

Parker Bowman

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CAFOs Cause Animal Suffering

It is wrong to put animals in a cage. It is wrong to cram them to the point they cannot turn around. It is wrong to exhibit these flaws and yet also be a major contributor to climate change. Despite the severity of these faults, factory farms—also known as concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs)—exhibit these horrible practices and more. While CAFOs harm animals through their horrific treatment of their livestock and their endangering of the environment, stricter legal controls, sustainable agriculture, and lab-grown meat can be used to mitigate these downsides and give animals better lives.

Animals in CAFOs suffer under cruel husbandry, resulting in deteriorated health and painful lives. One entry in the long list of crimes inflicted by CAFOs against animals is intensive confinement. Animals in CAFOs are trapped in cages, crates, or pens. Some of these spaces, including battery cages, veal crates, and gestation crates, limit animal movement to the point that they cannot freely move their wings, turn their body, or recline easily. Any animal has the right to move freely and explore, just like any other human; and yet, here in factory farms, this right is neglected. On top of this insult is a high dose of injury; animals often lose their body parts—including the beak, horn, tail, toe, or testicle—without anesthesia (“Farmed Animals”). In other CAFOs the manmade living conditions cause chickens to underexercise, consume antibiotics, and eat excessively, leading to their deteriorated health. Specifically, chickens’ hearts and legs are weakened; they struggle to breathe; and they endure chronic pain. Other health risks come from the practice of selective breeding, which has been used intensively enough to create two very different breeds of chicken for egg and meat production (“How Factory Farming Hurts

Animals”). It is unacceptable to strip away both animals’ freedom to travel and their physical health; yet, the immoral practices do not end there—they only continue in the production of foie gras. This is a delicacy created when ducks or geese are force-fed to grow their liver to eight times the natural size. To force-feed these animals, grain is sent into their stomachs using a tube put down their throat. They are often force-fed to the point that they are too heavy to freely move. Other inhibitors include disease and painful infections in the beak and throat resulting from the inhumane conditions (“Foie Gras”). Alongside the unhealthy conditions forced upon these innocent duck and geese, the sheer audacity of CAFOs to force-feed this intrusively and excessively demonstrates just how significant their contribution is to animal suffering. Ducks, geese, chickens, cows, pigs, and other animals all endure similar cruelty asserted upon them by CAFOs, degrading their health and stripping away their deserved freedom.

In addition to their cruel treatment of animals within farms, CAFOs also harm animals around the world through their worldwide environmental impact, including their acceleration of climate change. Each year, CAFOs are responsible for 14.5% of global greenhouse gas emissions (Francis). These emissions have been plentiful enough to produce acid rain and smog. U.S. animal farming operations allow greenhouse gases, especially methane, to be released from the 453 metric tons of manure they store each year (Hand). With such a plentiful release of harmful gases, climate change is accelerated, damaging animal habitats worldwide. However, this aforementioned manure comes with further downsides. Locations that store manure in bulk, known as “manure lagoons,” have been known to overflow during severe weather, polluting the environment with animal waste. Examples include Hurricane Floyd in 1999, Hurricane Matthew in 2016, and Hurricane Florence in 2018. The latter damaged or endangered 110 manure lagoons while also leaking 39 million gallons of combined sewage and animal farm waste into the Cape

Fear River Basin, a primary drinking source for nearby regions (“Industrial Agriculture 101”). This pollution from CAFOs damages animal habitat and, in some cases, compromises the natural resources these animals need to live, such as relatively clean sources of water. Sometimes, manure is even spread around intentionally; many CAFOs spray excessive amounts of manure over their fields as fertilizer, sending a runoff of nutrients into nearby water sources. This runoff leads to the creation of aquatic dead zones, areas with greatly diminished ecosystem health, which for decades have been increasing in frequency (“Industrial Agriculture 101”). Intentional pollution from CAFOs clearly poses a threat to animal health and survivability as natural resources are contaminated. Furthermore, the number of these resources consumed by CAFOs is astronomical. The average quantity of water used for beef production is 15,414 liters per kilogram of beef. Land use is just as egregious; beef production takes up 80% of the world’s agricultural land (Shepherd). By accelerating climate change, releasing large amounts of other pollutants, and gobbling up absurd amounts of natural resources, CAFOs endanger animal habitat and hence the animals who need it to live.

Looking at all of these downsides of CAFOs prompts the question of whether there are any practical solutions. Fortunately, these can be found in stricter legislation, the practice of sustainable agriculture, and the increasing popularity of lab-grown meat. Advancements in the political sphere over the past few decades have demonstrated that animals can legally gain better treatment from humans. Among the most important of these actions was a joint pledge reached between U.S. President Joe Biden and the European Union in 2021. This climate deal aimed to cut methane emissions 30% from 2020 levels by 2030 (“Climate, Environmental Justice Groups”). While the precedent set by this deal will likely inspire many other laws in the future, other smaller legal battles have panned out in animals’ favor. In 2004, the production and sale of

foie gras was banned in California, the law taking effect in 2012. While the law was challenged numerous times by the foie gras industry, the law's constitutionality has remained upheld ("Foie Gras"). This positive track record demonstrates the momentum animal rights have in the legal system. Although the law offers a path toward improved animal treatment in CAFOs, the practice of sustainable agriculture can also lead the way to improved animal welfare. Sustainable farming methodology includes reduced fertilizer and pesticide use, soil-preserving practices such as diverse crop rotation, and more open spaces for animals to live in. While all these practices reduce waste and therefore conserve the environment, the enlarged animal spaces also allow for free grazing, saving land from mass crop production used to feed these animals and therefore reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Also absent from sustainable agriculture are the problematic manure lagoons. All of these methods give sustainable agriculture a noticeable edge over its industrial counterpart in the environmental conservation department, protecting animal habitat ("Industrial Agriculture 101"). Another possible method to reducing environmental degradation comes in the form of lab-grown or cultured meats. These are generated by harmlessly retrieving a cell from an animal and placing them in conditions favorable to growth. The cell then multiplies to form sizable chunks of meat (Francis). This method conserves natural resources by using vastly less land and water, thereby reducing greenhouse gas emissions. While this method may sound far-fetched, two companies producing cultured meat received approval from the USDA in 2023 (Thompson). Restaurants have also begun serving cultivated meats ("How 'Lab-Grown' Meat is Made"). On top of this advancement, public opinion may also be open to lab-grown meats. About two-thirds of American citizens are open to trying lab-grown meat, and half of U.S. vegetarians are as well (Thompson). Transitioning the meat industry to producing only lab-grown varieties could be a viable way to reduce animal cruelty, as cultivated meats have

been garnering optimistic public opinion, conserving natural resources, and treating animals much more humanely when compared to CAFOs. Moreover, the fact of the matter is that improved laws, sustainable agriculture, and lab-grown meats are clearly viable ways of stopping the suffering animals endure because of CAFOs.

Clearly, CAFOs have been harming animals around the world by horribly mistreating livestock and damaging the environment in which all animals live. However, these faults can be relieved by new laws restricting animal cruelty, sustainable farming practices, and cultivated meats. Even if difficult to attain, all these solutions are achievable with rapidly improving technology, an open-minded public, and a solid number of able lawmakers. The variety of viable methods to address animal safety demonstrates the prime ability of anyone—even the most devout meat-lovers—to reduce the negative impact of CAFOs on the lives of innocent animals. Therefore, if all people would contribute, animals would live in a much safer, environmentally healthier world.

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