

**WTE Column of August 26, 2014. Editor's Headline: "The right way to raise food"**

Did you know that industrially-hatched turkeys have their upper beaks amputated, along with their toenails, within the first few days of their lives? I asked my son this question, a veterinarian and expert in animal diseases. I'm appalled to think of the "thanksgiving" feast I used to celebrate with my family.

Removing the beak transforms the bird's face into a shovel with a suck hole, explains Patrick Martins, so that the only thing it can do is gorge on the superfattening corn-based mash it would have disdained back when first spied by the Pilgrims. Toenails are severed to prevent the birds fighting in their overcrowded pens, where they find themselves on wood shavings that absorb their waste though not its overwhelming stench.

Factory-farmed turkeys never see the outdoors; instead, by the thousands they are crowded into barns lit by bright lights 24 hours a day. They have no way to move around, let alone roost, which is the equivalent of you and I having to sleep standing up while harsh artificial light glares down on us 24/7. Every year, roughly 270 million turkeys are raised thus. Instinct and intelligence has been bred out of them. Their days and nights are miserable, their lives filled with stress.

Hatched and raised in these conditions, the birds' immune systems become so weak, their feed is regularly supplemented with antibiotics. As a result, consumers' resistance to certain diseases is compromised. A staggering 70 percent of the world's antibiotics are pumped into factory-fed animals.

These turkeys are so flavorless, processors inject them with saline solutions and vegetable oils to improve "mouthfeel" while incidentally "goosing their weight . . . to sell the birds for a few bucks more."

Turkeys need to pick around for their food, which is impossible, no thanks to the industry's barbaric practice. And it isn't just turkeys that are tormented. Big Ag relies on a passive and undiscerning public, writes Martins. Objections by the few don't even register, since the industry moves billions in processed meat every year. It spends untold thousands lobbying "to keep regulators off its back." It may pay huge fines for dumping toxic waste, but only when it gets caught—which is seldom.

For all his ranting, Martins doesn't urge readers to go vegetarian; on the contrary: His book is titled, "The Carnivore's Manifesto." He advocates for farm-raised animals. He is pro-hunting, our legacy from long before farming, though he decries the NRA as "ridiculous and dangerous," its leadership "irresponsible and immoral."

He admires fast-food muckrakers like Eric Schlosser and Michael Pollan. He sings the praises of Ted Turner, whom he deems a leader in the sustainable food movement. (Roughly one in nine bison live on Turner lands.) Temple Grandin is his favorite hero, having done more for the rights of animals than any placard-hauling protest group.

Against formidable odds she convinced conglomerates like McDonalds and Cargill to make animals' lives—especially their journeys to the killing floor—less traumatic. She designs better handling facilities; educates human care-givers of animals in zoos, on farms, and within families; lobbies for cameras in slaughterhouses. For her “to break through a male-dominated corporate culture that was averse to any sort of change” is an incredible accomplishment, given her autism challenges, he writes.

Still, much of the meat we consume comes from animals bred and raised under dismal conditions and to the detriment of our environment. In eastern North Carolina, where ten million hogs are being bred at any given time, their stupendous waste is poisoning groundwater and contaminating drinking wells. Waste lagoons sometimes burst, sending out “tsunamis of pig shit” that kill thousands upon thousands of fish and wildlife—not to mention, bringing misery and sickness to humans.

A factory farm is a community of “thousands of pooping citizens,” but unlike human cities, these factories aren't held to safe and sensible standards when it comes to waste-processing. The effect is “scorched earth with no remorse.”

Martins wants us to change our ways of eating, beginning with attention to where our food comes from and how it's produced. Food education is what we need, he asserts. Just as some people now purchase vegetables at farmers markets or from local growers, we can do the same with the meat we consume. Slow Food International is a good place to start. Also his own Heritage Foods USA, which sells meat from animals raised “as God intended them to live” and slaughtered when “their time has come”—meaning prime for consuming. Problem is, a Heritage turkey runs a pricey \$140. Retirees like myself may swear off turkey on Thanksgiving; our stressed and overworked children and their families would be hard-pressed to do likewise. Nevertheless, the sustainable-food movement is steadily gaining ground, with groups like Center for Science in the Public Interest guiding consumers and lobbying lawmakers toward healthful fare.