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Slaughtering Factory Farms

You are trapped. Metal bars squeeze the sides of your disease ridden body so tightly that you are physically unable to move. You hear the cry of thousands of others echoing within the cramped, dark building. Anxiety peaks and you begin to gasp for fresh air, only to find that there is none to be found — you are engulfed in noxious fumes. No, this is not the beginning of the plot to some new horror movie, this is reality for the substantial quantities of animals being confined in crowded, indoor facilities for the purpose of producing animal products for human consumption, an industry otherwise known as factory farming. The time has come to recognize and address the undeniably unethical state of affairs that factory farms present. Although many claim that factory farming is necessary and efficient for the feeding of society, this is not only a complete fallacy, but is one that is significantly outweighed by its deplorable outcomes. Factory farming creates health risks for humans, causes indisputable damage to the environment, and leads to the subpar treatment of animals. Turning a blind eye to the blatantly abusive and disgraceful business of factory farming is to jeopardize not only ourselves, but the world and its inhabitants.

Many of us prioritize our own health and wellness on a day to day basis. One of the ways we do this is by choosing food that we believe offers us the most nutritional value. We often see junk food being crossed off of grocery lists around the planet. But, what if a food we have determined as “healthy,” and therefore are justified in consuming, really is not so? As it turns out, factory farmed meat is not as healthy as most people would like it to be. To begin, the meat produced by factory farmed animals holds little nutrition. In order to maximize meat output per animal, the animals are fed diets solely intended to increase their body mass to unnatural sizes at extraordinarily fast rates. However, if what an animal is being fed has little nutritional value, the meat they produce will not either. In fact, “a typical supermarket chicken today contains more than twice the fat, and about a third less protein than 40 years ago” (“11 Facts About Animals and Factory Farms”). Not only is factory farmed meat far more fatty, it often contains less essential vitamins and minerals due to the effects of animals being under intense stress (“The Dangers Associated with Factory Farmed Meat”). For example, Omega-3, which must be acquired through diet or supplement in humans, is found both less abundantly and in ratios unbalanced with Omega-6 in factory farmed meat. This unbalanced ratio paired with an inadequate intake of Omega-3 has been correlated with cardiovascular disease and cancer (“Your Health”). Another health issue factory farmed meat introduces is antibiotic resistant bacteria. An increased prominence of this resistant bacteria begins with the fact that “swine, poultry and beef cattle producers use from 16 million to 27 million pounds of non-therapeutic antibiotics on animals every year” (Weeks). Every animal, not just the sick ones, are dosed with these antibiotics to combat illness and promote growth. Due to this, many bacteria are killed; nonetheless, the ones unaffected by the antibiotics will continue to reproduce (Robbins). The

resistant bacteria that have now survived and reproduced are then able to be passed on to humans which can lead to infections unable to be cured by many antibiotics (Weeks). Even when not antibiotic resistant, humans can still contract several other food borne illnesses that originate in factory farms. In fact, a study at the University of Minnesota found that 69% of beef/pork and 92% of poultry tested were contaminated with E. Coli — a bacteria that can cause stomach cramps, diarrhea, and even death (Freston). It is sufficiently clear that factory farmed meat poses a threat to human health no matter how much we would like to think of it as a nutritious, clean option. Callously disregarding these effects of factory farming is not only irrefutably damaging to the health of society, but is supporting an industry that gives zero regard for the consumers monetarily keeping it afloat.

Not only is the health of our bodies put at risk, the health of the environment is as well. First, animal agriculture uses an exorbitant amount of natural resources. When talking strictly numbers, “the meat and dairy industry use[s] 1/3 of Earth’s fresh water” (“The Sustainability Secret”), 45% of Earth’s habitable land is used for factory farming and pasture feeding (“The High Price Of Factory Farming”), and 1/3 of our cultivatable land being used to grow crops to feed these animals (Bland). Factory farming is using copious amounts of our water, removing ungodly numbers of trees, and taking up preposterous amounts of land. The water and land that *is* left behind, however, is being vastly polluted by the presence of factory farms. Livestock produce mass amounts of manure and waste which contain several toxic and harmful chemicals. This waste then pollutes the soil, seeps into ground water, and is carried into other bodies of water through runoff. This is not just a little bit of pollution either, in fact animal agriculture is the number one cause of water pollution on the planet (“The Sustainability Secret”). This

pollution can lead to widespread death of aquatic species (Weeks); ocean dead zones, acidification, and temperature rise (“What's the Role of Factory Farming in Ocean Degradation”); and unsafe levels of toxic chemicals in drinking water (“Pollution (Water, Air, Chemicals)”). Factory farms are polluting another part of our environment as well: the air. The farms are responsible for emissions of several pollutants such as carbon dioxide, nitrous oxide, methane, hydrogen sulfide, and ammonia (“How Factory Farming Creates Air Pollution”). Three of these are primary greenhouse gases — carbon dioxide, nitrous oxide, and methane. Greenhouse gases play an extensive part in the cause of global warming (Weeks) which means that industrial farming is directly tied to climate change. Factory farming is posing a threat not only to individuals, but to the world as a whole and to ignore its effects is damaging for humanity as we know it. To continue down the path that factory farming has paved is to say goodbye to a planet abundantly fruitful with beauty and life, and hello to barren wasteland full of misery and excruciating death.

Though factory farming quite obviously has an effect on things going on outside of the farm, a peek inside is needed as well. The treatment of the animals inside those four walls is absolutely despicable and likely enough to make your stomach churn. To start with, factory farms are not the most luxurious places on the face of the planet. Many factory farms confine their animals indoors for the entirety of their lives feeding them Vitamin D in place of sunlight (Leepson). Animals are often unable to move their bodies or limbs either due to overcrowding or being housed in unreasonably small cages. When it comes to specifics, chickens are either packed together on the floor in numbers reaching the tens of thousands, or stuffed into minuscule wire cages with up to 9 others. Cows, though initially given time outdoors, are offered little

shelter up until their transportation to the overcrowded feedlots where they remain until slaughter. Pigs, on the other hand, are so tightly confined within their individual pens that they often cannot even turn their bodies around (“Farm Animal Welfare”). Such cramped living spaces for all of these creatures leads to behavioral problems, disease, physical deformities, fights, and injury (“Inhumane Practices on Factory Farms”). Not only is the living environment crowded, it is quite filthy as well. Poor animal waste management systems work by “excrement fall[ing] through floor slats into a pit, from which it is periodically flushed outside into a so-called lagoon. Acrid whiffs of ammonia waft up from the decomposing manure” (Weeks). These unsanitary conditions can cause health problems on their own or lead to the perpetuation of previously acquired ones.

Another threat to animal welfare that factory farms establish is physical alteration. Animals are mutilated in order to make the overcrowding “safer.” Tails and teeth are sliced off, horns are removed or cauterized before growth has a chance to occur, and beaks tips are seared away — all done without pain relievers or anesthesia (“Inhumane Practices on Factory Farms”). Another common body alteration is genetic modification in order for the animal to produce more meat, poultry, or eggs. These modifications can be so extreme that it is not uncommon for chickens to be physically unable to walk because their legs are incapable of supporting their now unnaturally sized bodies (“Factory Farming: The Industry Behind Meat and Dairy”). The physical and mental pain these animals are being forced to endure is often too much for them to handle, resulting in around 10% of them dying from stress, illness, or disease before they even make it to be slaughtered (“Factory Farms”). The atrocious treatment of animals within the walls

of factory farms is utterly unethical at best. If so many of us say we “love animals,” why are we continuing to ignore the billions of animals being mercilessly abused right in front of our eyes?

While it may be abysmal, some believe factory farming is needed to feed the masses. We would not have enough for the world to stay full, they say. There are billions of people on the planet, and simply eliminating an entire, efficient source of food would leave a large percentage with their mouths empty. In fact, an author for the Animal Agriculture Alliance stated, “animal agriculture is not only reducing its inputs and using the best technology to care for animals, but is producing the safest and most abundant food supply in history” (Kinler). However, once the math is done, the fact that factory farming is not necessary nor efficient is thrust into the spotlight. First of all, the necessity needs to be called into question. The reality is that 1.5 acres of land is capable of producing 375 lbs. of meat...or 37000 lbs. of plant based food (“The Sustainability Secret”). If the massive amounts of land currently being used for meat production were instead used for plant production, we would certainly still have enough food to feed the masses. The idea that factory farming is efficient also needs to be addressed. The truth is that we are putting large amounts of food and nutrients into feeding livestock and getting far less food out the livestock in return. In actuality, “livestock consume 77 million tons of protein contained in feedstuff that could potentially be used for human nutrition, whereas 58 million tons of protein are contained in food products that livestock supply” (Steinfeld). There is simply no way that this process is one that can be classified as efficient. With little to no evidence supporting the industry’s necessity or efficiency, the arguments of those who support factory farming become obsolete.

Factory farming, though creating product for human consumption, is an incontestably heinous industry. It is threatening human health, devastating the environment, and abusing the welfare of animals. Although many see factory farming as both necessary and efficient in order to keep society happy and well fed, this is doubtlessly a flawed perspective. We have sat back silently for long enough; the time has now come for us to put our feet down and slaughter the factory farming industry. Waiting a moment longer means watching the desecration to ourselves, our planet, and the animals continue to increase at an exponential rate. Soon enough it may be us struggling to breath through the noxious fumes permeating our environment — not just the animals who have fallen victim to factory farming.

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