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Call for Papers

Animals as Protein Factories:

**A History of European Livestock
across the East-West Divide (1950s–Present)**

Centre Marc Bloch, Berlin

15-16 June 2027

organized by

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After the apocalypse of World War II, severe food shortages and rationing in post-war Europe, and the 1946–1947 Soviet famine, both sides of the Iron Curtain turned to science and technology to boost food production while following a staggered timeline. Deeply transformed agricultural systems had to meet consumption standards that now emphasized the need for animal proteins (meat, eggs, fish and dairy). The intensification of livestock farming, including fish farming, had effects both upstream—due to the exponential demand for animal feed—and downstream—by increasing the supply of products from the agro-food industry—while revolutionizing farm labor. Transnational research shows that industrial animal farming—whether for pigs, cows, chickens, carp, or salmon—took remarkably similar forms on both sides of the Iron Curtain. Environmental history highlights the toll on ecosystems and animals, while the history of science and technology reveals comparable standardized practices in genetics, feeding, and health control.

This workshop explores how industrial farming transformed both animals, through genetics and human diets, through the promotion of livestock-derived products. It reshaped workforces and working communities and caused massive environmental damage through transformed landscapes and agricultural infrastructure. It also examines the upheaval in relations between humans and non-human animals, with aquaculture extending the boundaries of industrial domestication to aquatic life.

It traces how post-war socio-political and technological frameworks shaped farming systems in Western, Southern, and Eastern Europe, including former Soviet states (including the Caucasus and Central Asia). It addresses the collapse of working communities following the fall of the Eastern bloc, and the subsequent integration of these regions into the European single market and its standardization regimes. By analyzing the expansion of the European Union, the legacy of the Eastern bloc, and recent shifts, like the fast-tracked integration of Ukraine and Moldova following Russia's war of aggression, the workshop connects agricultural history to modern geopolitics. Additionally, it foregrounds Europe's colonial and post-colonial trade relationships with non-European economies, notably the trade in livestock, feed, and technology.

The aim is to connect isolated regional research areas and foster comparative studies across different national contexts. The workshop encourages participants to rethink how Cold War political blocs functioned and to examine the geopolitical realignments following the 1989–1991 turning point. It also links these geopolitical frameworks to local environmental factors, like climate, soil, topography, and water systems. Specifically, it documents what happens on the ground when modernizing models are pushed onto the agricultural sector by outside organizations. While the event welcomes broad comparative, transnational, or multi-scale approaches, it equally encourages focused case studies on specific European locations without requiring direct comparison.

This interdisciplinary workshop brings together experts from history, geography, sociology, anthropology, economics, veterinary medicine, biology, and agriculture. Interest in audiovisual documentary collections and oral history projects is especially welcome. Together, we will examine how changes in livestock farming since the 1950s have impacted animals, human societies, and the environment, focusing on shared trends and the continuous flow of ideas and goods within livestock farming.

The proposals may focus on the following five themes:

• Theme 1: Workers and experts in animal production

The triumphant techno-scientific approach revolutionized the organization of farming labor from the 1950s onwards, in both Eastern and Western Europe, albeit in very different ways and at different times.

To what extent did emerging organizations, such as collectives in the east and cooperatives in the west, ~~alter~~ boost the roles of agricultural specialists, including agronomists, breeders, artificial inseminators, and veterinarians? How did traditional peasant knowledge coexist with new scientific guidelines (genetics, nutrition, chemical inputs) under the pressure of mechanization and productivity goals? How did the new organization of labor change the agricultural landscape and farm architecture? How did these spatial changes impact daily work at the farm, village, and regional levels? How were the tasks and roles of specific workers (milkmaids, shepherds, swineherds) affected by these changes? How did this new division of labor shift the gendered distribution of tasks and expertise in livestock farming? How were new occupational diseases resulting from human-animal contact identified and addressed?

• Theme 2: The effects of industrialized livestock farming on relationships between humans and non-humans

The dominant techno-scientific approach has radically altered human/non-human relationships. New selection (cross-breeding, genetics, etc.) and reproduction techniques (artificial insemination) were employed, specific selection criteria were prioritized (e.g. muscle production, pathogen resistance, climate adaptability, feed digestibility).

What factors facilitated or hindered the adoption of these new techniques to select and modify animal bodies across different European societies? What were the main obstacles to these radical changes in the animal life cycle? How did the growth of industrialized livestock farming and high animal concentration transform slaughter methods? How did the physical locations and architecture of slaughterhouses change during this period? What effects did the focus on the production of animal protein (meat, eggs, milk) and the subsequent selection of specific animal bodies have on the exploitation of other animal parts (leather, collagen, hair, feathers, wool)? How did the management of epizootics and zoonoses evolve over time? What drove the shift in strategies from vaccination to preventive culling and modern biosecurity protocols?

• Theme 3: The circulation of technologies, knowledge and consumption standards

The upheavals observed in livestock farming across the European continent were the result of exchanges of knowledge and practices of varying intensity. How did the circulation of equipment, biological material and animals intensify during the 1970s? How did these exchanges operate within geopolitical blocs, across the Iron Curtain, and with non-European regions? What was the role of new food regulations and dietary sciences in promoting the consumption of animal protein throughout Europe? How did the agro-food industry expand its offerings of meat, fish, and dairy products during this era? What technical challenges arose regarding the production, packaging, preservation, and transport of these food products? To what extent did the solutions to these challenges lead to innovations that spread across the continent?

• Theme 4: Environmental disasters and the spatial distribution of industrial livestock farming

The intensification of livestock farming has caused and is still causing environmental and public health disasters: deforestation, erosion of biodiversity (which, among other things, helps regulate animal epidemics and limit the proliferation of species considered pests), depletion and pollution of water resources, disruption of natural biogeochemical cycles due to the concentration of manure, unhealthy (human) diets, and the proliferation of petrochemical-based packaging, to name but a few.

How did the industrialization of livestock farming transform rural infrastructure? How did the design of buildings address multiple goals, from the concentration of animals into ever-larger herds and the optimization of feed rations, to the cold chain for the preservation of animal products? How did the intensification of livestock farming transform rural areas —both in and outside Europe— in order to provide enough feed to meet new productivity standards? Lastly, how does climate change challenge the current architectural and organizational structures of intensive animal farming? To what extent does the climate impose a shift to other livestock species and/or to geographic migration?

• Theme 5: Between collapse and expansion – socio-economic and political entanglements in the worlds of livestock farming

The expansion of the European Union (EU) and the fall of communism changed how Europe produces livestock. These events created new farming hubs but also left many farms and rural areas empty. After the collapse of state-run mega-farms where thousands of people worked together, the slaughter and mass sale of millions of cows, pigs, sheep and poultry, what traces did they leave on the landscape and in people's memories? What has become of both the social and the built environment of former agricultural labor communities? What became of the non-human inhabitants, and to what extent has livestock been radically transformed (e.g. depopulation, extinction of socialist-era and local breeds)? How did access to money for growth and EU standards for cleanliness and animal welfare lead to new rural environments, new breeds, and integrated and standardized production? How did Western companies buy cheap land in the East to set up massive,

highly automated grain and livestock businesses? How has access to new markets created new leaders in meat exports across the continent? In what contexts have new forms of livestock farming reemerged in certain parts of Eastern Europe, including in war-torn Ukraine?

Submission guidelines

The workshop will take place at the Centre Marc Bloch in Berlin from **15 to 16 June 2027**.

We will be applying for funding to help cover participants' travel and accommodation. We would be grateful if applicants could indicate whether they would require financial support and whether they might be able to contribute to part of their travel or accommodation costs if needed.

In line with our commitment to reducing the workshop's environmental impact, we will reimburse rail travel within Europe. Air travel will only be eligible for reimbursement if no rail connection under 10 hours exists.

The workshop is designed as an in-person encounter, as one of its main aims is to encourage exchange among participants. Online participation will be considered only in exceptional circumstances, in particular for colleagues from overseas or for those based in Ukraine who are unable to leave the country.

Please [complete the application form online](#) by **18 October 2026**. The application should include a 300–500 word abstract and a brief biographical note (100-150 words).

For any questions, please feel free to contact us at animals.as.factories@gmail.com



Duck vaccination campaigns in the Landes and Gers Department, France, 2023 /Xavier Remongin, agriculture.gouv.fr

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