

America's Modern Livestock Farming

Term Paper

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Introduction

Imagine a farm that most meat, dairy, and poultry comes from. One might picture a barn with acres of farmland. There are cows grazing, chickens laying eggs and the walking around a large area, and pigs are outside the barn walking around. The animals are content and healthy and the farm is clean and natural. Decades ago the United States of America had this system of farming. However, today animals are often kept in indoor facilities, and there is an immense amount of animals. Today small individually owned farms are not as common. Like Wenonah Hauteur said in her presentation, there are a few corporations that own the majority of poultry, beef, and pork sold in grocery stores (Hauter, 2015). These companies are powerful. As technology grows, agriculture machines are invented to be more efficient. Efficiency is important to feed our growing population, however the health of the environment, animals, and people should not be compromised.

Effect on the Environment's Health

The way animals are taken care of impacts the environment. Air pollution and nutrient depletion of soil are the effects of modern farm practices. "Consider a very large rancher's decision about how many cattle should graze on his or her 100,000 acre grassland plot in Texas. If the rancher overgrazes the land, the grass will recover more slowly" (Wilde, 2013, Page 36). To increase profit, farmers will sometimes not let the land recover, this leaves grassless, nutrient bare, and disease infected soil left for the next group of cattle. This is very bad for the health of the soil, because it would take years to get the soil back to normal. Therefore, farmers continue to put cows on the same land and feed them instead of letting them graze. The air is polluted with methane from the waste of farm animals. Methane is a greenhouse gas that contributes to climate

changes (Wilde, 2013, Page 47). Factory farms also have to wash their animals often since they live, defecate, and eat in the same small area. This uses a lot of water, which puts a dent in the supply of fresh water. These effects are potentially irreversible.

Effect on Animal's Health

Animals are often treated cruelly on factory farms. Many pigs, cows, and chickens are kept in cages or small crowded pens. Most animals never even see sunlight. Chicken and pigs are unlikely to walk on grass. Some factory



farms do treat their animals humanely. Farms that treat their animals humanely have veterinarians who care for illnesses in the animals. The animals are not abused, underfed, or overcrowded. However, this is more expensive. To cut costs and increase production many companies do not treat their animals humanely.

Mother pigs and their newborns are sometimes held in gestation crates, “A gestation crate is a metal crate or cage, usually with a bare, slatted floor, which is so narrow that the sow cannot turn around and can only stand up and lie down with difficulty... A bare gestation crate prevents virtually all natural behavior and interaction with other pigs. Scientific research shows that gestation crates cause physical and psychological suffering to sows, including lameness due to weaker bones and muscles, abrasion injuries, cardiovascular problems, digestive problems, and urinary tract problems” (Compassion in World Farming, 2014). These crates cause the pigs to suffer both physically and mentally. These cages also breed disease.



Dairy cows also do not have a natural life, they are bred to have certain characteristics, like large udders. Cows are often confined to indoors and cannot graze outside. This causes a humane concern for cows, because the cows contract mastitis; “Mastitis is a painful udder infection that is prevalent among dairy cows. 16.5 percent of deaths of dairy cows in the US are attributed to mastitis, which is more commonly reported than any other health problem in the dairy industry” (Compassion in World Farming, 2014). Cows undergo pain and unnecessary sickness for the company’s higher profit.

Chickens are commonly raised in sheds. The broiler sheds are overcrowded; “A single broiler shed often houses tens of thousands of birds. Each chicken receives slightly more space than a single sheet of notebook paper” (Compassion in World Farming, 2014). The overcrowding creates an environment of poor air quality, lack of exercise causing weak legs, and dirty shed floors. The environment causes disease and billions of deaths. Animals on modern farms commonly are not taken care of properly.

Effect on People’s Health

Modern livestock farms with disgusting conditions lead to health problems in the Americans who eat these products. Unsanitary farm conditions breed disease, and we eat the diseased animal meat or the antibiotics the animal took to get rid of the disease. Antibiotics in food is leading to antibiotic resistance. Therefore, when someone gets sick they are immune to the medicine. A combination of practices cause human health to be compromised; “The unnatural feeds, hormones, and excessive quantities of antibiotics used on factory farms put the

human population at risk for chronic disease, obesity, and drug-resistant bacteria, and pose the threat of major zoonotic disease outbreaks” (Farm Sanctuary, 2014). People may not realize that their seemingly fine food is contributing to their inability to fight off illnesses. Also, the potential dangers in eating non-organic meats and eggs is not well-known. Taking the extra step to buy organic could help Americans from these risks.

Free Range Chickens

Modern farms that are clean, humane, and healthy do exist. Mary’s Free Range Chickens on the Pitney Family Farm in California are an example of a successful independent chicken farm. The chickens graze on a new grass area every three days. The chickens are not abused nor are they in a stressful environment. In sheds the chickens never see the sun however the Pitman Family Farm lets the chickens roam outside. The chickens live and grow naturally without human interference. Also some of the chicken are GMO-free or organic (Mary’s Free Range Chickens). This farm is proof that farming can be safe and profitable. Environmental well-being, human well-being, and animal well-being are all being taken care of.

Smithfield’s Animal Abuse

The large livestock farming corporations that control the meat industry are the most known for their animal abuse. The companies own thousands of small farms, therefore the corporations do not monitor the farm. Also the large companies do not care if the animals are abused as long as they are making the largest possible profit. Also when videos of animal abuse surface the companies only take a small blow to their overall profit. One company whose abuse



is repeatedly reported is Smithfield. Smithfield is well-known for their pork. Smithfield throws pigs and kills them inhumanely. Also, Smithfield pigs are kept in tiny cages not much bigger than their bodies (The Humane Society, 2010). Other large factory farmers committed to getting rid of the gestation cages Smithfield should too.

Analysis

The growing population is putting a strain on the food supply. However, raising animals the right way takes more time and money. We must find a middle ground, before we see worse effects from factory farms. Right now we can ignore the environmental effects but they could grow to be undeniable. We can also blame our health problems on things other than factory farms. Education is an important part of changing our food. The farms are very profitable, however sacrifices have to be made.

Conclusion

The traditional farming techniques that were visualized in the introduction, have evolved into a faster and more profitable process, but this has come at a price. In America, poultry, meats, and dairy are products that we have always provided for ourselves. America should be able to be proud of its food. We should not have to fear recalls and health complications. Having healthy food is important to live a long life. A lot of the food we buy from normal grocery stores is not healthy. The food from the normal grocery stores have GMOs, antibiotic resistant bacteria, coloring chemicals, preservatives, and possible e. coli or salmonella. In addition to making our bodies unhealthy we have cruelly abused animals and our environment. America needs to fight to get an updated traditional farm back.

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Pictures

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