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|  | Most people are aware of the deleterious effects of the automobile and heavy industry on the ecology of our planet. But few are aware that meat production has contributed greatly to environmental deterioration.  The alarming increase in the number of livestock has been accompanied by a trend for livestock to spend all or part of their lives in feedlots where they eat large quantities of grain and soybeans. Feeding large numbers of animals in this fashion requires an enormous agricultural output. In fact, one half of the agricultural output of the Unites States every year goes to feed livestock. If we could cut the amount of grain that is used for livestock by only 10% and use instead for public consumption, 130 million people could be fed.  Feedlot agriculture has placed a strain on our natural resources and the quality of our environment. For one thing, water resources are being squandered at a concerning rate. One half of the water consumed in the United States is used in livestock production. A total vegetarian diet requires 300 gallons of water per day, while a carnivorous diet requires more than 4,000 gallons of water per day. Not surprisingly, there is evidence that the heavy demand for water by the meat industry is leading to the depletion of unrenewable underground water reserves.  Approximately seven billion tons of topsoil are eroded every year in the United States. With the loss of topsoil, the fertility of the land and its yield are decreased. As it turns out, the majority (85%) of soil erosion is linked to overgrazing or the growing of food for livestock. Consequently, overgrazing has been the major cause of desertification, both in the United States and around the world. Furthermore, the clearing of land for livestock agriculture has resulted in massive deforestation. This loss of forest land has contributed further to soil erosion and the depletion of natural resources.  One might wonder what happens to the two billion tons of manure produced annually by farm animals. Much of the nitrogenous wastes turns into soluble ammonia and nitrates which leach through the soil and contaminate the groundwater. This runoff encourages the growth of algae that deplete the water of oxygen and result in the death of aquatic life. The enormous quantity of waste generated gives the animal food industry the distinction of being one of the world�s largest polluters of water.  Our wildlife has also suffered as a direct consequence of livestock production, for the clearing of large tracts of land and forests for agriculture has reduced the size and range of natural habitats. This problem is particularly acute in the Amazon basin in Brazil where land is being cleared at a phenomenal rate for the grazing of cattle. Grazing animals alter the ecological balance, placing wild plants and animals at risk. This behavior underestimates our dependence on the ecosystem and reflects and attitude that wildlife and forests stand in the way of progress. |

*This Web Site is Best viewed with 256 or more colors.*

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