

Impact of food industrialization



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The Industrialization of Our Food System: Are We Sacrificing Quality to Quantity?

The industrialization of our food supply is something that is becoming more popular amongst farmers and food producers. One of the biggest reasons in the overcrowded conditions in farms and how easy it is for one animal to spread diseases to all, thus ending in our plates. This becomes even more problematic with the rise of globalization – with an infected animal in a farm in Alabama that no one detects, people in China can receive the disease and spread it from there. However, with the rise of industrialized agriculture, other significant problems have arisen. Obesity has skyrocketed as prices for naturally-grown food increase quickly; diseases, both behavioral and physical, have increased in children and many more drawbacks that would be too long to list. As for its history, industrial agriculture arose alongside the Industrial Revolution, something we are also feeling the side-effects of today. It is a fact that by the end of the early nineteenth century, agricultural techniques had improved so much that the output was many times greater than that seen in the Middle Ages. This was suiting and satisfactory, as the human population was growing at an exponential rate. Later on, as nitrogen, potassium and phosphorus were found and properly studied, they had a new purpose as synthetic fertilizers and pesticides. With the increased usage of these elements and vitamin supplements, many farm animals face less and less exposure to nature and all that is natural, as they are fully grown indoors. Furthermore, the discovery of antibiotics and vaccines ensured that animal-spread diseases do not occur in crowded facilities. However, as

industrial agriculture becomes a more popular method, concerns have arisen over the sustainability of intensive agriculture, which has been related to the decreasing soil quality in key places, such as the US, Australia, India and Asia.

One strong proponent of the deindustrialization of the American food system is Al Jazeera. Since its establishment in 2006 as an international news source, it has gained a lot of momentum, due to their wide range of topics and top-notch reporting on world events. The channel itself currently broadcasts to 250 million households across 130 countries. In their article supporting agriculture and the preservation of natural-growth farms, Vandana Shiva, the author of the article, states how many industrialization supporters keep falsifying information about the scale and contribution of organic farming. Many of these advocates claim that organic farming requires too much land grab and uses too many pesticides, when the facts are that industrial agriculture is causing the deforestation of the rainforests in the Amazon and Indonesia, fuelling a land grab in Africa and Europe. In fact, according to the FAO International Technical Conference on Plant Genetic Resources in Leipzig, industrial farming is the reason for seventy-five per cent biodiversity erosion, seventy-five per cent water destruction, seventy-five per cent land degradation, as well as forty per cent greenhouse gases. These high numbers wound the planet in ways unfixable and long lasting. Not only this, millions of farmers are losing their farms and hard work. Even the food, which is consumed by the population is suffering - animals are put into factory farms and fed grain, as opposed to grass in a natural setting; this is equal to an animal prison. This lack of nutrients affects

both the animal and the human consumer, as people are also devoid of these important dietary ingredients. The simple fact is that as industrialized agriculture has gained popularity, the number of hungry people on the planet has also risen. This is an indicator that something is not right; the food system has taken a wrong step.

The facts and evidence presented by Vandana Shiva are well informed and presented. I was swayed by her argument and found myself disliking industrialized agriculture much more than previously. It is clear that she did her research and knew what she was talking about all the way through. The article was very well-structured and delivered, with no stray points or unnecessary rants. While I was previously aware of the treatment of animals in industrialized farms, I was ignorant on the impact it had on the planet environmentally. Deforestation one of the most serious problems we face today - whether regarding global warming or the extinction of millions of species, however, the fact that humans are still doing it when we have other, currently available, option is maddening. The facts are, countries that do not consume industrialized-grown food suffer from much lower rates of obesity and other food-related diseases. The problem the United States has is the fact that its organic food is much more expensive and harder to get than its industrialized-grown counterpart. It is an unfair race - why should consumers not have an equal access to either type? This disadvantage creates an unescapable cycle: people with less money do not purchase the organic food, thus consuming lower quality food with not enough nutrients. Since it lacks the richness of naturally grown food, people with lesser incomes consume more food, usually one that is unhealthy, cheap and lacking any

types of significant nutrients. Thus, obesity begins sprouting up and rapidly spreading around the country. The problem is escaping this poisonous cycle and learning a healthier style of living. Why should we industrialize food, when naturally grown food is tastier, uses less space, does not injure the Earth and its resources and does not aid in the wide-scale release of greenhouse gases?

An opponent of the deindustrialization of the food system in the United States is Blake Hurst, published in the American Enterprise Institute. The AEI is an American establishment, focused on research and education on issues of government, politics, economics and social welfare. Started in Washington in 1943, it still runs there and supplies its large readership with thoughtful articles. In his article on why industrialized agriculture is not the enemy, Blake Hurst describes how he got the idea of discussing this topic. Whilst on a plane, he heard an organic farm activist broadcasting about the inhumanity of industrialized farming. Hurst was angered at the ignorance of the reporter and is now on a mission to educate people why industrialized farming is not harmful but beneficial. His first and strongest arguing point is that people who sit in offices all day and stare at computer screens do not know what being a farmer is, yet they demand things they are not well-informed on. Telling someone how to do their work when you have no sensible information on the subject is selfish and may oftentimes be completely wrong. Hurst states that critics of industrial farming spend most of their time complaining about the way the food is raised, in regards to conditions and treatment. As his argument, he describe turkeys and how when they are naturally raised, they are not smart enough to survive long

enough to be used as food. Furthermore, as President Obama and his government listen more and more to the public and demand fairer treatment of animals, the farmers cannot do anything to disprove and obey. Indeed, industrial farming conditions for animals are improving drastically. Hurts argues that nature is sometimes even more cruel than farmers, with mother pigs eating their offspring and that life is unfair all-around.

Hurst's article on why industrial farming is not evil was written well but lacked a strong punch that sways the reader to his side. Starting off with a personal story was a nice touch and humanized the writer, making him both relatable and approachable. His point on the fact that people who do not produce food do not really understand what is going on was the strongest out of all the ones later listed. It is true: with no first-hand experience, it is easy to rally for something when one is not aware of the amount of labor that goes into it. Organically-grown food is advertised as healthier and cruelty-less grown, but what do people who live in cities without animals know about how food is truly grown? However, that is where Hurst's argument begins weakening and losing its initial punch. One big mistake in his article is the lack of focus on the environmental impact the industrial agriculture creates. In fact, most farmers that do not grow organic food fail to mention how their crops affect the environment and pollute various sources permanently. It was also scarcely mentioned how the health of the American citizens has significantly gone down after industrial agriculture became more and more popular with farmers and food producers. Hurst does mention that the "old-fashioned" way of farming is much more demanding and dirty but should food consumers and farmers both eat lower quality food

because someone does not want to work? As Shiva mentioned in her article, food is what we are. What we eat is absolutely essential to our overall well-being and happiness. As obesity rates, not only in America but all over the world, continue to exponentially increase, it is important for us to find the source and come up with a solution.

When exploring this topic, I realized how ignorant I was on many of these facts and side effects of industrially-grown food. However, when thinking about it, the proponent's arguments make a lot more sense. As someone from a country that grows all of its food naturally, when moving to the United States, I definitely noticed a decrease in both quality and taste. Everything is larger, unnaturally so, lacking of taste and not as satisfactory. In my country, for less than a dollar, I could get a plentitude of naturally grown fruits and vegetables, while in America, I can get a smaller, industrially-grown, quantity. It is both disappointing and saddening. Humans need these nutrients, why should I pay so much to consume them? I believe the saddest fact is that many countries follow America's steps and search for easier ways to complete food growing. This can be noted, as obesity begins rising all around the globe, with the spread of fast food American chains, which do not offer any type of nutritionally significant food. Chains, such as McDonalds, Burger King, KFC, Wendy's, etc., sell food for cheap. When families with lower incomes go out to purchase food, it is much easier to get more of one type of food, instead of a few of another, even if the latter is healthier. Food has always been a privilege to our species but at this point in history, when there is an opportunity for most people to easily consume it, why are we settling for the worst of the available choices? Why should organic food,

which our bodies need be more expensive and harder to obtain than junk food, something that should not be consumed at a constant rate? Because it is the easy opt-out and costs less for giant corporations to produce.