

Why go vegetarian?

Part 2: Research

For our research paper, each of us served as the participants for our findings. Participant #1, Nadia DeMartino, enjoys eating meat regularly. She generally cooks dinner at home, eating chicken and beef at least once a week. Ashley Rose, Participant #2, is a natural carnivore who enjoys eating fast food on a regular basis. She is always running around from work to school and home and stops at fast food chains because it is convenient, tasty, and quick. Her favorite purchases at Wendy's are chicken nuggets and Junior bacon cheeseburgers. Jennifer Baume, Participant #3, doesn't think dinner is complete without meat. She is also a true believer that bacon tastes great on almost anything. Some of her favorites include bacon chicken cheese steaks, bacon cheese fries, turkey and bacon sandwiches, and bacon pizza. We have decided to practice being vegetarians because of the inhumane practices that the food industry contributes to; such as, food borne illnesses, contaminated meat, harmful antibiotics, and abuse of workers and animals.

While many American consumers sit back and enjoy their meals, they are passively unaware of the conditions their food went through. Wendell Berry, author of "The Pleasures of Eating," urges his readers that they must eat responsibly to live free. In regards to eaters, he states, "If they think beyond that, they recognize that they are passive consumers. They buy what they want — or what they have been persuaded to want — within the limits of what they can get. They pay, mostly without protest, what they are charged" (Berry). The point of Berry's writing is to urge the public to look into where their food has come, under what condition it

was produced, and what chemicals it may contain. Our group has decided to become active consumers, meaning that we will be more aware of what we are eating and protest against eating meat from food industries. The following will observe some of the reasons we have chosen to be vegetarians.

A subject that is not spoken enough among the public is the effect of food born illnesses from meat that has been processed without sanitary precautions. "Federal health authorities have estimated that food borne diseases sicken 76 million people, cause 325,000 hospitalizations, and kill 5,000 Americans every year" (Mead). If 5,000 people are dying each year from food born illnesses, why are food industries not taking more careful precautions? Barbara Kowalcy, who was featured in the documentary *Food, Inc.* states, "We put faith in our government and we are not being protected on the most basic level" (Kenner). Kowalcy lost her two year old son Kevin when he died from E.coli poisoning after eating a hamburger on vacation. Similar to Kowalcy at one point, many consumers trust food industries and the government to produce safe food. However, the meanings of safe and sanitary have been abused and food industries have taken shortcuts to supply food and make more money, leaving many consumers unaware of the dangers. "To the factory, time is money and yield is everything," and it will continue to produce food without considering the health of the nation (Pollan).

According to The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "While most people get *E. coli* O157 from contaminated food (such as undercooked ground beef), it also can be passed in the manure (feces) of young calves and other cattle" (CDC). Cows spend most of their life

standing in manure, where most of it is not completely cleansed off the animal before being slaughtered. A tiny bit of manure can infect several packages of meat because one cow is processed with other cows in many packages of meat. The Huffington Post states that “medical researchers at the University found evidence of fecal contamination in 69% of the pork and beef and 92% of the poultry samples in retail markets where nine out of ten chicken carcasses in the store may be contaminated with fecal matter” (Freston).

In addition, food factories are injecting our foods with harmful antibiotics and ammonia, also known as glass cleaner, used as a processing agent in meat. Hormones and steroids are injected into chicken, cows, and other animals, advancing their weight and growth so that they can be slaughtered and sold quicker. Chickens are pumped with so many hormones that their bones and internal organs cannot keep up with their growth and they plop over and have a difficult time walking. “Animals today raised on factory farms have had their genes manipulated and pumped full of antibiotics, hormones and other chemicals to encourage high productivity. In the food industry, animals are not considered animals at all; they are food producing machines” (IDA).

In many factory farms across America, animals and workers are abused and mistreated. Factory workers are treated inhumane and unfairly, and as consumers, our group does not want to eat from food industries that are treating their workers unjustly. If food factories treat their workers without compassion, then what does that say about how they treat animals? According to *Food, Inc.*, “Meat packing is the most dangerous job in America” (Kenner). In an article titled “Blood, Sweat, and Fear,” factory workers were interviewed about their injuries

and treatment encountered at work. The article states, "Automated lines carrying dead animals and their parts for disassembly move too fast for worker safety. Repeating thousands of cutting motions during each work shift puts enormous traumatic stress on workers' hands, wrists, arms, shoulders and backs" (Compa). In addition to injuries, many workers receive little benefits or time off for treatment. As for animals, they are kept in dark, confined cages standing in their manure until they are slaughtered. "Even so-called "free-range" animals are often mutilated without the benefit of painkillers; kept in filthy, disease-ridden sheds; forced to endure long trips to the slaughterhouse without food or water; and killed in the same ways as animals from factory farms" (PETA).

After researching how food industries operate unethically, our group has taken the opportunity to become active consumers, being more aware of what we eat. The Humane Society of the United States encourages consumers to eat by "The Three R's", --reducing the consumption of meat and other animal-based foods; refining the diet by avoiding products from the worst production systems; and replacing meat and other animal-based foods in the diet with plant-based foods" (HSUS). Below observes our journey as vegetarians under the rule of the "The Three R's."