

Meat Production in America

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Meat production in America has become a highly controversial and discussed issue in society. Some believe it is cruel, many believe it is a necessary evil, and others believe that there is no issue with meat production. The treatment of animals involved in meat production ranges based on the quality and price of the meat; however, many believe that this should not affect the conditions that they are forced to live in. This treatment can be argued as a necessary evil because the lower quality meat allows for people of lower social classes to afford the basic needs of a "balanced" diet. The implementation of CAFOs (Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations) keeps the costs of meat production low by lowering the living standards of these animals. The issue that is raised is if the living conditions are considered ethical. There are several other issues involved with the production of meat. For example, CAFOs can cause ground water pollution, soil contamination and meat contamination. All of these things jeopardize human life. Many of the practices in CAFOs are unknown to the general public who eat meat produced in these CAFOs; however, many that do know of the practices believe that the animals being put up to slaughter have lived in terrible conditions and have been mistreated for a majority of their lives. The ethical concerns involved with meat production are animal cruelty, environmental destruction, and the endangerment of human life.

The history of CAFOs starts with a distributional mistake by a chicken egg laying provider in the 1920s. Mrs. Cecile Steele ordered fifty chickens for egg laying purposes, but she received a shipment of five hundred chickens. Despite the mistake, Mrs. Steele saw this as a business opportunity. Instead of selling the chickens' eggs, she made a shed for the birds and began to start raising them to be slaughtered. She quickly began to understand how profitable the business was that she fell into and ordered a large shipment the next year. This was the beginning of the CAFO era. Later in the 1930s, John Tyson enhanced the previous Steele design by implementing his personal ingenuity. His plan was to raise chicks in his factories instead of having to outsource to another company for his chickens. This kept everything inhouse, which meant he could control the supply that he needed in order to fulfil the demanded product without having to compete with other companies for the chicks. The CAFO industry was put on hold and no real innovation was made during the 1940s due to World War II. However, in the 1950s and 1960s Tyson's system proved to be very

profitable and the CAFO system began to catch on. This is how CAFOs became the most successful and efficient way of producing meat in America (World Food History 2011).

The CAFO industry brings many negative aspects to the table, such as animal cruelty, run off, pollution, and contamination. There are many instances where animals are subjected to poor living conditions. Food Inc. does a very good job depicting the average life of an animal of in one of these concentrated animal feeding operations. For example, many of these animals are subjected to very small living conditions; that are extremely dirty. Animals are forced to stand sometimes ankle deep in their own feces for days. This can cause many different types of diseases that can contaminate the meat of these animals. These diseases are sometimes never cured, and the animals are still put on the meat market. This causes danger to the humans consuming the meat provided by the CAFOs. In recent years, several different food chains like Chipotle have experienced issues with meat coming from CAFOs. Meat can sometimes be contaminated with E. coli. This can cause a massive disturbance to the flow of business for a food organization, in fact several Chipotle restaurants across the country had to shut down for several days because of the E. coli outbreak (Robert Kenner, Richard Pearce... 2009).

Animals are also given many different types of hormones and steroids which can cause meat to be contaminated. These hormones and steroids are not always taken care of in the meat packaging industry. This can cause the passing of hormones from the animals to humans. This also puts a great amount of stress on the animals. Some of these animals are too big and fat that they are unable to stand on their own. These animals have to lay down in their confined spaces in their own feces. The use of growth hormones is very common in the chicken production industry as well. Some of the chickens will get so big they will be unable to stand, which will cause them to be trampled by all of the other chickens around them. There can be up to 20,000 to 30,000 chickens in a CAFO at one time. Depending on the square footage of the CAFO, this can sometimes leave chickens with less than one square foot to roam around, which can be an extremely stressful environment for the chickens (Notaras 2018).

CAFOs have a significant effect on the local ecosystems and farming lands. CAFOs are a major producer of run-off and water pollution. The fecal run-

off from the cattle and pig feces does significant damage to the surrounding water systems and soil tables. The Shame of Concentrated Animal Feedlots states that "16.7 tons of hog manure are produced annually for every resident of the state of Iowa" (Notaras 2018). This generates a huge issue for anyone trying to farm local areas because the damaged soil table and water table do not supply nutritious food sources for crops. The hormones and steroids that are given to the different animals also can be caught in the run-off that contaminates local water sources, which can cause contamination through bioaccumulation. This can significantly affect the surrounding ecosystems.

The grain and corn industry are directly affected by the CAFO industry because the CAFO industry is a major employer of the grain and corn producers. Many CAFOs rely on these producers to feed their livestock; unfortunately, for some of the animals this provides a major problem. Cows, for example, are unable to digest corn because it is not a part of their natural diet. This means that the corn must be removed from their stomachs in some fashion. Sometimes this means that a veterinarian must be called in to physically remove the corn from the cow's stomach. Many believe this is very cruel to the animals because they are naturally supposed to consume a grass-diet. This goes against the nature of how cows are supposed to live. CAFO's use corn because it is very cheap and accessible. The U.S. government provides subsidies on corn that allows farmers to produce it at a low cost. This makes it much easier for the CAFO industries to buy corn and grain at cost-efficient prices. This also significantly affects the price of the meat coming out of CAFOs because the lower input costs make it more affordable to maintain the animals at a profitable size (Pollan 2006).

There are several arguments for the pros of the CAFO system. CAFOs are extremely profitable; they take a large number of livestock and sell their meat to the country. This makes it very easy for the country to maintain a steady meat supply for everyone who wants to consume meat in America. They also provide many jobs to people all across the country. CAFOs provide work to people feeding the animals, caring for the animals, transporting the animals, and slaughtering the animals. This provides huge economic gain to people who are unable to find other work because they may be considered unskilled workers, but they can still find work in their local CAFOs. The CAFO industry is also extremely efficient. The industry supplies a massive amount of meat all across the country daily. This allows Americans to eat meat and have a balanced diet. The animals being in confined areas makes it easier to control the animals and easier to feed all of the animals at once. This makes it more efficient for the workers to maintain the

animals at a state to where they can be sold and delivered for sale. The CAFO industry also makes it much less expensive for people to consume meat on a daily basis. This allows people of lower income to get their necessary meat consumption. If the lower income class was unable to afford meat, it would be a major issue for society because there would be a much better nourished population of people. It would be extremely unfair for the lower income class to not have meat at their disposal. A Nation of Meat Eaters shows that 52.2 billion pounds of meat are consumed yearly by Americans (Barclay 2012). This shows just how productive and cost-efficient these CAFOs are. They are able to provide the nation with a massive amount of meat per year fit for consumption. These CAFOs also raise the general welfare of the surrounding communities because it provides wealth to the local economy. CAFOs do a lot of good for the nation even if there are many cons surrounding the topic. The U.S. nation would be unable to sustain a healthy populous without the CAFO industry (Editor 2015).

This is where the big question arises. Are CAFOs really worth it? Many would argue that they are, and many would argue that they are not. There are many ethical issues surrounding the idea of CAFOs. The mistreatment of animals is what most people focus on, but there are many more that this paper has previously pointed out. The general populous is unaware of the problems surrounding CAFOs like pollution and contamination. These are major issues surrounding the CAFO industry that destroy local ecosystems. It is very important to be able to feed a nation and supply a nutritious diet to everyone, but where is the line? How far will people go to profit and keep the general public fed? It seems as though society has implemented a very cost-efficient way to keep everyone fed. Although there are many cons and the treatment of animals in these CAFOs is egregious, it seems as though this is a necessary evil to feed the general public.

CAFOs are still a very controversial issue because many people are unwilling to see eye to eye on the subject. There will always be people asking for animal rights and for the destruction of all CAFOs, but these people meet a very specific criterion. They are a minority of people who are usually vegetarian or vegan. They are unwilling to believe that maybe this issue is beyond anyone's control because it is important to keep a society fed. Most people are unwilling to change their diet completely and not consume meat at all. The expectation that the CAFO system will be changed is absurd because America is very dependent on its existence. Americans need the CAFO system or else meat prices will go through the roof and the government will not be able to subsidize meat industry to the point of where meat is affordable. Calling for regulations and changes is a very bold act

considering that the regulations would cause the majority of Americans to be unable to afford meat. The CAFO argument is a very complex one because both sides make very clear and understandable points; however, one side focuses on the good of society and the other focuses on the good of a community and animals. When it comes to the ability to consume cheaper and more accessible meat, America will also choose the easiest option even if it may be considered an evil industry by some.

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