

A Look at Factory Farming

ANIMAL CARE cannot be a pressing concern for people who eat animals. Or can it? Judging from what is (not) reported in the media, the dearth of information on the raising of animals for slaughter is understandably not of pressing interest. How could it be? All but the most jaundiced carnivores do not care to be reminded that animals have feelings—with the exception of their household pets, who may be nearly humanized by their owners, and thus, one hopes, treated humanely.

But though the living conditions of many animals targeted for human consumption is unsettling enough not to be common knowledge, the meat-eating American public *is* concerned about the health benefits or hazards of consuming animal flesh. For it is potentially *their* flesh. Therefore the chemicals fed to animals destined for one's dinner should be strictly regulated. But isn't that a function of our federal government? Most Americans have what may politely be called faith that its government will protect their health through the controls and scrutiny of the Department of Agriculture (USDA), which includes the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). But the movers and shakers in the livestock industry have their own interests for which they also seek government cooperation, a cooperation that may run counter to consumer needs and expectations. And big money has a way of persuading. Is there the makings of a conflict here?

Consider the following. According to officials at the Humane Farming Association (HFA), the nation's largest and most effective organization dedicated



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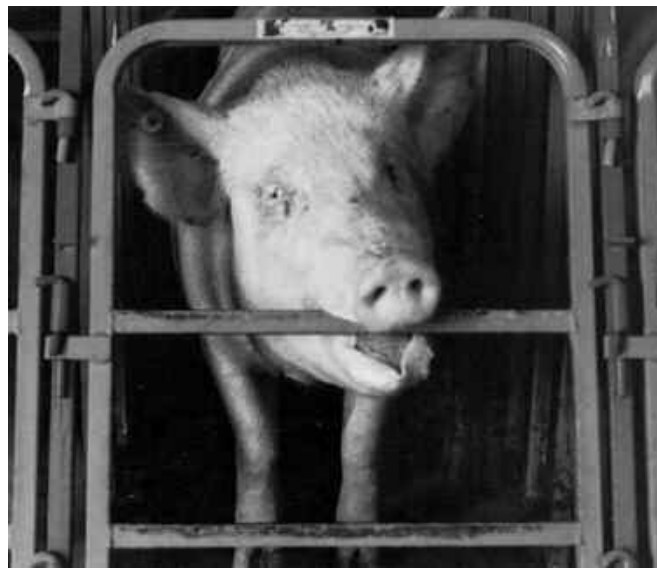
This is how "milk-fed" veal calves spend their entire lives—chained at the neck in wooden crates, they can not walk or even turn around. They are fed an anemia-inducing liquid diet.

to the protection of farm animals, the FDA learned in August, 1989, that the Vitek Supply Corp, a veal calf feed supplier in Wisconsin, was using the illegal and toxic drug clenbuterol as an ingredient in the feed it manufactured, sold and distributed to major veal industry producers. But the FDA and the USDA kept their information secret, eventually prompting the HFA to initiate its own investigation, which, when the incriminating evidence became overwhelming, resulted in the FDA's finally bringing suit against Vitek in 1997.

Clenbuterol is a steroid-like drug not approved for use in the U.S. "In Europe, it has been related to hundreds of illnesses, most requiring emergency hospitalization." (HFA Special Report, Vol XIII, No. 1) Vitek had illegally distributed more than 1.7 million pounds of clenbuterol-laced feed. Its value to veal "farmers" is that it speeds weight gain in calves and artificially lightens flesh color. Why is



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A sow locked in a gestation crate often rubs her snout back and forth across the front of the crate or frantically and repeatedly bites the metal bars—an endorphin-releasing activity whose “self-narcotization” may provide a temporary measure of relief from the torment of crate confinement.

“Battery” cages now produce over 98% of our eggs.

the word “farmer” in quotes? Because veal calves are raised in factories. The newborn male calf is taken from its mother and chained in crates measuring 22” wide and 58” long. It cannot turn around or lie down in a natural position. It is deliberately kept anemic to produce the light-colored meat sold as “milk-fed” veal. Deprived of drinking water, the calves drink more of their drug-laced liquid feed, gaining weight more rapidly. They are kept in darkness, denied all solid food, and suffer from chronic diarrhea.

This is the terrible fate of hundreds of thousands of veal calves every year in the U.S. But who would know it in the meat department of one’s local market, where slabs of animal flesh are neatly packaged in white styrofoam trays and clear plastic wrappers? Complete dissociation from the origins and history of a once sentient (and therefore suffering) being are essential for gustatory satisfaction.

Veal calving is but one form of factory farming. Cows have been turned into biotech milk machines through injection of Bovine Growth Hormone (BHG) which artificially manipulates the cow’s lactation, exposes women, according to toxicologist Dr. Samuel Epstein, to “an additional breast cancer risk,” increases bovine udder infections (Consumers Union), mastitis, cystic ovaries, disor-

ders of the uterus, lesions and swellings in the hocks and knees (Monsanto warning).

Chickens are also factory farmed. They are raised in “battery cages,” four or five so closely packed together that they are barely able to move. To reduce cannibalism, laying hens are “debeaked” by a hot blade, many dying from shock during the process. The hen is pressed against the side of its wire cage. Her feathers fall out. Her skin becomes raw, often bloody. Her feet are injured and often caught in the sloping wire floor. Male chicks, being of no value to the egg industry, are thrown into plastic garbage bags where they slowly suffocate under the weight of the chicks dumped on top. Others are ground into animal feed—while still alive. Christ’s body is crucified in many ways.

While the advertising phrase “No Hormones” suggests that factory eggs are raised naturally, in fact enormous amounts of antibiotics, pesticides, and other chemicals are used. Vegetarians who eat eggs have the option of buying eggs labeled “range free,” or “cage free,” and “no antibiotics.”

The pork industry is also an ugly spectacle. Here the media has recently been raising something of a stink. Not because of the inhumane conditions the pigs endure, but because their waste is leaching into the waterways where it feeds a microorganism

(*Pfiesteria*) that is killing large numbers of fish and causing human illnesses. (See “Are Our Coastal Waters Turning Deadly?” *National Wildlife*, April/May, 1998.) The pork farmers say there is no connection between these occurrences and their business.

And what of the pigs themselves? They are often raised in crates, cages, and bare concrete pens in windowless metal buildings. As federal tax breaks favor large-scale corporate agriculture, industrial pig farms now dominate the pork industry. The animals can be intensively confined through the extensive use of drugs. Writing in the *National Hog Farmer*, L.J. Taylor offers this advice: “The breeding sow should be thought of, and treated as, a piece of machinery whose function is to pump out baby pigs like a sausage machine.” Or from the *Hog Farm Management Magazine*: “Forget the pig as an animal. Treat him just like any other machine in a factory. Schedule treatments like you would lubrication. Breeding season is the first step in an assembly line.” Regarding “treatments,” the National Academy of Sciences reports that “Medicine costs stemming from swine confinement production systems have been shown to be at least double those of a comparably productive pasture and hutch system.”

Where does all that medicine (antibiotics, hormones) go? Into the sow. Where does the sow go? Much of it into the human stomach, along with the microbes some of the medicines were meant to kill or control.

Enough of the lurid details. Although, if they are not described, it’s business as usual. They do have a motivating shock value. Were each meat eater required to tour the factories where their meals originate, many might immediately “swear off,” since flesh food is palatable for most people only when complete dissociation from its living source is maintained.

Is the vegetarian “off the hook,” guiltless in these matters. Scarcely less than his meat-eating neighbors, associates and friends. For most of us, out of sight *is* out of mind. Efficient daily functioning even requires it. But there is One Who experiences *all* the world’s pain and suffering—human and animal. And anything we can do to reduce man’s inhumanity to his brothers, including



HFA Photo

By depriving veal calves of their mother’s milk, fresh air, exercise, adequate nutrition, and proper veterinary care, veal factories are a breeding ground for stress and infectious diseases. Consumer awareness and consumer pressure are the most effective means we have for eliminating the health hazards posed by factory farming and for ending the needless suffering of animals.

his younger brothers in the animal life wave, will help to lessen Christ’s ongoing Passion.

Ignorance is sin and bondage. Knowledge is power and the ground of individual freedom. Let it be known then that “intensive confinement facilities constitute one of today’s most serious consumer health and environmental hazards. And for the animals held captive, life is one of unrelenting frustration, pain and suffering,” inflicted upon them for the sake of personal profit.

Those who would like to know what they can do to mitigate the health threat and alleviate the suffering of factory farmed animals may contact the Humane Farming Association, 1550 California St., San Francisco, CA 94109 (Phone 415 771-CALF). We’re not talking about heavy-handed proselytizing. There is much here that will appeal directly to the meat consumer’s self-interest. Such as their health. And if their humanity is awakened to the cry of captive millions of warm-blooded, soul-bearing beings, all the better—for all of us. □

—C.W.