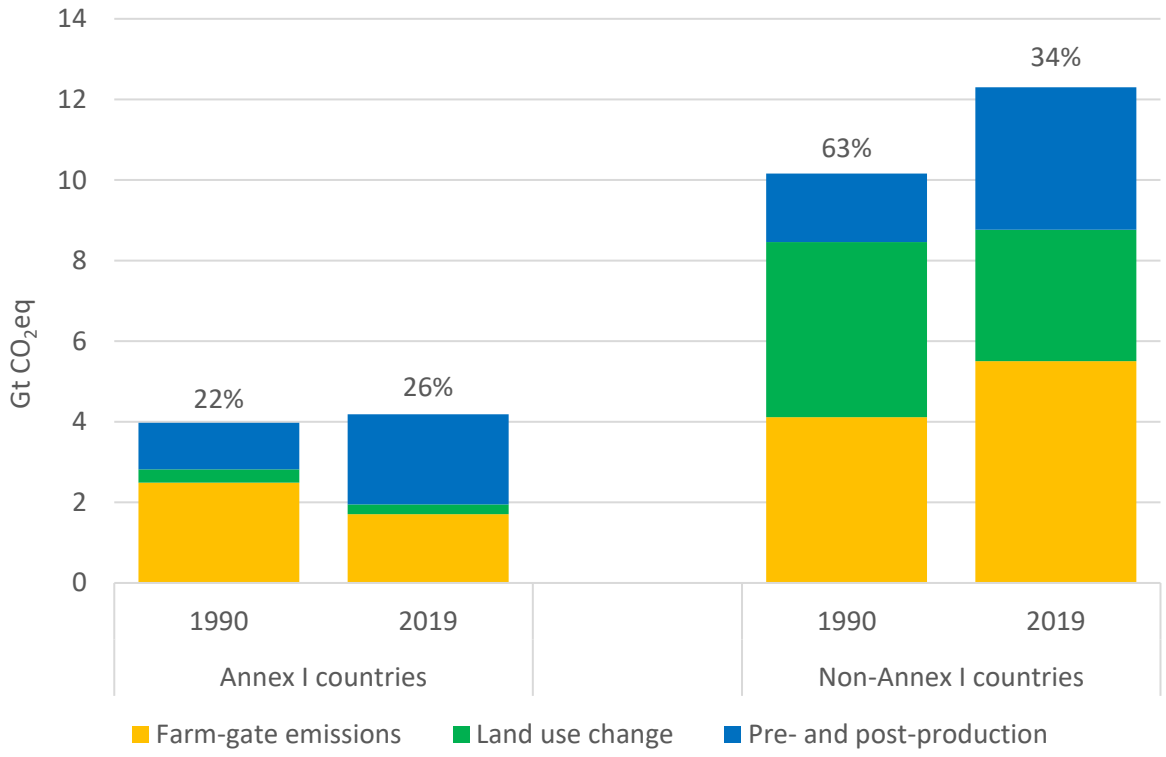
Source: FAO, 2021.

SPECIAL GROUPS AND REGIONS

Examining agri-food systems GHG emissions by Annex I and Non-Annex I country groupings can reveal trends across development contexts, as countries listed in Annex I of the UNFCCC can be used as a proxy to understand trends in developed economies, while the non-Annex I country grouping can be used as a proxy to examine trends in developing economies. A full listing of countries within each group can be found in FAOSTAT (FAO, 2021).

Total agri-food systems increased across both country groupings, from 3.9 Gt CO_2eq in 1990 to 4.2 Gt CO_2eq in 2019 in Annex I countries (a 5 percent increase), and from 10.2 Gt CO_2eq in 1990 to 12.3 Gt CO_2eq in 2019 in Non-Annex I countries (a notable 21 percent increase) (Figure 5). In addition, clear trends can be identified across life-cycle stages: both country groups have significantly increased GHG emissions from pre- and post-production and reduced land-use emissions over the period 1990–2019, while a divergent trend can be observed for on-farm emissions, largely driven by agricultural emissions, i.e. those within the farm gate and due to related land use change (Figure 6).

Figure 5: Agri-food systems GHG emissions by life-cycle stage



Note: The percentages indicate the share of agri-food systems in the total emissions of the region.

Source: FAO, 2021.

In 2019, the *relative* contribution of agri-food systems to regional total emissions from all human activities was the largest in Africa and Latin America, with a share of 56–72 percent, while it was nearly 24 percent in Asia and North America.

Land use emissions dominated the large shares in Africa and Latin America, and were larger than farm-gate emissions and pre- and post-production emissions. Farm-gate emissions were nonetheless significant in these two regions, as well as in Oceania (above 38 percent). In Europe, emissions from pre- and post-production activities represented 17 percent of the total in 2019, compared to 8–10 percent in Oceania, Asia and North America.

The top two *absolute* emitters in 2019 were Asia and Africa, and in these regions the share of land use