

Comfortably Unaware Summary

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1-Sentence-Summary: *Comfortably Unaware* is a well-researched compendium on how our food choices and animal agriculture impact the well-being of the whole planet.

Read in: 4 minutes

Favorite quote from the author:



The environmental crisis – and global warming in particular – is probably the most serious problem humanity is facing as I write these words. However, in the public discussion about climate issues, we overlook one very important factor all too often.

We talk a lot about burning fossil fuels and transportation as the top reasons for global warming. And surely, their effects are quite bad. However, there is also the third major element in that story: animal agriculture.

Raising livestock causes as much as 20% of human-induced greenhouse gas emissions. It also contributes to destroying wildlife and produces unimaginable amounts of waste. Yet, the gravity of these things is often skipped, because it would require us to touch upon a very intimate aspect of our lives: *our eating habits*.

The title of this book, *Comfortably Unaware: What We Choose to Eat Is Killing Us and Our Planet*, perfectly captures the root of the whole problem. It is comfortable for most people to remain oblivious to the impact their food choices have on the planet. However, Richard Oppenlander argues that it is high time we give up that comfort and open our eyes to how we can help solve the biggest problems of humanity by simply... adjusting our diets.

Here are 3 lessons about animal agriculture that may shock you:

1. Raising livestock contributes a great deal to the destruction of rainforests.
2. If people ate less meat, there wouldn't be any world hunger.
3. Animal agriculture is responsible for a lot of dangerous pollution.

Are you ready to face some uncomfortable truths? If so – let's go!

Lesson 1: **Animal production requires big areas of land, which usually take away from rainforests.**

The most basic message you need to swallow up here is that meat and other animal products consumption has a severe impact on the environment. Scientists have proven beyond doubt that raising livestock simply requires incomparably more resources than plant production.

One of these resources is land. Raising animals requires doubling down on the use of farming lands because, on top of the space needed for the livestock itself, farmers also need vast areas to grow food for them.

This causes the destruction of valuable wildlife areas in order to acquire the necessary amount of land. **Sadly, a lot of that land comes from cutting down the rainforests, which are arguably the most valuable natural formations in terms of maintaining ecological balance.**

Rainforests are considered “the lungs of the Earth,” as they absorb millions of tons of carbon dioxide and produce the oxygen which is vital for human (and other animals) survival. They are also home to numerous species that are key for the local and global ecosystem.

According to Raintree, we are currently losing 78 million acres of rainforests every year. This means 150 acres per minute! That is certainly a speed which is very far from what we may call “sustainable.” And much of this destruction comes from animal farming.

Lesson 2: **We can easily solve world hunger by a mass transition to a plant-based diet.**

Once we recognize how resource-demanding animal farming is, one natural conclusion should arise. If people, on the global level, adjusted the proportions between their animal and plant consumption – we could easily produce more food with the same amount of resources.

Or even – use up fewer resources and still feed every person in the world. **Oppenlander claims that if a sufficient chunk of the grains we use to feed livestock was distributed to humans instead, we could overcome the problem of world hunger in no time.**

This is hardly surprising when you get to see some numbers.

According to an ecology professor, David Pimentel, *“More than half the U.S. grain and nearly 40 percent of world grain is being fed to livestock rather than being consumed directly by humans.”* This means that with the grain it feeds animals, the U.S. could instead provide food for 800 million people.

The case of water use is no different. In fact, it seems that livestock consumes even more water than humans do. Worldwatch Institute states that *“agriculture uses about 70 percent of the world’s available freshwater, and one third of that is used to grow the grain fed to livestock.”* This shows us that *any* type of agriculture is already incredibly costly. The animal agriculture, however, costs our planet indefinitely more than the plant one.

Lesson 3: One of the biggest problems caused by animal agriculture is pollution.

On top of all the resources it depletes, animal production also harms the environment in one more significant way. **Raising livestock always comes with expelling huge amounts of pollution – both into the air and water.**

Animal production is responsible for around 20% of the global greenhouse gas emissions. Just for comparison, all the world’s transportation only accounts for 13%. But what’s even more disturbing is that in animal agriculture, a big part of the greenhouse gases we talk about is methane.

Why is it disturbing? Because, according to science, *“methane is roughly 30 times more potent as a heat-trapping gas.”* This means that it heats up the atmosphere 30 times more effectively than carbon dioxide.

Another type of pollution the livestock produces is their faeces. The first problem is the sheer amount of it. According to Oppenlander, U.S. animal farming alone releases over 5 million pounds of excrement per minute. That’s quite a lot of sh*t to deal with – both literally and figuratively speaking.

What only adds up to the situation is that those excrements are usually full of hormones, antibiotics and pesticides that often get released to Earth’s water systems. This way, they re-enter the food chain, for example through being consumed by fish. And so, you can’t be guaranteed that some of that stuff doesn’t end up on your plate.

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Comfortably Unaware Review

Comfortably Unaware will make you feel uncomfortable – especially if you are a meat, fish or dairy eater. And that’s exactly the point. Oppenlander realizes that it is our obliviousness about the environmental costs of our diets that keeps reinforcing some of our biggest ecological issues. His mission is to awaken you from this obliviousness – and his book certainly does that job.

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Who would I recommend the *Comfortably Unaware* summary to?

The 29-year-old environmentally-conscious millennial looking for motivation to cut down on meat, the 50-year-old nutritionist who wants to incorporate the environmental aspect into their clients’ meal plans, and to anyone struggling to understand where is all the “vegan hype” coming from.