

Future Mindset and Challenge
Pre-assignment A1
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Introduction: what is important to me

I have been involved into animals' welfare issues most of my life. The feeling of compassion does not let me close my eyes and ignore the matters that billions of living creatures are being treated horribly and live and die in immense suffering. Although I hardly eat any meat, I still make exemptions, maybe, once in several months, but when I do, I try to source sustainable products. As an animal activist, I receive up-to-date information from numerous NGOs working on different aspects of animal welfare, and one of the topics always covered is safety of meat and quality standards. And the problems begin right here.

The problem

If someone wants to buy packaged meat (or chicken, or fish) in a supermarket, in most of the cases it will have numerous quality seals. It might say: "non-GMO", "free-range", "animal welfare". They all sound quite promising, and the customer will be satisfied with his choice, assuming he bought a sustainable product. But the problem is that most of them have nothing to do with the actual well-being of the slaughtered animals. Most of them are vaguely defined (take "good quality"), often meaningless or supporting very low internal producer standards and are not FDA-approved. But the problem is that even an FDA-approval ("free-range", "organic") does not mean that the animals are feeling well on those farms where they are bred. Samuel Goldwyn, an author of the famous "Supersize me" documentary where he exposed the fast-food industry in the US, has created a sequel in 2019, following the whole food supply chain for a chicken sandwich shop. I was shocked to discover the very ugly side of chicken production for both animals and farmers even upon the FDA approval. Apart from the living conditions of animals, there are more aspects such as live animal transport and slaughter. To keep costs low, sometimes animals are transported for days to the final destination, in extreme temperatures, stuffed in crates, denied water and food. Many of them die during these travels but remain standing squeezed between their living peers. Another story is the slaughter process. PETA is often publishing investigations showing, say, livestock being electrocuted and hung upside down to have their throats cut and bleed to death. But every now and then there will be a pig or a cow still conscious, screaming in agony, dying in immense pain.

Well, an average person (say, a meat-eater, not very concerned about his health and farm animals) will say (an assumption too!): it's life, we have always lived like this. These animals were bred to be eaten, and that's what we do. They might use different arguments but basically,

they will see nothing wrong about the meat industry and would not feel convinced to change their purchasing and eating habits. But having always acted like this does not mean that we have always acted right. Why so?

The answer is literally in the air. The reason why several weeks ago our world has changed to a very new condition, has its roots there. The mystery virus, which stopped the world economies, destroyed businesses, spread panic and fear, and quick and painful death, was considered to have appeared on a wet market in China (World of Pain, 2020). The markets are infamous for miserable conditions where wild and domestic animals are kept in tiny crates, often stacked upon each other, live animals stored underneath hills of corpses of another kind, exposed to all their body liquids. For the freshness of meat, they are often slaughtered and prepared directly on the market in front of other animals. The animals undergo extreme stress and fear, and their weakened immune systems are especially exposed to bacteria and viruses (LiveScience, 2020). The main problem of this disaster are the UNNATURAL conditions those animals are kept in. The humanity would probably be safer if people would not stack together the creatures who were never meant to contact with each other when sick, and then would not consume the meat of those animals. One would assume, I am far from China and I do not eat bats or pangolins, what does it have to do with farm animals and my nuggets? Well, look back in the recent history (Appendix 1). Plenty of the epidemics in the past years come from animals. Let's look at the swine flu, bird flu and mad cow disease: the viruses appeared on farms where animals are kept in UNNATURAL conditions. Locked in cages, in overcrowded spaces with filthy floors, they cannot expose their natural instincts, not even move. Many of them go crazy, bite or even eat alive their peers, living in constant discomfort, pain and stress. Their weakened immune systems are protected against standard diseases by antibiotics, but then the viruses keep mutating. Another source of problem is the food, as there had been common practices of feeding livestock with meat and bone meal made of their own kind (Fact Checking Project, 2014). This kind of cannibalism and its consequences was considered one of the reasons for the mad cow disease. The degenerations caused by this diet, as well as by chemicals widely used by industrial agriculture can be a reason for further animals' diseases such as tumors. Further stress is caused by mishandling by farm or slaughterhouse workers. It had been proven that extreme stress directly influences the quality and the safety of meat (HSI, 2001) and, as we can see, can directly

affect every person in the world, no matter if a meat-eater or vegan. The nature is fighting back for disrespecting its rules.

It is surprising that despite these cases, the farming and slaughter practices did not seem to change much. The industrial giants (say, Tyson Foods or Perdue in the US, Wiesenhof in Germany) producing cheap meat are interested in keeping the prices low at any cost. Investigations and interviews with farmers (PETA, 2015, Goldwyn, 2019) show the miserable practices they use. The information is kept discrete, and no access is allowed to any step of meat production until the animals are dead and cut. Nonetheless, even investigations and bad publicity do not stop consumers from purchasing the cheap products with green labels.

But we are in a big crisis now. The ignorance has changed our lives so massively, that we need, we must have control over food safety. If a consumer risks to eat a steak and die, after contaminating and killing his whole family, we MUST have a right and possibility to really see what is happening behind the walls of farms and slaughterhouses. Unfortunately, we cannot stop it now, as rising economies discover the wealth and access to good food. Animal activists assume that veganism would save the planet, but this is an utopic solution for now. Silicon Valley startups are growing meat in labs, but this will take some time until the price is affordable, and amounts are sufficient. We need a technology to reduce animal suffering and to make factory farming transparent, to see that the meat we are eating is safe, and not simply approved by misleading seals. In order to survive in the new reality, the meat producers must take on the new game rules. They cannot produce cheap meat at ANY price anymore. I believe this change can happen, same as slavery was cancelled, as child labor was prohibited, and so on.

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Appendix 1.

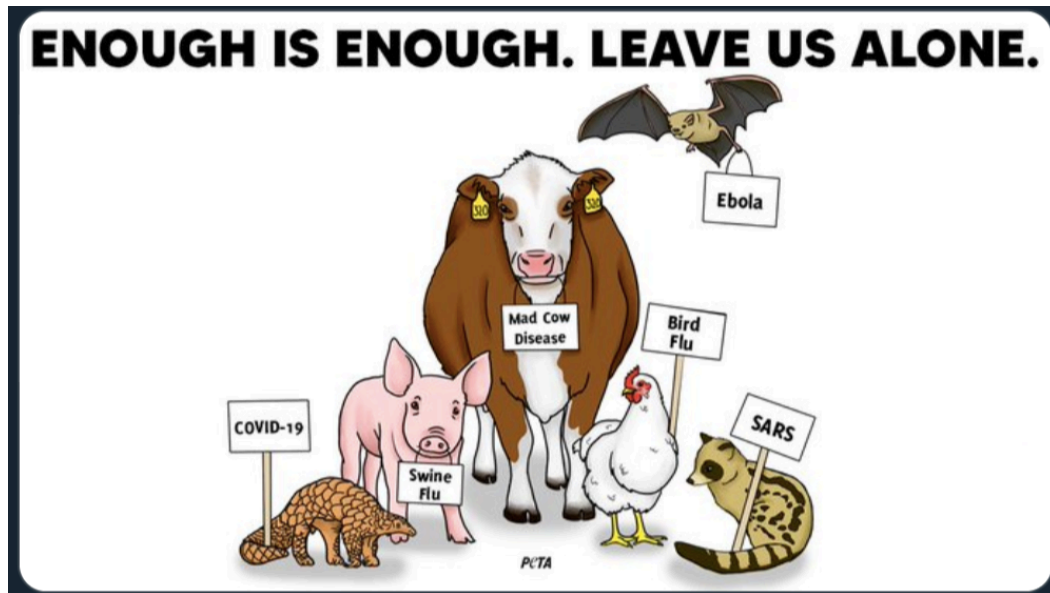


Figure 1. PETA (2020). *It's time we start listening to them. You can prevent the next global pandemic by going #vegan.* Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/peta>