

## **Meat Your Food**

*Argument/Persuasion*

Come get your hot and spicy chicken wings, your thick and juicy burgers, your plump hot dogs and moist turkey breast. Come enjoy some sizzling sausages, some steaming meatballs and tender pork chops. Come bite into a thick hunk of Daisy's left flank, tear the flesh from Porky's right rib.

Far back into our history, the human diet has revolved around the consumption of meat. Today, however, I feel we should question the health and morality of this ancient diet. Eating animal flesh was originally a necessity, but over time it has become more of an indulgent tradition. We focus on its satisfying flavor—the way it is marinated, cooked, and presented. In efforts to rationalize our meat-eating customs, we ignore the fact that meat is no longer the healthiest source of protein. Furthermore, we try to deny that the leg of lamb, now marinated in lemon cream sauce, once stood in a grassy field, and that the beef, now dressed in ketchup and hidden between sesame buns, once grazed in a pasture. We avoid acknowledging that our perfectly seasoned steak was once a moving, breathing animal, and that we took the life of that animal to satisfy an appetite, not a need.

The conditions under which our meat-eating customs originated were drastically different from those in which we live in today. Man's pattern of using animals for food goes back to a time before choice or judgment. The people of these ancient times regarded hunting as a necessity, and the consumption of meat was a vital source of survival. It is not likely that the ice age environment of the Peking and the Neanderthal man supported a diet of gathered fruits, nuts, and roots. This, however, is not the case today. Men have developed amazing farming techniques that allow us to grow massive

amounts of nutritional vegetation. Our survival no longer demands the killing of animals for their meat.

Many argue that a healthy vegetarian diet cannot be achieved. This, however, is far from being true. While meat does provide the high quality protein and minerals that should be included in a healthy diet, so do many vegetables. The eight essential amino acids, which are the building blocks of complete quality protein, can also be acquired through combinations of legumes and grains. A healthy human diet should contain between 3% and 8% protein. Wheat is 17% protein, and cabbage is 22%. Vegetables and cereal products provide an ample amount of vitamins and minerals with less of the cholesterol and saturated fats found in meat products. Medical researches have established a link between saturated fats, cholesterol, and the incidence of heart disease, strokes, arteriosclerosis, and cancer. Also, many agricultural and industrial wastes, such as PBBs, PCBs, DDT, dioxin, and various other carcinogens, store themselves in animal fat. Even growth hormones in the meat, used by ranchers to quicken weight gain, endanger the health of the people who consume it.

Eating meat not only threatens the health of the consumer but also supports the victimization and mistreatment of animals. These animals, raised to be butchered, live in extremely over-crowded conditions. Large farm animals are often cramped into tight stalls, confined from movement, and covered in flies. They stand in piles of their own manure, constantly exposed to toxic fumes and excessive bacteria. The stress of never being able to stretch, exercise, assume natural positions, or experience natural lives weakens the animals' immune systems, often resulting in serious respiratory disease and bacterial infections. Other results of the distress and crowding include broken bones and

even cannibalism. Farmers deal with these problems by debeaking, castrating, or dehorning animals, all of which are often performed without anesthesia.

It is disturbing but important to keep in mind that these are sensitive beings. A kennel, a stable, or a zoo that treated animals in a similar manner would be fined or would completely lose its right to operate. A private citizen who confined a cat or dog this way would be charged with animal cruelty. Farm animals, however, are explicitly excluded from the Federal Animal Welfare Act, which protects all other animals in the U.S. This means there are virtually no laws that protect them from even the most brutal treatment as long as it takes place in the name of production and profit.

The meat industry has a strong interest in keeping the public comfortable with eating meat. To do this they stress taste, convenience, and tradition, and ignore health threats and ethical issues. We are provided with the ultimate in meat eating convenience; it's often prepared, deboned, precooked, and prepackaged. This allows us to easily ignore the real source of our steaks and hotdogs: animals, painfully raised and slaughtered. Since we no longer depend on meat for survival, it is our responsibility to question the meat eating tradition, for our own health and the welfare of other living beings. It is time to ask ourselves whether the animals are on our table because they belong there, or because we choose to ignore the fact the truth.