Factory Farming: Destroying the Environment

You Can Help
Choosing plant foods instead of animal foods is one of the biggest steps that we can take to lighten our impact on the Earth. In addition, we can help support more sustainable food production systems by shopping for vegan food at local farmer’s markets, food co-ops and health food stores, or by joining a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program. For additional information and to get involved in efforts to prevent industrial farming abuses, please visit farmsanctuary.org.

Deforestation and Desertification
A main contributor to desertification in the Western U.S., livestock grazing decimates native vegetation and animal populations and accelerates soil erosion, transforming once fertile land into desert-like environments.

Hundreds of millions of acres of forests and rainforests worldwide, including 260 million acres in the U.S., have already been cleared for livestock grazing or animal feed crops. Razing or burning rainforests down to create grazing land for livestock is a major cause of species extinction in the rainforests of Central and South America.

Nearly 80 percent of the agricultural land in the U.S. is used to feed the nearly 10 billion farm animals who are slaughtered each year in this country alone. In fact, more than 40 percent of the total land mass of the U. S. is used to raise animals for food.

From tropical rain forests in Brazil to ancient pine groves in China, entire ecosystems are being destroyed to satisfy the human desire for meat. According to scientists at the Smithsonian Institute, the equivalent of seven football fields of land is bulldozed every minute to create more room for farm animals.

Compromised Air
Since factory farms, or Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOs), are considered “farms,” they are currently exempt from the industrial emissions standards required by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Yet factory farms release tons of greenhouse gases and highly toxic pollutants, like hydrogen sulfide and ammonia, into the air we breathe every single year.

The EPA reports that roughly 80 percent of ammonia emissions in the U. S. come from animal waste. Atmospheric ammonia can...
Animal agriculture is responsible for more deadly greenhouse gases than all the SUVs, Hummers, cars, trucks, planes, ships, and other forms of transportation in the world combined. These greenhouse gases accelerate global warming which, scientists say, will increasingly lead to catastrophic climate-related disasters around the world.

Fecal Contamination

Animals raised for food generate more than 100 times more excrement than the entire U.S. human population, but this raw waste is not treated in sewage systems. This excrement often contains toxins and other pollutants which find their way into groundwater, and eventually into the sea, killing countless fish and other aquatic organisms and devastating marine ecosystems.

According to the EPA, agriculture is the single largest source of water pollution in rivers and lakes, and the waste from factory farms is a significant part of the problem. In fact, waste generated by factory farms has already polluted more than 35,000 miles of rivers in 22 states, and contaminated groundwater in 17 states.

Dead Zones

A leading cause of soil and groundwater contamination, lagoon breaches and fertilizer spills are incredibly common. When this waste makes its way into our streams, rivers and groundwater supplies, massive numbers of fish and other animals die. When 25 million gallons of rotting hog waste spilled into a North Carolina river in 1995, as many as 10 million fish died as an immediate result.

In the Midwestern U.S., most farms are on or near streams and rivers that carry excrement from factory farms into the Mississippi River, which ultimately deposits this hazardous waste into the Gulf of Mexico. The nitrogen runoff from farm animal waste and fertilizers that are primarily used to grow crops for farm animals causes algae populations to soar, depleting the water’s oxygen levels and killing fish and other aquatic creatures. Oxygen depletion from animal manure and fertilizer pollution has created a 7,000 square mile “dead zone” in the Gulf of Mexico off the coast of Louisiana where virtually all of the sea animals and plants have died and most forms of aquatic life can no longer survive.

Ruined Ranges

Livestock grazing is one of the most ecologically destructive forces of the modern era and is still legally permitted within the National Wilderness Preservation and National Park Systems and subsidized by taxpayer dollars at a rate of $100 million a year.

In the U.S. alone, livestock grazing adversely affects 22 percent of federal threatened and endangered species, including the desert tortoise, pronghorn antelope and numerous bird species. Additionally, federal government agencies exterminate vast numbers of coyote, prairie dogs and other native animals who “interfere” with or are perceived as “threats” to livestock or agricultural interests.

Wasted Water

According to the Pew Commission on Industrial Farm Animal Production, growing farm animal feed crops “places enormous demand on water resources: 87 percent of the use of freshwater in the U.S. is used in agriculture, primarily irrigation.” Worldwide, agriculture accounts for 93 percent of water depletion, with the vast majority of freshwater used for farm animal feed production.

Producing one pound of animal protein requires about 100 times more water than producing a pound of grain protein. In fact, factory farming wastes so much water that you can save as much water by not eating a pound of beef as you can by not showering for almost six months.

In addition to providing drinking water for farm animals and irrigation for feed crops, factory farms use scarce freshwater resources to flush manure out of barns and for other industrial uses. For example, industrial milking centers that use manure flush cleaning and automatic cow washing systems can use as much as 150 gallons of water per cow per day.

Ransacked Oceans

The human appetite for seafood is driving many marine species to extinction. In fact, according to a Food and Agriculture Organization estimate, more than 70 percent of the world’s fish species are either fully exploited or depleted, and researchers have warned that all fish may be gone by the year 2048 if overfishing trends continue.

Hundreds of thousands of dolphins and endangered turtles, as well as billions of other marine animals, become entangled in fishing nets annually and are thrown back into the sea dead or dying. The fishing industry refers to animals killed by their wasteful and devastating fishing practices as “by-catch.”

In fish farming, or aquaculture, fish are raised by the thousands in gigantic pens. These conditions make animals very susceptible to disease, so they are heavily dosed with antibiotics. Like livestock farming, aquaculture has also led to the further disparagement of our delicate aquatic ecosystems, polluting bodies of water with waste run-off containing potentially hazardous chemicals, drugs and pathogens.

Further depleting our oceans of life, feed for “farmed fish” typically consists of wild-caught fish taken from our already ravished oceans. This inefficient process requires approximately five pounds of wild fish to produce only one pound of “farmed fish.”