

Animals as Food, day 1 – Focus on Food Systems and Farm Animal Welfare

David DeGrazia, “Meat Eating”: the story of “hen x”, “hog y”, and “cow z”

- What kind of welfare problems does DeGrazia describe in intensive confinement systems? How are these different from the welfare problems of extensive systems?
- not all 'factory-farmed' meat is created equal, welfare-wise... Which is better? Which is worse? Why?
- How might DeGrazia's dichotomy between '**factory farms**' and '**traditional family farms**' be problematic?
- “Many fish today are raised in fish farms... When fish are raised in this way, the case for boycotting these products is stronger.” Why might this not necessarily be true?

Temple Grandin, “Thinking Like Animals” and “A Major Change”

- What are some of the details that farm animals (cows, in this case) notice that ‘normal’ humans ignore?
- “By the end of 1999, 90 percent of beef plants were stunning 95 percent of the cattle they processed with one shot: 37 percent were stunning 99 percent to 100 percent with one shot.” While this is definitely a laudable improvement, keep in mind that 5 percent of a few hundred million is still five million!
- What are the benefits of using a checklist/yes-or-no scoring system to evaluate slaughterhouse practices?
- While slaughter conditions have improved, Grandin says that transport conditions have in many cases gotten worse—given the nature of modern economics/business, why might transport present ethical problems?
- “One of my biggest concerns is...that producers are pushing animals beyond their biological limits.”
- “Large meat-buying customers such as fast-food restaurants in the United States and supermarket chains in the United Kingdom can motivate great change...”

Carol J. Adams, “The Rape of Animals, The Butchering of Women”

- What are the different ways, according to Adams, that animals become **absent referents**?
 - For an example: why do we say “leg of lamb” rather than “a lamb’s leg”?
- “Bunny Bop” organizer—“what would all these rabbit hunters be doing if they weren’t letting off all this steam? I’ll tell you what they’d be doing. They’d be drinking and carousing and beating their wives.”

Animal Ag Alliance, “Animal Agriculture: Myths and Facts”

- What does this mean? “We understand the difference between what an animal may want and what it needs?”
- The AAA is right to point out that most of the country’s (then) 2.2 million farms are, in fact, family owned—the 7,000 that are not, however, are really, really big...[as an aside: the definition of precisely what constitutes a farm is an interesting one, and the USDA changes it around every now and again]
- What does AAA point to as the benefits of indoor housing systems? (237) How does they explain the confinement/crating/caging of animals?
- How does the AAA respond to the ‘myth’ that “animals are routinely “mutilated” by **beak trimming, tail docking, branding, dehorning, castration**, and other practices”? (239) Are you convinced?
- On **antibiotics**: “there is no conclusive scientific proof that the use of human antibiotics in animals...is a risk to human health” (note the extremely cautious language here...). While it’s true that “animals kept in housing are no more likely to get sick than animals kept in the open” as a general rule, the question of **stocking density** does change matters.

“Farmer in Chief” (Michael Pollan, Oct. 9, 2008)

- Pollan argues that the food system is directly related to the health care crisis, energy independence and

climate change. How so?

- What effects do rising food commodity prices (i.e., the **global food crisis**) have on those most in need?
- How does Pollan say our food system got the way it is (see: Earl Butz, ‘get big or get out’)
 - Wendell Berry: “to take animals off farms and put them on feedlots is to take an elegant solution—animals replenishing the fertility that crops deplete—and neatly divide it into two problems: a fertility problem on the farm and a pollution problem on the feedlot. The former problem is remedied with fossil-fuel fertilizer; the latter is remedied not at all.”
- Creating a definition of “food” (as against what Pollan calls ‘edible food-like substances’)
- This article is one of Pollan’s best-known works, but it is just one of many articles, books, and films (the best current example is *Food, Inc.*) that are growing increasingly critical of our current food system.

The Omnivore’s Delusion (Blake Hurst – *The American: Journal of the American Enterprise Institute*)

- “He thinks that farmers are too stupid to farm sustainably, too cruel to treat their animals well, and too careless to worry about their communities, their health, and their families. I would not presume to criticize his car, or the size of his house, or the way he runs his business. But he is an expert about me, on the strength of one book”
- “Some of the largest farms in the country are organic—and are giant organizations dependent upon lots of hired stoop labor doing the most backbreaking of tasks in order to save the sensitive conscience of my fellow passenger the merest whiff of pesticide contamination.”
- “The parts of farming that are the most “industrial” are the most likely to be owned by the kind of family farmers that elicit such a positive response from the consumer.”
- The example of pig gestation crates and turkeys raised outdoors (even though “the turkeys don’t seem to mind” wallowing in their own waste, apparently...)—are you convinced by Hurst’s arguments here?
- What is Hurst’s response to the argument that manure ‘lagoons’ are a big environmental and health problem?
- “If we are about to require more expensive ways of producing food, the largest and most well-capitalized farms will have the least trouble adapting.”
- Why does Hurst argue that commercial fertilizers are, for better or worse, an absolute necessity?
- What did you think were the strongest points of Hurst’s arguments? The weakest? Are you convinced?

Spoiled: Organic and Local is so 2008 (Paul Roberts – *Mother Jones*)

- “Many of the familiar models don’t work well on the scale required to feed billions of people, Or they focus too narrowly on one issue (salad greens that are organic but picked by exploited workers. Or they work only in limited circumstances. (A \$4 heirloom tomato is hardly going to save the world...because concepts like local or organic dominate the alternative food sector, there is little room left for alternative models.”
- “Consider our love affair with food miles...[how might] a 20-pound shopping basket of locally grown produce actually represent a larger carbon footprint than the same volume of produce purchased at a chain retailer”?...More important than food miles, though, is ‘resource intensity’
- “To achieve [comparable] yields, polyculture requires far more intensive and continuous management”
- “If we wanted to rid the world of synthetic fertilizer use—and assuming dietary habits remain constant—the extra land we’d need for cover crops or forage...would more than double...the current area of farmland.”
- “One farmer in Oregon with a few hundred acres can grow more pears than the entire state of Oregon eats.”
- “We obviously need to rethink such practices as air freighting raspberries from Mexico or salmon from Chile” (Do you agree? What are the implications of this ‘rethinking’?)