

OPT OUT OF INDUSTRIAL MEAT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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CENTER FOR
FOOD SAFETY

www.centerforfoodsafety.org



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CENTER FOR FOOD SAFETY'S *Opt Out of Industrial Meat* is intended to provide tools and information to help consumers shift away from consuming meats raised in intensive factory farm systems and identify protein sources that are healthier for people, producers, and the planet.

Meat production and consumption have risen steadily, both in the United States and globally, putting negative pressure on resources, ecosystems, and human health. In particular, it has led to increases in the intensification and scale of food animal production and contributed to the dominance of concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs) in the industry.¹ There are five recognized, undeniable burdens created by modern mass-scale, concentrated meat production:²

- Shift in production away from food crops toward animal feed crops.
- Inefficient conversion of plant-based calories to animal-based calories.
- Generation of enormous amounts of waste.
- Emission of greenhouse gases (GHGs).
- Poor treatment of animals in confinement.

The food animal industry has sought many quick fixes to ease, address, or hide the impacts of intensive animal production, banking on technological innovations to improve efficiencies, reduce waste, and stem pollution. But the only way to successfully reduce the environmental, social, and health burdens of meat production is to reduce the number of animals raised for food³ and improve production practices.

The good news is, it is becoming easier and easier to opt out of the industrial meat system and choose wholesome animal and plant proteins that are raised organically, equitably, and humanely.

HOW TO "OPT OUT" OF INDUSTRIAL MEAT

According to the Dietary Guidelines Scientific Advisory Committee, roughly 35 percent of people in the U.S. exceed the recommended daily intake for protein, the vast majority of which comes from animal sources.⁴ To opt out of industrial meat, we must reduce the amount of meat in our diet, intentionally source certified organic, humane, and pasture-raised meats for the meat we do eat, and consume more plant proteins, like beans, lentils, peas, chickpeas, nuts, and seeds.



CENTER FOR FOOD SAFETY'S "HALF-FOR-WHOLE" CHALLENGE

CFS challenges you to make this the year you opt out of industrial meat entirely. Consumption data shows that meat intake has increased rapidly over the last 50 years, coinciding with decreased consumption of grains and other plant-based foods and an increase in heart disease, diabetes, certain types of cancers, and other diet related illnesses. Pledge to cut your meat intake in half to eat a more wholesome diet this year. Reducing meat by half better enables you to source more sustainable brands for the meat you do eat and to round out your daily protein with plant-based foods. Use this guide to identify sources of certified organic, humane, and pasture-raised meat as well as plant-based protein like beans, peas, lentils, nuts, and seeds. Take the pledge here: <http://www.endindustrialmeat.org>

Consider these three strategies when opting out of industrial meat.

1. EAT MEAT OCCASIONALLY Eating less meat is shown to correspond with consuming more plant-based foods like grains, fruits, and vegetables.⁵ It can also make buying certified organic, humane, and pasture-raised meats more practical. Starting each week with a Meatless Monday has been found to help people eat less meat than they would otherwise as the week continues.⁶ Observing Meatless Monday, choosing to eat one meatless meal per day, or creating dishes that feature plants at the center, are all possible strategies for reducing reliance on industrial meat. Reducing the portion of animal proteins in your meals, for example, can improve heart health and reduce risk of disease.⁷ Additionally, by eating a reduced portion, you may be able to use your same allotted budget to invest in buying certified humane, organic, and pasture-raised meat that may cost more. Cutting your typical meat portion in half, making hybrid meat and vegetable dishes, and eating a diverse array of fruits, vegetables, grains, and legumes with each meal can all help reduce the animal protein portion on your plate.

2. CHOOSE CERTIFIED ORGANIC, HUMANE, AND PASTURE-RAISED MEATS Producers who certify their farms as humane, organic, and pasture-raised are required to meet specific standards of prac-

tice. These standards require and verify practices that protect the environment, prohibit unnecessary use of veterinary drugs, and ensure the welfare of animals. These practices are in stark contrast to the crowded, inhumane, and cruel conditions in animal factories. By finding certified farmers at your local farmers' markets, looking for meaningful labels at the store, and eating at restaurants that source from certified farms, you avoid meat from industrial systems. Read our profiles of certified farmers to learn more about the many organic, humane, and pasture-based producers around the country.

3. EAT MORE ORGANIC AND NON-GMO PLANT PROTEINS Diets high in organic and non-GMO plant proteins help to lower the risk of heart disease⁸, lower cholesterol⁹, lower systolic blood pressure¹⁰, reduce risk of obesity in children¹¹, and lower mortality. Beans, nuts, seeds, fruits, and vegetables that are certified organic are required to be produced in a way that maintains or improves the natural resources of the farm and the surrounding ecosystem, including water, soil, and biodiversity. Eating a diverse mix of plant foods, being aware of your daily protein needs and the amount of protein certain plants provide, and eating at establishments that focus on organic, non-GMO, plant-based menus will help you create meals that do not contribute to industrial meat production.



WHAT IS INDUSTRIAL MEAT?

“Industrial meat” is a broad term that encompasses a large and complex segment of food animal production. However, there are some basic commonalities that help to define these production systems.

CONFINEMENT One of the primary characteristics of industrial meat production is the confinement of animals in enclosed spaces, such as barns or feedlots. Often, confinement settings have poor sanitation, ventilation, lighting, and hard flooring. These conditions are detrimental to animal health, leading to a range of conditions from hoof lesions and bone injuries, to respiratory diseases from ammonia and dust inhalation, to stress and aggression due to overcrowding.

OWNERSHIP The food animal industry is dominated by a few large companies controlling the majority of production. Rather than farmers owning and raising their animals for the duration of their lives, it is currently more common for processing companies to directly own livestock or hire growers under contract to raise the animals. Just four companies—Tyson Foods, JBS USA, Cargill, and National Beef Packing—now control 75 percent of the U.S. beef market.¹²

SCALE With corporate ownership comes a larger scale of production. From 2002 to 2012, the percentage of animals raised in large-scale operations has

rapidly increased. In 2012, 96 percent of pigs in the U.S. were raised in operations that produce 1,000 or more animals.¹³

BREEDS Industrial meat producers use animal breeds that have been selected for extreme productivity or efficient physical traits that benefit the producer at the expense of the health and vitality of the animals. For example, due to selection for rapid growth or productivity, laying hens have high rates of osteoporosis and pigs are at increased risk of abnormal bone growth.¹⁴

PHARMACEUTICALS Industrial meat relies on abundant use of pharmaceuticals to maintain an otherwise unachievable rate and scale of production. The cocktail of drugs used today to uphold the status quo has severe animal welfare consequences. These drugs include hormones and beta-agonists used to increase growth rates and decrease an animal’s lifespan, antimicrobials to slow the rampant spread of bacteria resulting from unsanitary living conditions, and feed additives, which include growth promoters, drugs that prevent diseases, preservatives, and synthetic nutrients.

INHUMANE TREATMENT In order to prevent animals from harming one another in cramped, unsanitary, and stressful conditions, industrial meat producers often implement various inhumane production methods. These practices include clipping the teeth of new-



born piglets, grinding up live male chicks after hatching, starving hens for up to two weeks to induce the egg-laying cycle, removing the tails of animals to prohibit biting, cutting off the beaks of chickens and turkeys to reduce pecking, and castrating animals without painkillers, often ending in botched results.¹⁵

WHY “OPTING OUT” IS IMPORTANT FOR A SECURE FOOD FUTURE

Animal factories have significant detrimental consequences for individual health, natural resources, wildlife, animals, farmers and food workers, climate, community health and safety, and the economy. These impacts, often externalized by the companies producing the animals, make the systems unsustainable and undermine our ability to produce healthy food that is safe for consumers, food workers, animals and the environment.

Opting out of industrial meat is vital for:

PERSONAL HEALTH Overconsumption of meat is linked to increased risk of heart disease, obesity, stroke, certain cancers, type-2 diabetes, and shorter life span.¹⁶ The meat industry’s practice of routinely dosing healthy animals with antibiotics is making critical medicines less effective where we need them: treating bacterial infections in humans.¹⁷ Eating industrially-raised meats also increases the risk of exposure

to antibiotic resistant bacteria and animal drug residues.

FOOD WORKERS Trauma-related injuries occur at animal factories at 6.5 times the rate of all other manufacturing jobs.¹⁸ Industrial livestock workers have increased presence of the dangerous strain of resistant staph infection (Methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA)).¹⁹

POLLINATORS The production of feed crops for industrial meat production, like corn and soy, threatens pollinators by subjecting them to high rates of toxic pesticides, destroying their habitat, and exposing them to animal drugs and feed additives found in industrial animal manure that is applied to crops.

WATER CONSERVATION One pound of industrial beef requires 1,799 gallons of water.²⁰ One pound of industrial pork: 576 gallons. Industrial chicken: 468 gallons.²¹ The United Nations declared animal factories major contributors to increasing water depletion.²²

ANIMALS Industrial animal factories torture and cruelly abuse food animals through severe, painful physical alterations and the regular use of growth promoting drugs that impair animal health. Beta-agonist drugs have been linked to immobilization, stomach ulcers, brain lesions, blindness, lethargy, respiratory problems, heart failure, and higher mortality in cattle.²³



CLIMATE Animal factories are responsible for 18 percent of global GHG production and over 7 percent of GHG emissions in the U.S.²⁴ Grain-based livestock feeds are grown with synthetic fertilizers, which contribute 65 percent of nitrous oxide and 30 million tons of ammonia emissions annually.²⁵

COMMUNITY HEALTH Chronic exposure to emissions from animal factories can lead to asthma and asphyxiation.²⁶ Stench from animal factories, such as hog facilities in North Carolina and Iowa, inhibits nearby residents from engaging in outdoor activities and permeates into their homes.

FOOD SAFETY A single package of factory-raised ground meat could contain tissue from hundreds, if not thousands, of animals; a single downed cow infected with a pathogen such as *E. coli* could contaminate more than 100,000 hamburgers with an infectious dose.²⁷ Animal factories create more virulent strains of infections, like MRSA, a serious antibiotic-resistant staph infection.

FARMERS Consolidation has forced smaller farmers to leave the industry. In the beef industry, only four companies process roughly 75 percent of the cattle in the United States.²⁸ Contracts take advantage of individual farmers' and operators' liberties to make deci-

sions and dictate specific feed, medications, and production methods.

LOCAL ECONOMIES The presence of animal factories can reduce nearby property values by 10 percent due to persistent odors, pollution risks, and insect infestations.²⁹ Corporations that own animal factories purchase very few inputs locally. In contrast, small producers spend two times more on local expenditures and purchase 85 percent of inputs locally.³⁰

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Ending overconsumption of meat and poultry products is critical to end the environmentally destructive, socially unjust, and inhumane industrial animal factory food system. Market changes are one strategy with which to push for change, but do not guarantee that the industry as a whole will implement and maintain these critical reforms. To create lasting, enforceable change, the federal government must:

- Hold CAFOs and other animal factories accountable for emissions and pollution.
- Prohibit the use of animal drugs for sub therapeutic purposes, including growth promotion, feed efficiency, and disease prevention.
- Create and implement baseline national standards for farm animal welfare.



- Strengthen technical assistance and other support programs for food animal producers to adopt sustainable and humane practices, and seek out third party welfare certification.
- Support immediate implementation and enforcement of the Organic Pasture Rule and the Organic Livestock and Poultry Practices Rule, and transition incentive programs for conventional food animal producers interested in becoming certified organic.
- Develop policies that protect the rights of workers in the food animal supply chain and ensure safe and humane working conditions.
- Enforce anti-trust laws and prevent illegal consolidation in the food animal industry.

SUMMARY

Industrial food animal production relies on secrecy, cruelty to animals and workers, and chemical inputs to operate. The evidence is clear: the factory model does not work for producing safe, healthy, and sustainable meat and poultry. This system is supported by federal and state policies that allow companies to externalize their costs and fail to hold them accountable for their emission of pollutants, treatment of animals, labor practices, or control of the market. Engaging your state and federal legislators and supporting advocacy efforts is a great way to promote critical reforms

that protect public health, animals, and the environment from the impacts of animal factories, like CAFOs.

But overconsumption of animal protein in modern diets is also a significant driver of the CAFO system. Changing the way we think about, purchase, and incorporate proteins in our daily lives can make an enormous impact on how companies continue to produce food in the U.S. and globally. By identifying your daily protein needs for a healthy lifestyle, ensuring that at least half of your protein comes from plants, and sourcing meat only from certified humane, organic, or pasture-raised farms you can:

- Disrupt the industrial food animal complex
- Promote your personal health
- Protect the welfare of animals raised for food
- Support the economic and physical wellbeing of farmers and farm workers
- Conserve vital resources and mitigate climate change
- Rebuild rural economies

Read Center for Food Safety's full report for greater details on why and how to opt out of the industrial meat system, or visit endindustrialmeat.org.

ENDNOTES

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