

Plain Truth from the Cattle Rancher Who Won't Eat Meat (excerpts)

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By Howard Lyman with Glen Merzer

I am a fourth-generation dairy farmer and cattle rancher. I grew up on a dairy farm in Montana, and I ran a feedlot operation there for 20 years. I know firsthand how cattle are raised and how meat is produced in this country. Today I am president of the International Vegetarian Union.

Sure, I used to enjoy my steaks as much as the next guy. But if you knew what I know about what goes into them and what they can do to you, you'd probably be a vegetarian like me. And believe it or not, as a pure vegetarian now who consumes no animal products at all, I can tell you that these days I enjoy eating more than ever.

If you're a meat-eater in America, you have a right to know that you have something in common with most of the cows you've eaten. They've eaten meat, too.

When a cow is slaughtered, humans do not eat about half of it by weight: the intestines and their contents, the head, hooves, and horns, as well as bones and blood. These are dumped into giant grinders at rendering plants, as are the entire bodies of cows and other farm animals known to be diseased. Rendering is a \$2.4 billion-a-year industry, processing forty billion pounds of dead animals a year. There is simply no such thing in America as an animal too ravaged by disease, too cancerous, or too putrid to be welcomed by the embracing arms of the renderer.

Another staple of the renderer's diet, in addition to farm animals, is euthanized pets - the six or seven million dogs and cats that are killed in animal shelters every year. The city of Los Angeles alone, for example, sends some two hundred tons of euthanized cats and dogs to a rendering plant every month. Added to the blend are the euthanized catch of animal control agencies, and roadkill. (Roadkill is not collected daily, and in the summer, the better roadkill collection crews can generally smell it before they can see it.)

When the gruesome mix is ground and steam-cooked, the lighter, fatty material floating to the top gets refined for use in such products as cosmetics, lubricants, soaps, candles, and waxes. The heavier protein material is dried and pulverized into a brown powder - about a quarter of which consists of fecal material. The powder is used as an additive to almost ALL pet food as well as to livestock feed. Farmers call it "protein concentrates." In 1995, five million tons of processed slaughterhouse leftovers were sold for animal feed in the United States. I used to feed tons of the stuff to my own livestock. It never concerned me that I was feeding cattle to cattle.

In August 1997, in response to growing concern about the spread of bovine spongiform encephalopathy (or Mad Cow disease), the FDA issued a new regulation that bans the feeding of ruminant protein (protein from cud-chewing animals) to ruminants; therefore, to the extent that the regulation is actually enforced, cattle are no longer quite the cannibals that we had made them into. They are no longer eating solid parts of other cattle, or sheep, or goats.

They still munch, however, on ground-up dead horses, dogs, cats, pigs, chickens, and turkeys, as well as blood and fecal matter of their own species and that of chickens. About 75 percent of the ninety million beef cattle in America are routinely given feed that has been "enriched" with rendered animal parts. The use of animal excrement in feed is common as well, as livestock

operators have found it to be an efficient way of disposing of a portion of the 1.6 million tons of livestock wastes generated annually by their industry.

In Arkansas, for example, the average farm feeds over fifty tons of chicken litter to cattle every year. One Arkansas cattle farmer was quoted in U.S. News & World Report as having recently purchased 745 tons of litter collected from the floors of local chicken-raising operations. After mixing it with small amounts of soybean bran, he then feeds it to his eight hundred head of cattle, making them, in his words, "FAT AS BUTTERBALLS." He explained, "If I didn't have chicken litter, I'd have to sell half my heard. Other feeds are too expensive." If you are a meat-eater, understand that this is the food of your food.

We don't know all there is to know about the extent to which the consumption of diseased or unhealthy animals causes diseases in humans, but we do know that some diseases - rabies, for example - are transmitted from the host animal to humans. We know that the common food poisonings brought on by such organisms as the prevalent E. Coli bacteria, which results from fecal contamination of food, causes the death of nine thousand Americans a year and that about 80 percent of food poisonings come from tainted meat. And now we can also be virtually certain, from the tragedy that has already afflicted Britain, that Mad Cow disease can "jump species" and give rise to a new variant of the always fatal, brain-wasting Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease in humans.

For all too many humans, the first decision they consciously make about their health is the stark one between by-pass surgery and angioplasty, or between chemotherapy and radiation. In reality, however, we knowingly make choices every day that can either lead us toward these grim options, or else toward happier ones. We do so, of course, every time we decide what fuel to put in our bodies.

To make our choices informed ones, we have to start with the facts.

"It would be difficult to conceive of any topic of discussion that could be of greater concern and interest to all Americans than the safety of the food that they eat." -- Judge Mary Lou Robinson Texas Beef Group v. Oprah Winfrey & Howard Lyman (1998)

For over 200 hundred years, our country's legal systems have refused to recognize "product libel." People can maliciously libel a human being and be required to pay damages; but not inanimate products such as Corvairs, Pinto fuel tanks, asbestos, the Dalkon Shield, fruits, vegetables and meat products. Robust debate and criticism have turned surmises and suspicions and anathemas into discoveries or recognition of facts and truths. One has only to look back at our history and see how the dissenters of the past --criticizing tobacco, coal dust, useless over-the-counter drugs and a variety of health-damaging food additives and pesticides -- have been proven right again and again.

Now, it seems, CORPORATIONS want to do what King George III, foreign dictators and bad domestic political bosses were unable to do -- shut up the American people. The realistic objective of the frivolous "veggie-libel" statutes and lawsuits is not money; it is to send a chilling message to millions of people that they better keep their opinions to themselves. -- Ralph Nader 4/29/98

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