Impacts of the meat industry and consumption

Meat Industry and Consumption: The Juicy Truth

The meat industry has been the center of a largely controversial discussion between omnivores and vegetarians alike. While both sides have presented benefits of each diet, the negatives of the meat industry – such as mistreatment of animals – have begun to surface more. Though consumer demand has varied in response to animal welfare and meat safety, there have not been prolonged impacts on demand that imply change (Finkel 118). The United States still remains to be among the highest meat consuming counties in the world (Chiles 791). Even worse, only a small percentage of the meat produced in the US is done under non-industrial circumstances (Pew 2008). These hidden truths in the meat industry place consumers' health and the environment at a risk of being damaged. There should be a reduction in the biased media portrayal of the meat industry in order for people to improve their own well-being and positive environmental impact.

Mass media has large power over influencing society and deciding what type of food is " better" for consumption. In 2008, a secret video of the Hallmark Westland Meat Packing Company in California was released to the public (Finkel 117). It showed handicapped cattle being tormented, electrocuted, and stabbed by forklifts (Finkel 117). This video led to the largest beef recall in the history of the United States (Finkel 118). The controversy drew a lot of attention from the public and according to a survey done in 2012, almost fifty percent of US consumers were ' somewhat to extremely concerned' about livestock welfare (Yadavalli, 226). Because meat consumption is so routine for so many people, negative and critical thoughts are not normally provoked. The idea of masculinity and strength in eating meat is emphasized

in the meat industry advertisements and thus reinforced through society (Rothgerber 363). Past research has proven that people have a tendency to attribute meat consumers with masculine gender roles and vegetarianism as feminine (Timeo 419). Thus, meat consumption is encouraged due to the conformity to dietary gender norms (Timeo 418). Yet, the negatives of the meat industry and treatment of animals is neglected or paints a faulty image – leaving the public to be misled (Leroy 346). This has caused consumption of meat in the United States to have nearly doubled in the past century (Leroy 350). Even though mass media routinely legitimizes meat production and the public believes meat consumption is ‘ natural’, this is often not the case.

The consumption of meat can provide a good source of protein. However, Americans consume almost two times the daily protein requirement based off the USDA recommend amount (Adeya-Andany 2019). Diet consumption is ubiquitously known to have connections to health. Moreover, there is scientific evidence that overconsumption of red meat leads to increased risk of heart disease, obesity, and cancer. According to research conducted by the Internal Medicine Department in Spain, animal protein intensifies insulin resistance and has strong associations with type 2 diabetes (Adeva-Andany 2019). On the other hand, plant-based foods enhance insulin sensitivity and aid in decreasing the risk of diabetes and other health risks, like cardiovascular disease (Adeva-Andany 2019). The high cholesterol and saturated fat in meat is what leads to the plaque buildup increasing health risks (de Boer 241). These health risks have been broadcasted to the public in the 2020-2025 Dietary Guidelines for Americans in which the World Health

Organization, American Cancer Society, and World Cancer Research Fund have declared processed meats to be carcinogens – cancer causing substance (Wilde 424). These carcinogens cause differences in the body's ability to repair DNA and thus genetic susceptibility to bulky DNA adducts (Ho 8). In addition, the Guidelines suggest for Americans to lower their processed meat intake to maintain a healthy diet (Wilde). A review done by the World Health Organization estimates that an additional 50 gram increased in processed meats increases the risk of colorectal cancer by 18% (Ho 9). Animal meat is also a risk of danger for human ingestion. Polybrominated diphenyl ethers (PBDEs) are a type of popular flame retardant that gets released into the environment (Pietron 62). PDBEs can be consumed by humans through animal meat and can disrupt the human body as endocrine disruptors, affecting neurological activity (Pietron 64). In addition, animal waste is also often left to contaminate waterways and rural communities are placed at a high risk of disease-causing toxic water (Pietron 64).

The environment has always suffered from consequences at the expense of meat industry success. Surprisingly enough, the public has a lack of awareness towards the connection between meat consumption and climate change (Macdiarmid 489). Peatlands have been drained and forests have been chopped down to allow for livestock to be raised and agricultural soil to be used (Webster 2010). These patterns have continued as population growth has rapidly increased. The animal industry generates a lot of greenhouse gases that contribute to climate change due to the emissions from cattle belching, synthetic fertilizers used, and machinery power

(Webster 2010). According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the ‘ warming of the climate system’ is ‘ *very likely* due to the observed increase in anthropogenic greenhouse gas concentrations’ (Webster 2010). Water use for meat production is often executed extremely inefficiently and a large environmental “ footprint” is left. Waterways are contaminated so much that aquatic life is also at risk of dying. About 30% of the worldwide agriculture freshwater is used by the meat processing industry (Macdiarmid 495). The wastewater from slaughterhouses is labeled by the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to be one of the most detrimental industrial waters that can cause groundwater pollution and water deoxygentation (Webster 2010). The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization have predicted meat and milk consumption to increase two-fold by 2050 (Vaughan 8). If companies are not willing to reduce their carbon footprint, more environmental issues will erupt.

In order to allow for people to lessen environmental damage and improve health, mass media should be rewired to portray the meat industry correctly. Overconsumption of meat is still consistently encouraged to raise profits of meatpacking businesses. Though, certain processes in the industry have improved, it is still far from being safe. Rivers and drinking water are polluted and contaminate the streams to a toxic level, making it dangerous for any wildlife and human water supplies (Finkel 118). These controversies go unnoticed by the public. This is because consumers are forced to trust the agricultural system because there is no other option. However, in order for there to be sustainability in the world, these risks must be dealt with and a proper solution must be formed soon.

Works Cited

- Adeva-Andany, María M., et al. “ Effect of Diet Composition on Insulin Sensitivity in Humans.” Clinical Nutrition ESPEN, Jan. 2019.
- Chiles, Robert Magneson. “ Hidden in Plain Sight: w Industry, Mass Media, and Consumers’ Everyday Habits Suppress Food Controversies.” Sociologia Ruralis, vol. 57, Dec. 2017, pp. 791–815.
- Clarke, Alexis. “ Vegetarianism and Sustainability.” Journal of the Australian Traditional-Medicine Society, vol. 21, no. 2, June 2015, pp. 106–111.
- de Boer, Joop, and Harry Aiking. “ Pursuing a Low Meat Diet to Improve Both Health and Sustainability: How Can We Use the Frames That Shape Our Meals?” Ecological Economics, vol. 142, Dec. 2017, pp. 238–248.
- Finkel, Ed. “ THE CORNERSTONE OF THE AMERICAN DIET: With New Flavors and Even New Proteins, the Ubiquitous Burger Is as Popular as It’s Ever Been.” Meatingplace, no. 6, June 2019, pp. 114–120.
- Ho, Vikki, et al. “ Exposure to Meat-Derived Carcinogens and Bulky DNA Adduct Levels in Normal-Appearing Colon Mucosa.” Mutation Research, vol. 821, Sept. 2017, pp. 5–12.
- Leroy, Frédéric, et al. “ Meat in the Post-Truth Era: Mass Media Discourses on Health and Disease in the Attention Economy.” Appetite, vol. 125, June 2018, pp. 345–355.
- Macdiarmid, Jennie I., et al. “ Eating like There’s No Tomorrow: Public Awareness of the Environmental Impact of Food and Reluctance to Eat Less Meat as Part of a Sustainable Diet.” Appetite, vol. 96, Jan. 2016, pp. 487–493.

- Pietron, Wojciech, et al. “ Exposure to PBDEs Associated with Farm Animal Meat Consumption.” Chemosphere, vol. 224, June 2019, pp. 58–64.
- Rothgerber, Hank. “ Real Men Don’t Eat (Vegetable) Quiche: Masculinity and the Justification of Meat Consumption.” Psychology of Men & Masculinity, vol. 14, no. 4, Oct. 2013, pp. 363–375.
- Wilde, Parke, et al. “ Legal Feasibility of US Government Policies to Reduce Cancer Risk by Reducing Intake of Processed Meat.” Milbank Quarterly, vol. 97, no. 2, June 2019, pp. 420–448.
- Yadavalli, Anita, and Keithly Jones. “ Does Media Influence Consumer Demand? The Case of Lean Finely Textured Beef in the United States.” Food Policy, vol. 49, Dec. 2014, pp. 219–227.