RESEARCH AGENDA

2026 Research Agenda

PROGRAM	Lab-wide — both intervention pathways and the measurement foundation
STATUS	Active — this agenda governs current work and is revised as lines close or open
PUBLISHED	August 2026, at altruismlab.com/resources

PURPOSE

This agenda states the questions the Lab has committed to investigating in 2026, why each matters, how each is being approached, and what will be published from it. It is a commitment device: readers can check later output against what was promised here. No line of inquiry below asserts a result.

01

How to read this agenda

Each line of inquiry carries a status — **Active** (work is underway now) or **In development** (scoped, not yet started) — and names its intended public output. Outputs take one of two forms: an update to an existing published document, or a new working note in the Lab's library. Nothing here is a peer-reviewed publication or claims to be.

THE STANDING RULE

Negative and null findings get published with the same prominence as positive ones. An agenda that only reports what worked is marketing, not research.

02

Supply side — Factory Farm Exit

A. Producer economics and the trapped-producer fraction ACTIVE

Question. What does the balance-sheet reality of contract livestock producers look like, and what share are plausibly "trapped" — carrying debt against specialized assets they cannot exit without external help?
Why it matters. The entire intervention hypothesis rests on this fraction being material. If it is negligible, the program stops.
Approach. Desk research on agricultural lending structures, contract-production economics, and existing farm-transition literature; expert interviews with agricultural finance practitioners.
Output. Findings folded into the next revision of the Factory Farm Exit Intervention Brief.

B. Legal instruments for permanent capacity retirement ACTIVE

Question. Which legal instruments — deed restrictions, easements, restrictive covenants — can make the retirement of animal-production capacity permanent and enforceable, in which jurisdictions, at what cost?
Why it matters. Without enforceable permanence, a buyout is a subsidy, not a retirement.
Approach. Comparative review of instruments used in conservation and land-use contexts; jurisdictional analysis for major livestock-producing states.
Output. Working note; conclusions folded into the intervention brief.

C. Transaction mechanism design IN DEVELOPMENT

Question. What transaction shape — pricing logic, debt resolution, transition support, integrator involvement or avoidance — would a trapped producer actually accept, and what does it cost fully loaded?
Why it matters. This is the design output the whole program depends on; it converts the hypothesis into something testable.
Approach. Builds on lines A and B; scenario modeling against published criteria (permanence, leakage, producer welfare, unit cost).
Output. Mechanism-design section of the revised intervention brief; the honest cost model published with it.

D. Leakage and displacement frameworks IN DEVELOPMENT

Question. When capacity is retired in one place, how much is simply rebuilt elsewhere — and how should the program net that against gross retirement, before it ever claims a number?
Why it matters. Leakage is the most likely way this intervention could look successful while accomplishing little.

Approach. Review of leakage treatment in adjacent fields (conservation, emissions offsets, fishery buybacks) and adaptation of their netting rules to livestock capacity.
Output. Counting rules added to the Measurement & Impact Ledger Framework before any pilot is evaluated.

03

Demand side — 100 Million Meals

E. Institutional procurement decision mapping ACTIVE

Question. In institutions that serve meals at scale, who actually decides what is served, on what cycle, under what constraints — and where in that chain is a welfare-motivated change most likely to stick?
Why it matters. The program's premise is that these decision points are few and reachable. The map is the pilot's targeting tool.
Approach. Desk research on food-service management structures and procurement cycles; practitioner interviews across campus, healthcare, and corporate food service.
Output. Institution-selection criteria in the next revision of the 100 Million Meals Program Brief.

F. Menu-default evidence review ACTIVE

Question. What does existing research actually support about menu defaults, choice architecture, and plant-forward substitution in institutional settings — effect durability included, publication bias acknowledged?
Why it matters. The pilot should be built on the strongest available evidence, stated at its true strength — not on advocacy summaries of it.
Approach. Structured literature review with explicit quality-weighting; documented disagreements rather than smoothed conclusions.
Output. Working note in the library.

G. The counting rule for a shifted meal IN DEVELOPMENT

Question. What precise, pre-registered definition of "one meal shifted" is strict enough to be credible and workable enough to be counted from real institutional data?
Why it matters. The program's target is stated in meals; the unit must be defined before the first count or the target is theater.
Approach. Draft counting standards tested against real menu and procurement data structures; conservative treatment of substitution and baseline questions.

Output. The counting rule, published in the Measurement & Impact Ledger Framework before any pilot count begins.

04

The measurement foundation

H. Impact Ledger operationalization ACTIVE

Question. How does the published three-tier evidence ladder translate into day-to-day ledger practice — entry format, promotion review, correction handling, display rules?
Why it matters. A framework that exists only as prose decays under pressure. Operational rules keep the honesty mechanical.
Approach. Drafting the ledger's operating procedures against the framework; dry runs on hypothetical entries.
Output. Revisions to the Measurement & Impact Ledger Framework.

I. Welfare-metrics review IN DEVELOPMENT

Question. Which animal-welfare measurement approaches are rigorous enough to underpin the Lab's eventual outcome claims, and how should competing frameworks be compared honestly?
Why it matters. "Capacity retired" and "meals shifted" are proxies. The Lab should be explicit about what they are proxies for, and how confident anyone can be in that mapping.
Approach. Comparative review of published welfare-assessment frameworks; consultation with domain researchers.
Output. Working note; definitions adopted into the framework.

05

What this agenda will not do

- It will not report effort as progress. Lines of inquiry close with findings, published either way.
- It will not quietly drop questions. Lines removed from a future revision are listed as closed, with the reason.
- It will not convert theory into claims. Nothing in this agenda counts toward any outcome number anywhere.

06

Engagement

Researchers and practitioners with relevant expertise — agricultural finance, rural law, food-service operations, welfare measurement — are invited to engage with any line above, including to argue that it is misconceived. Critique received in 2026 shapes the 2027 agenda. All routes begin at **altruismlab.com/contact**.

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