

The majority of people if they were made aware of just how unpleasant the lives of many of our food animals are would probably eat far less meat.

One of the ploys used by the advertisers is to show smiling animal faces on advertising billboards or packaging associated with the sale meat and dairy products. This is designed to mislead those who don't give any thought to the plight of these animals. This is not to say that we should not have animal meat in our diet. It is to say that we can do a lot better than the current cruel methods used with intensive animal production.

One group of producers who describe themselves as beyond organic, are called grass farmers. Using techniques which form a closed system of humane outdoor animal rotations where nothing is wasted, the yield is similar or better than intensive production facilities. The problem is that this way of doing things does not fit in with the industrial food chain production of huge agribusinesses (Pollan 06). The following two tables demonstrate the hidden extreme unpleasantness associated with intensive animal production (Pollan 06) (Jacobson 06).

Industry	Proportion in intensive production units.	Conditions	Mutilations
Poultry	75% of world production of meat and 66% of eggs, but majority of western production	Large sheds, no outside contact. For layers, birds are kept in cages in a space less than 2/3 to 1/2 A4 sheet of paper per bird. Forced moulting to increase egg yield is induced by food and water restriction. Breeding stock for broilers is starved to increase fertility.	Beaks clipping, de-toeing, killing unwanted male chicks by being macerated alive
Pork	40% of world production, majority of western production	Large sheds. Farrowing cages to protect newborn piglets provide just enough space for the animal to stand or lie down, with no more than half a pace forward or backward. Slatted steel floor with cesspit underneath. Never go outside. Farrowing crates are particularly inhumane and many areas of the world have banned their use.	Tails docked
Beef	Majority of western animals finished in feedlot operations	Variable length of time in feedlots, crowded manure covered ground. No shade or protection from weather.	Castrated, de-horned and branded without anaesthetic.

Dairy	Relatively small but growing	Large sheds, milked three times a day. Never outside and kept in tiny spaces of 2 to 2.5 sq metres. Walk around in manure.	Tails docked in an attempt to reduce udder infections.
-------	------------------------------	--	--

The following table lists the many disorders that are almost never seen in free range animals but are not uncommon in intensive animal production operations.

	Medical problems suffered by animals because of confinement		
Poultry	<p>Increased coccidial infections requiring organic arsenical prophylaxis. Limb injuries from the cages are common. Pectoral myopathy related to loss of blood supply in the abnormally large breast muscles occurs if these muscles are suddenly contracted when the bird is alarmed. The muscle then dies and subsequently kills the bird. Breeding to maximize the meat yield leads to heart disease and lameness. Viral epidemics can wipe out vast numbers of birds such as Newcastle disease or the much more feared H5N1 avian influenza. Psychological problems such as head rocking and excessive drinking are well recognized. Panic behaviours leading to injury is seen in broiler houses.</p>		
Pork	<p>Increased urinary infections possibly related to direct contact with excreta. Foot and leg injuries from containment barriers Wasting disease is more common in intensive production facilities. Poor conditions lead to problems with suckling and other maternal functions. Exposure to toxic fumes from manure such as ammonia and hydrogen sulphide causes problems apart from the fact that it is very unpleasant. Psychological problems are well known such as cage chewing, squatting behaviour, tail biting.</p>		
Beef	<p>Unnatural diet of feedlot animals causes the rumen to become more acidic rather than the usual neutral levels, leading to gastric ulceration and in a proportion of animals, liver abscesses. 13% of livers in one investigation were discarded because of this. High grain diets are also associated with other problems such as bloat, diarrhoea and the often lethal grain overload syndrome. Psychological problems such as the "buller syndrome" where steers repeatedly mount other cattle, often causing physical injury. Tongue rolling and chewing of solid structures such as fence posts are seen.</p>		
Dairy	<p>High milk output, in some cases stimulated by hormones, causes udder problems, and increased numbers of infections, made worse by contact with their own excreta. Confined animals may develop a range of neurotic disorders such as head rubbing, grating teeth on metal cages, eye rolling.</p>		

A significant proportion of the antibiotics, pest control chemicals and hormone therapies are only used in intensive production units. Many of these substances are either a direct threat to humans or are a threat to the surrounding wildlife. A more humane treatment of animals without the use of intensive production methods would significantly reduce the use of these substances. The price we pay for our meat and dairy should include the true costs of the damage these practices are doing to our own health and health of the environment.

The final trip: the horror of the way animals are treated before and during slaughter.

Stage	Events
Transport to the abattoir	Animals are frequently transported long distances in extremely cramped, cold/hot conditions without food or water. Many are injured or killed.
Problems with slaughter	Some killing methods involve the slitting of the throat without being stunned. In many high throughput facilities, stunning is often not fully effective and the animals die a slow, unpleasant death.
Danger to abattoir workers.	Abattoirs have some of the worst working conditions imaginable. High level of injuries, mistreatment of workers and underpay are widely reported.

The bottom line: cheap animal protein foods damage us and damage the environment.

No one should consume animal products without being aware of the issues that have been detailed here. The point is that there are ways to produce animal protein products which are humane, which don't damage the environment and are totally sustainable. The fact is that they cost more. If the true price of the environmental and health problems that factory farming of animals were included in the price you pay at the supermarket, things would be a lot more expensive. Remember the price you pay has been reduced by trading the value of our own health and that of the environment.

References:

(Pollan 06) Michael Pollan. The Omnivore's Dilemma. Bloomsbury Publishing 2006

(Jacobson 06) Michael Jacobsen. Six arguments for a greener diet. Center for Science in the Public Interest. 2006