

## Does ‘factory farming’ increase our risk of experiencing pandemics?

Some experts have hypothesized that the novel coronavirus made the jump from animals to humans in China’s wet markets, just like SARS before it. Unsurprisingly, many people are furious that the markets, which were closed in the immediate wake of the outbreak in China, are already reopening.

It’s easy to point the finger at these “foreign” places and blame them for generating pandemics. But doing that ignores one crucial fact: The way people eat all around the world — including in the US — is a major risk factor for pandemics, too.

**[Editor’s note: Listen to GLP’s interview with veterinarian and farmer Dr. Leah Dorman [‘Factory farming’ poisons our food and harms animals?](#) to learn more about food safety and animal agriculture.]**

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For years, expert bodies like the World Health Organization and the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) have been warning that most emerging infectious diseases come from animals and that our industrialized farming practices are ratcheting up the risk. “Livestock health is the weakest link in our global health chain,” noted the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations in a [2013 report](#).

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To be clear, scientists believe the novel coronavirus originated in wild bats, not factory farms. But it has awakened us all to the crushing effect a pandemic can have on our lives. Now that we’ve come face to face with this reality, the question is: Do we have the political and cultural will to do something major — changing the way we eat — to sharply decrease the likelihood of the next pandemic?

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