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Unit 2 Essay

Question: Is food dehumanizing us?

The contemporary global factory farming system brings about the mistreatment of animals, puts workers at risk, and represents the lack of precaution that the general population shows in choosing what to eat. However, this lack of caution in food choices may be due to the widespread misconception that it is safe and sustainable, and many modern companies are dumping these harmful malpractices.

Animals endure unimaginable suffering from their time of birth until their death. “South Africa’s international live animal trade has come under fire for the brutal transport conditions, when the country has adequate slaughter facilities to give them a more humane death,” eNCA stated in 2013. eNCA is an African 24-hour news channel, which was launched in 2008. eNCA reports live on pertinent news and events across the continent, and offers two newsletters. However, much of their programming is meant for entertainment, which could influence the ability of the channel to present reports that are based entirely in reality. South Africa’s animal trade remains inhumane when there are readily available humane methods. There is a similar trend going on all around the world when it comes to animal mistreatment: the modern food industry is so focused on feeding more people while minimizing costs that corners are cut far too often and animals’ lives are made miserable. PETA (2016) says

“On today’s factory farms, animals are crammed by the thousands into filthy, windowless sheds and stuffed into wire cages, metal crates, and other torturous devices... [they] are crowded onto trucks and transported for miles through all weather extremes, typically without food or water. At the slaughterhouse, [they] will have their throats slit, often while they’re still conscious. Many remain conscious when they’re plunged into the scalding-hot water of the defeathering or hair-removal tanks or while their bodies are being skinned or hacked apart.”

PETA is a global organization which advocates the humane treatment of all animals. Their extensive work since March, 1980 has gained them several million followers, and their enormous following has even caused amendments to be put into place. However, it is clear that their purpose is not only radical, but one-sided, and their American base creates doubt about whether or not they are truly capable of speaking on behalf of the world. Farm animals are treated horrendously throughout the course of their short lives; they are crammed into unhealthily small spaces with no sunlight and no stimulation. Even worse: as soon as livestock mature, their lives are basically rendered useless. They are shoved into crates and shipped to slaughterhouses through horrible conditions, then slaughtered, most while still conscious and feeling. The meatpacking industry does not care about the welfare of the animals they slaughter; they simply

care about how much meat they are selling. After all, these are not living beings to them; they are simply meat.

The working conditions of the factory farm industry are extremely hazardous for workers, who do not even receive decent pay for their risk. In a statement made by the Journal of Public Health (1992),

“Outbreaks of infection amongst slaughterhouse workers may come to the attention of public health physicians either as a result of requests for investigation at the abattoir or because of secondary spread to people outside the place of work. The health of workers along the food chain should be of concern to public health physicians.”

Mayon-White, R.T., the author of this article, is a writer for the U.S. National Library of Medicine, who has published extensive reports on the spread of disease and infection. However, little information is available about him online outside of his many articles, so one cannot be sure that the information he presents is entirely credible. The conditions in which slaughterhouse employees must work are extremely disgusting and unsanitary, creating the adequate conditions for disease to spread and be picked up from animal carcasses. This has become such a problem that there have been numerous outbreaks of infection among these workers, which have caught the attention of public health physicians. This just proves the point that something like the outbreak of disease is important to pay attention to, and yet factory farm and slaughterhouse owners have not been forced to make these places safer. In a separate case, EFFAT (2012) says, “According to a study, four out of five butchers in large slaughterhouses are nowadays working under service contracts. ‘German slaughter houses are becoming the center of wage dumping in the Republic,’ says the trade union NGG.” EFFAT (the European Federation of Food, Agriculture, and Tourism trade unions) was founded in 2000. It represents 120 national trade unions from 35 European countries, and defends the interests of more than 22 million workers. However, as a governmental organization, its freedom of actions and speech may be limited. According to this German article, the pay for workers along the so-called “chain” is nothing to be highly regarded. Wage dumping, or offering wages much lower than is normal in an industry, is common in this practice. For the extreme risk that these employees face on a daily basis, they should at least receive adequate pay.

In general, people eat what is cheap without taking the effects of this into consideration. In an example provided in 2016 by The Saudi Gazette, Mohammed Abdul Majid says,

“We are living for our taste buds and we are trying everything to keep them happy. This is evident when we visit restaurants and eat food without trying to find out how it was made...The major reason why restaurants do not stop selling unhealthy food is because we do not stop buying it.”

This quote is from the Saudi Gazette, a Saudi Arabian newspaper that was founded in 1978. They report on breaking news in Saudi Arabia, and are a primary source for news. However, the majority of their stories are based on the king, which represents a potential lack of focus on other issues. We are far too focused on eating what tastes good rather than eating what is healthy or, for that matter, sustainable. Our overconsumption of unhealthy foods only encourages their

manufacture and sale in the future. Another global argument for the consideration of food choices comes from Nature and More, 2016.

“Food has never been cheaper. Still, each food item brings ecological and social costs with it that are unaccounted for. According to the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the hidden costs of conventionally produced food amount to 700 billion USD in environmental damage and 900 billion USD in social costs; together 1.6 trillion USD.”

Nature & more is a global organization which was in response to consumer demand for healthy, organic and fairly traded food, and focuses on providing just that. However, their goal is not as centered upon putting a stop to factory farming as much as it is simply working around it. Food that might be considered cheap by the average buyer is actually creating a much deeper hole in the pockets of those who buy it. We are doing trillions in damage to the environment and social order; food is dehumanizing us.

However, today's production and consumption system cannot be completely intentional. The decision to eat cheap food may be based on an assumption, created by the industry itself, that it is safe and sustainable.

“‘Food fraud...describes a substitution, addition, alteration or a misrepresentation, deliberate and intentional, of food ingredients or of food packagings, or false or misleading statements formulated concerning a product for economic gain.’ As a recent examples, there may be mentioned: the addition undeclared horse meat in beef products, the addition of melamine in milk and infant formula, and the alteration of the chilli powder with Red Sudan” (Khayreddine Bouabida, 2016).

Khayreddine Bouabida is a French writer who focuses on the topics of quality assurance and food safety. He has much experience as a laboratory engineer and quality manager assistant. However, there is not much known about his education or writing experience. If companies and individuals continue to falsely market their products, they are jeopardizing the health and food security of the entire world. No matter how rich or poor an individual is, they are still vulnerable to food fraud. An example of just this type of fraud comes in the form of a list made by the European Commission, 2016.

“An Ontario poultry producer who supplied meat to some of Canada’s largest groceries has been charged with mislabelling conventional chicken as ‘certified organic’. The Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) is pressing charges as ‘part of the ongoing investigation into alleged misrepresentation of organic poultry products’. The agency declined to provide further details, citing the ongoing court process.”

The European Commission is the executive part of the European Union, responsible for the legislative tasks and day-to-day business of the EU. However, their articles only cover the biggest scandals, which makes food fraud seem like a smaller problem than it actually is. This Canadian company marketed their product as ‘organic’ when, in fact, it probably came from a factory farm. This means that consumers were paying more to eat something that they thought

was safer and more eco-friendly when in all reality, they were eating chicken that came straight off of a conveyor belt. This massively reduces consumers' trust in the organic label in the future, meaning that labeling things this way in coming times will mean nothing to the modern customer.

Luckily, there is hope for the future: Many influential global companies are doing away with the use and/or funding of food from factory farms.

"Consumers today are increasingly demanding food that does not originate from animals that have experienced cruelty...95 percent of consumers say they want farm animals to be treated well, but...most animals raised for food today grow up inside crowded factories... and most are victims of inhumane agricultural practices" (Live Science, 2014).

Live Science is a scientific news website launched in 2004 which covers global news stories of the science variety utilizing experienced journalists and experts. However, they often publish articles outside of their bounds of expertise. If 95% of consumers want farm animals to be treated properly, that calls into question why it simply is not happening. There is a massive lack of knowledge in the contemporary consumer about what they are actually buying and where it comes from, since they seem to be under the misconception that their food is coming from somewhere other than a factory, whereas in reality these places are few and far between. A separate statement was made by TakePart in 2015. "Last week, the Federal Drug Administration approved the first genetically modified animal to be commercially sold and consumed nationwide...more than 60 supermarket chains are refusing to sell it in their stores—Costco now included." TakePart is a digital news and lifestyle magazine which uses independent journalism to talk about what they consider "today's most important, socially relevant topics, alongside a social action platform." They also have a Social Action Network (SAN), which is comprised of over 150 nongovernmental organizations representing an initiative to take action against the world's problems. However, for a website that is based in America, they often speak in-depth about other countries, which seems out of bounds for their level of real inside knowledge. When major companies such as Costco refuse to sell something like genetically modified animals, approved by the FDA or not, it shows a degree of knowledge on their part about what their buyers prefer to take home with them. Nowadays, knowledge about the truth behind factory farming is much more widespread and common, and it's scaring people. Chains like Costco have chosen to profit off of this demand for organic and non-GMO foods by removing the offending items from their shelves, and although it is most surely for naught but economic gain, the end result is a happier, healthier range of customers.

Through the course of this research, I have learned a vast amount of information about the cruel industry known as factory farming. It has caused me to look differently at what I put on my plate, and I've even considering going fully vegetarian if I can manage it. This system is atrocious and unsustainable, and I would like to involve myself with it as sparingly as possible.
(2037 words)