

Rethinking¹ the meat guzzler²

A SEA change in the consumption of a resource that Americans take for **granted**³ may be in store — something cheap, plentiful, widely enjoyed and a part of daily life. And it isn't oil. It's meat.

The two commodities share a great **deal**⁴: Like oil, meat is **subsidized**⁵ by the federal government. Like oil, meat is subject to accelerating demand as nations become **wealthier**⁶, and this, in turn, sends prices higher. Finally — like oil — meat is something people are encouraged to consume less of, as the **toll**⁷ exacted by industrial production increases, and becomes increasingly visible.

Global demand for meat has multiplied in recent years, encouraged by growing affluence and nourished by the proliferation of huge, **confined**⁸ animal feeding operations. These assembly-line meat **factories**⁹ consume enormous amounts of energy, pollute water supplies, generate significant greenhouse gases and require ever-increasing amounts of corn, soy and other grains, a dependency that has led to the destruction of vast **swaths**¹⁰ of the world's tropical rain forests.

Though some 800 million people on the planet now suffer from hunger or malnutrition, the majority of corn and soy grown in the world feeds cattle, pigs and chickens. This despite the **inherent**¹¹ inefficiencies: about two to five times more grain is required to produce the same amount of calories through livestock as through direct grain consumption.

Once, these animals were **raised**¹² locally, reducing transportation costs and allowing their **manure**¹³ to be **spread**¹⁴ on nearby fields. Now **hog**¹⁵ production facilities that resemble prisons more than farms are hundreds of miles from major population centers, and their manure "lagoons" pollute **streams**¹⁶ and groundwater. (In Iowa alone, hog factories and farms produce more than 50 million tons of excrement annually.)

Perhaps the best hope for change lies in consumers' becoming aware of the true costs of industrial meat production. **Animal welfare**¹⁷ may not yet be a major concern, but as the horrors of raising meat in confinement become known, more animal lovers may start to react. And would the world not be a better place were some of the grain we use to grow meat directed instead to feed our fellow human beings ?

Source : http://www.nytimes.com/2008/01/27/weekinreview/27bittman.html?_r=1&emc=eta1&oref=slogin



VOCABULARY

1 **Rethinking** : reconsider, reflect, think seriously about.

2 **Guzzler** : one who consumes excessively or greedily.

3 **Take for granted** : to assume, to accept without question. Americans can buy meat freely and cheaply, thus if it is ALWAYS available in the supermarket, you may take it for granted. Another example : if you live in Nice, you might take the sunny weather or the beach for granted.

4 **A great deal** : in this context it means : a lot or a large amount. In another context it can mean something different. For example, if you bought a car for a low price but it's value was much higher, you would say that you got 'a great deal' on the car.

5 **Subsidize** : to give money to. In this case the US government subsidizes the meat industry because it gives federal money to meat companies, in hopes of promoting commercial growth.

6 **Wealthier** : richer, having more money.

7 **Toll** : payment, or cost.

8 **Confined** : restricted to a certain area. For example, cows raised for meat are raised in a confined space because their movement is restricted by barriers (gates and fences).

9 **Factories** : A place (usually a large building or group of buildings) that produces or manufactures products which will later be sold to consumers.

10 **Swath** : a piece or a strip of land.

11 **Inherent** : an inseparable element or quality, native. For example, the inherent dangers of alcohol abuse.

12 **Raise** : bring up. Cows can be raised on a local farm, or in a factory farm. Also, children are raised by their parents.

13 **Manure** : animal excrement, often used as fertilizer.

14 **Spread** : to put, apply or distribute something onto something else. For example, to spread butter on bread.

15 **Hog** : pig.

16 **Stream** : a body of water, usually smaller than a river.

17 **Animal welfare** : the condition (health, happiness, etc) or well-being of animals. Welfare can also apply to people and organizations, for example, looking out for your personal welfare, the welfare of others, etc.

QUOTATIONS FOR FURTHER DEBATE

« The world continues to fall gradually to pieces around us as some of the gravest threats to the long-term sustainability of humankind remain all but ignored. I would put the excessive consumption of meat right up there in that category. And though I understand only too well why it is that politicians continue to ignore this particular aspect of food and farming today, I despair at their selective blindness ».

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« The question is not, «Can they reason?» nor, «Can they talk?» but rather, «Can they suffer ? »

Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832), was an English gentleman, jurist, philosopher, and legal and social reformer. He is best known as an early advocate of individual and economic freedom, including the separation of church and state, freedom of expression, equal rights for women, animal rights, the end of slavery, the abolition of physical punishment (including that of children), the right to divorce, free trade, and no restrictions on interest. He supported inheritance tax, restrictions on monopoly power, pensions, and health insurance.