Most People Are Unaware of How Much Suffering Factory Farming Causes Animals

Factory Farming, 2013

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Currently, the process of eating meat is considered the norm in our culture. It is what is being portrayed by the media, through various advertisements, on a daily basis. We are consistently told that consuming meat is necessary for survival. Advertisements from companies like McDonald's, Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC), Wendy's, and other food-chain restaurants reinforce this idea of meat consumption. However, things have not always been this way. It was not until the 1940s, after people discovered the benefits of injecting antibiotics and vitamin supplements on animals, that meat eating became more prevalent. In fact, in the past, meat consumption was reserved only for special occasions such as high days and holidays.

How Is Factory Farming Portrayed by the Media?

According to [French philosopher Michel] Foucault's theory on the power of discourse, the news media have an obligation to present the social issues surrounding the treatment of animals "fairly for public debate". In other words, it is the media's responsibility to present both the benefits and drawbacks of factory farms. It is the media's obligation to tell us what actually goes on inside every factory farm, and not hide behind the false pretenses that farm animals are happy and content. So is the news industry providing consumers with the truths about factory farms?

Most media for meat and dairy typically focus on the display of pastoral fields, green grass, and on animals roaming free. The media has instilled in our minds the idea that farm animals get the opportunity to graze, stride around, swish their tails, and moo or cluck in the open field, accompanied by a hard-working farmer with his family by his side. Every year, the meat industries spend billions of dollars on advertising and on devising strategies to influence the way we think about the food we eat. They offer free educational resources to schools, constantly broadcast advertisements on radio and TV stations, and they promote their products to doctors, nurses, and dieticians. In fact, in the past few years, there have been a growing number of partnerships between schools and fast-food chains. In 2008, McDonalds sponsored an elementary school in Seminole County by providing coupons alongside the children's report cards. Furthermore, they perpetuate the myth that animals are perfectly content by using packages that are decorated with pictures of happy animals. Egg cartons, for instance, are almost always seen carrying drawings of joyful hens, dancing under the blessing of a smiling sun.

Moreover, carnivistic invisibility is employed through omission. This is the reason why the ten billions of animals that are killed each year for meat remain inconspicuous from public knowledge. The media intentionally hides the truth from us by leaving us little exposure to animals, and thus making it much easier to distance ourselves from the reality that our actions influence their treatment. Additionally, invisibility is maintained by actively preventing anticarnist information from reaching consumers. For example, in 2004, CBS turned down the $2-million deal with the animal rights group People for Ethical
Treatment of Animals (PETA), which wanted to air an anti-meat advertisement during the Super Bowl. The network claimed that it did not support advocacy advertisements; yet, ironically, during the game, CBS ran an anti-smoking advertisement.

The Reality Behind Factory Farms

Currently, according to the statistics made by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), 10 billion animals are killed for food each year, which equals to:

- more than a million animals killed every hour
- 19,011 animals killed per minute
- 317 animals killed per second

What Happens Inside Factory Farms?

For the most part, animals in factory farms are in confinement buildings, which have a glass viewing port where the visitor, as well as the farmer, can view the animals. The reality also is that most animals are penned up all day and night, with the amount of sunshine scientifically controlled. There is also automation to provide the animals with food, water, and an occasional change of air, so the farmer may not even need to "visit" his animals more than once a day. In addition, the media does not disclose the amount of suffering that actually goes on in every factory farm. They do not tell us that chickens are the most tortured animals in factory farms and that most chickens have to stand on their own feces all day and end up getting litter burn from their manure. The fact that layer hens are often crammed together in cases so tiny that they do not get enough room to even lift a single wing—which then immobilizes them for their entire lives—are also hidden from us. Moreover, when egg production declines, the hens are often subjected to a process called "forced molting"; in which they are starved and denied water to shock the hens into losing their feathers so those that survive can start a new laying cycle.

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Although many people are now aware of what veal calves are, many are still oblivious to the amount of suffering they go through for society to have an enjoyable dinner. In fact, many are unaware that veal calves are kept in total darkness for most of any given day, fed a diet of iron-deficient milk substitute, and are often left to starve, so as to produce a product whose flesh is palatably pale and tender. Most pigs (more than millions of them), on the other hand, spend their entire lives in intensive confinement and never see outdoors until they are packed into trucks to be sent to slaughter. This is unfortunate considering just how intelligent and friendly pigs actually are. As a matter of fact, it only takes piglets 3 weeks to remember names and to respond when called. However, not a lot of people know about this because the media has been so focused on objectifying them.

Other Disadvantages

What is often undocumented is the fact that animals are not only the ones affected by factory farms.
• Factory farms’ employees, who are routinely exposed to noxious gases from concentrated wastes, usually develop serious respiratory diseases, reproductive dysfunction, neurological degeneration, seizures, and comas.

• Residents who live near factory farms are affected through the toxins that contaminate the air and their drinking water which lead to eye irritation, chronic asthma, bronchitis, diarrhea, severe headaches, nausea, spontaneous abortions, birth defects, infant death, and viral and bacterial disease outbreaks.

• Approximately two-thirds of the 1,400 known human pathogens originated in animals.

• Scientific studies and government records also suggest that almost all chickens are infected with E. coli and about 39 to 75 percent of these chickens that are transported to retail stores are still infected.

Furthermore, the livestock industry accounts for:

• 80% of the greenhouse gas emission, while the
• methane produced by cattle and their manure has a global warming effect equivalent to that of 33 million automobiles.

So Why Do People [Not] Reject the Disastrous Effects of Factory Farming?

When it comes to food choices, most of us turn to what our habits dictate. "There is ease and relaxation in doing what we have always done. And if our habits are continually reinforced by the society around us, they can become even more powerful and alluring." In addition, it is simply much easier to eat meat than to avoid it. Meat is always readily available. Non-meat alternatives, on the other hand, are much harder to find. You have to actively seek them. On top of it all, vegetarians are often faced with the dilemma of having "to explain their choices, defend their diet, and apologize for inconveniencing others". Many individuals are aware that the meat we consume comes from animals. However, society does not want to concede the horrors because they do not want to acknowledge the connection between their actions and the animal's sufferings. Others detach themselves from the harsh realities of factory farming by avoiding questions that lead to the optimal truths about factory farms. Since embracing these disguises can "shield us not only from the fact that it is dead (mostly baby) animals that we are eating, but they also obscure the moral and epistemic obligation to know how our actions may contribute, in some way, to another's suffering"....

It is important to consider the ethical issues relating to factory farming since the majority of our food comes from industrial farms. Also, once we are able to make full empathetic connections to the food we eat, we would then be able to make wiser decisions. Meat eating was not as prevalent 60 or 70 years ago, so why should it be now?

Further Readings

Books


Periodicals and Internet Sources


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