This year’s COP28 climate summit in Dubai, UAE ended with applauds on the spotlight placed for the first time on food and agriculture, but activists say climate talks ended without a commitment to change way we produce food places the lives of billions of humans and animals in jeopardy.

Early Tuesday, delegates approved new plan to accelerate efforts towards the phase-down of unabated coal power, phasing out inefficient fossil fuel subsidies, and other measures that drive the transition away from fossil fuels in energy systems, in a just, orderly and equitable manner, with developed countries continuing to take the lead.

The conference also saw several announcements to boost the resilience of food and public health systems, and to reduce emissions related to agriculture and methane.

Reacting to the outcomes from the summit, Kelly Dent, World Animal Protection’s Global Director of External Engagement observed that though the need to transition away from fossil fuels has been acknowledged and is a forward step, failure to agree on a comprehensive fossil fuel phase out at COP28 is a grave blow. “But this not the only failure”, she said.

Also of concern are elements of the UN’s Food and Agriculture Organisation’s Roadmap, which failed to mention agroecology. Instead, millions of dollars have been pledged and directed towards the same institutions, ensuring power remains concentrated in a handful of profit-driven actors across the current flawed food system.

According to a statement issued by the World Animal Protection (WPA) at the end of the summit, the Declaration on Sustainable Agriculture, Resilient Food Systems, and Climate Action has been signed by over 150 countries – but it does not include a just transition to a food system which would reduce the damaging greenhouse gas emissions produced by industrial animal agriculture, including factory farming. Nor did it mention the need for an increase in plant-based diets.

According to the NGO, adequate finance to enable developing countries to adapt to the impacts of climate change, including the impact on food and agriculture systems is crucial to the livelihoods vulnerable people in developing countries and on this the COP has not delivered”

“Delaying the actions needed in this critical area is as a blow to small holder

farmers in the global south and who are crucial to their communities' food security. They are on the front line of climate change caused by the unsustainable farming methods of the Global North," Kelly said.

On the sidelines of the talks, the presence of big agribusiness at the summit saw the promotion of alarming solutions such as genetic modification of animal and methane-reducing feed additives.

Climate experts expressed their conmcerns that that instead of working as partners with farmers for best outcomes, self-serving big agri-businesses push their scientific innovations onto them. With a paltry 0.3 % only going to small scale producers there is also a need for a profound reform in this area

In a groundbreaking report released at COP28, World Animal Protection (WAP) showed how cruel factory farming contributes at least 11% of the global greenhouse gases fuelling climate change. Small holder farmers, especially in the Global South, who contribute to the livelihoods and food security of 1.7 billion people suffer and lose the most from climate disasters.

"We need to double down to ensure these declarations and statements are translated into policies on the ground," Kelly said.