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# Why We Need Labels on Food from Factory Farms

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It was not long ago that consumers knew where their food came from. Most of it, including meat, dairy and

eggs, came from backyards and neighborhood family farms. But today, after decades of consolidation, 95% of our meat, dairy and eggs comes from industrial “factory farms” or, to use industry lingo, Confined Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOs).

CAFOs represent a corporate-controlled system characterized by large-scale, centralized, low-profit margin production, processing and distribution systems. The CAFO model, propped up by taxpayer-supported subsidies, contributes to a host of environmental, public health, animal welfare, workers’ rights and fair trade crises and injustices.

How do we return to producing animal products that are safe for human consumption, using practices that support organic, sustainable farms and respect the environment and workers’ rights? We believe this will require a massive public education campaign, coupled with strict laws requiring restaurants and food retailers to label products — including meat, dairy and eggs — that are sourced from factory farms. Once these products are properly labeled, consumers will accordingly be able to make better, more responsible choices.

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## The Facts

The facts about factory farms

The CAFO industry is rife with dirty little secrets, and it is getting tougher to expose those secrets, as states pass laws criminalizing undercover efforts to reveal the rivers of waste that CAFOs spew into communities, the injustices that they inflict upon the workers who labor there, and the cruelties that the animals confined there must endure.

Here are just a few of the ills that CAFOs inflict upon society:

***They threaten the environment.***

CAFOs contribute directly to global warming by releasing vast amounts of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere —

more than the entire global transportation industry. According to a 2006 report by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), animal agriculture is responsible for 18% of all human-induced greenhouse gas emissions, including 37% of methane emissions and 65% of nitrous oxide emissions. Indirectly, factory farms contribute to climate disruption through their impact on deforestation and the draining of wetlands, and because of the nitrous oxide emissions from the huge amounts of pesticides used to grow the genetically engineered corn and soy that are fed to animals raised in CAFOs.

***They put public health at risk.***

CAFOs generate 220 billion tons per year of agricultural waste, which can include blood, dead

animals, chemicals, antibiotic and growth hormone residues and sanitizing chemicals. The raw liquefied sewage they produce is 25–100 times more concentrated than human sewage, yet thanks to industry lobbyists, it is largely unregulated. It thus runs off into rivers and streams, or is stored in open lagoons, which routinely burst, sending millions of gallons of waste into waterways and spreading microbes that can cause gastroenteritis, fevers, kidney failure and even death. Consequently, at least 4.5 million people are also exposed to dangerously high nitrate levels in their drinking water.

***They violate workers’ rights.***

The CAFO industry employs about 500,000 workers in the U.S. It consistently operates with one of the highest injury

rates in the country, largely because state and federal labor agencies have failed to institute and enforce labor laws to prevent known workplace hazards. Most slaughterhouse facilities operate around the clock, killing and processing hundreds or thousands of animals per hour. Workers suffer chronic pains in their hands, wrists, arms, shoulders and back, caused by a combination of high speed, long hours and repetitive motions. CAFO workers also suffer from a high rate of respiratory illnesses, including asthma, caused by long-term exposure to animal waste.

In addition, as the work at CAFOs has become more automated, the need for highly skilled workers has declined, resulting in the industry relying on a non-unionized, “disposable”



Photo Credit: Compassion Over Killing

workforce. According to Human Rights Watch, workers who try to unionize are spied on, harassed, pressured, threatened, suspended, fired, deported or otherwise victimized for exercising their right to freedom of association.

**They violate fair trade laws.**

Access to cheap grain and the government's failure to enforce anti-trust laws have fueled the growth of GMO grain producers, like Monsanto, and the CAFO industry. Agribusiness spent \$751 million over the past five years lobbying Congress and another \$480.5 million in direct campaign contributions over the past two decades. Since 1995, taxpayers have provided \$292.5 billion in direct agricultural subsidies, another \$96 billion in crop insurance subsidies, and over \$100 billion in subsidies to promote the growth of genetically engineered corn and soy. From 1997

to 2005, in fact, the four largest producers of broiler chickens paid \$5 billion less than the cost of production for their feed.

Federal law preempts mandatory state labels on meat packaging, but labels indicating whether or not meat and dairy products come from a factory farm are allowed on store shelves (with shelf tags) and on meat and dairy cases. Some stores already provide this information. The Organic Consumers Association (OCA) would like to see legislation that requires this information, not only in grocery stores but also on restaurant menus. Until such legislation is passed, we urge consumers to pressure stores and restaurants to label all products sourced from a factory farm — and to boycott those stores and restaurants that refuse to do so.



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- ▶ [www.animalwelfareapproved.org](http://www.animalwelfareapproved.org)
- ▶ [www.certifiedhumane.org](http://www.certifiedhumane.org)
- ▶ [www.eatwild.com](http://www.eatwild.com)
- ▶ [www.globalanimalpartnership.org](http://www.globalanimalpartnership.org)  
(Level 4 or Higher)

