



GOOD FOOD

MAKES EVERYTHING BETTER

ANIMAL WELFARE

HOW WE TREAT OUR ANIMALS reveals a great deal about our culture – about its values and connection to the living planet. The picture is not always flattering because there is no question that, in the dominant factory-style, industrialised food system, billions of farm animals suffer greatly.

Modern intensive animal farming exists to produce meat, eggs and dairy products as quickly and cheaply as possible. If we use 'yield' as the sole measure of agricultural success, then industrial livestock production can claim to be uniquely successful.

Between 1961 and 2007 the world population increased by a factor of 2.2, but total meat consumption quadrupled, and poultry consumption increased 10-fold. At present, nearly half of the world's cereal crops are used to produce animal feed and currently over 70 billion land animals (poultry and mammals) are used for food each year.

Heavy subsidies from government are being used to increase this number.

CROWDED, DIRTY & CRUEL

In factory farm systems animals are kept in large, crowded, dirty and cruel industrial facilities that bear no resemblance to farms as most of us imagine them. They are bred to produce more meat, milk and eggs than they would naturally produce.

Under these conditions it is almost impossible for any farmer to provide the 'Five Freedoms' necessary for farm animal health and well-being:

- Freedom from hunger and thirst by ready access to fresh water and a diet to maintain full health and vigour.
- Freedom from discomfort by providing an appropriate environment including shelter and a comfortable resting area.
- Freedom from pain, injury or disease by

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prevention or rapid diagnosis and treatment.

- Freedom to express normal behaviour by providing sufficient space, proper facilities and company of the animal's own kind.
- Freedom from fear and distress by ensuring conditions and treatment which avoid mental suffering.

Although the EU now prohibits practices such as battery cages, sow stalls and veal crates, the majority of poultry, pigs and dairy cows are still raised in cramped, often barren, sheds, cages and crates.

BREEDING DISEASE

According to the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) breeding cows to produce high yields of milk is the major cause of poor welfare and health problems in these animals.

Similarly, breeding pigs for rapid growth leads to poor cardiovascular health and leg disorders, while breeding hens to produce more and more eggs causes osteoporosis, raising the risk of fractures and lameness.

Mutilation is still common practice on factory farms: piglets and lambs are castrated and tail-docked, while hens and turkeys have their beaks-trimmed.

The natural diet of farm animals is pasture and forage – not the grains used in factory farms. Grain-based diets can produce serious and sometimes fatal digestive tract problems in cows, goats and sheep whose stomachs are best suited to high-cellulose plants like grass.

INCREASING WASTE

Across many cultures meat (especially red meat) is regarded as a nutritionally desirable food as well as a symbol of affluence. Increasing meat consumption, and therefore factory farming, is a centrepiece of many governments' plans for our collective food future, even in traditionally low-meat eating populations such as India and China.

But in a world of limited resources industrial livestock production is wasteful of water and energy. It produces high levels of climate changing gases and excess manure than can't be easily recycled on the farm.

Livestock production is wasteful of calories too. Currently one third of the global cereal harvest and 90% of the world's soya harvest is used for animal feed.

Because grains are not part of their natural diet, livestock are very inefficient at digesting them. Only 5-25% of the nutrients

(depending on the animal) are converted into edible meat. The rest is used for maintaining the animal's metabolism and building inedible nerve and bone tissue. In fact, it can take up to 24kg of grain to produce 1kg of beef.

Our food system is also wasteful of the animals' lives; each year in the EU alone, meat equivalent to almost two billion animals is thrown away uneaten.

HUMAN HEALTH

This drive to increase meat consumption also ignores the impact on human health. Antibiotics routinely fed to farm animals – either because their living conditions make them sick, or as growth promoters, can accumulate in meat, milk and eggs, fuelling the global problem of antibiotic resistance.

Factory farms act like reservoirs for antibiotic-resistant bacteria which can spread into communities beyond the farm, causing premature death and disease in humans.

In the West we also eat far more meat than is necessary or healthy leading to rising

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levels of chronic illnesses such as heart disease, diabetes, stroke and some cancers.

LESS IS MORE

It doesn't have to be this way. In sustainable mixed farming systems (smaller scale farms that raise both crops and animals) waste is less of a problem; manure can be turned into fertiliser as part of a 'virtuous cycle'. Cattle and sheep eat mostly grass, which humans cannot eat, and turn this into foods that we can eat. Animals have access to the outdoors and can be raised on land that is often not suitable for growing crops.

Sustainability encompasses more than just environmental impact. It also includes a duty of care to our farm animals, to ourselves and others, which cannot be met by relying on cruel, inefficient factory farming.

Reducing our meat consumption, ensuring high levels of welfare for those animals that are in the food system and using grains that would otherwise be fed to animals to feed people make a substantial contribution to achieving sustainability and reducing poverty and world hunger in the future.



This leaflet is part of a series on sustainable food issues, produced by Beyond GM. References available online:

beyond-gm.org/good-food