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The Cost of Affordable Food

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The Cost of Affordable Food

Abstract

When someone puts a piece of food in front of me, I don't just see a piece of food.

Instead, I see an innocent cow being cornered by a forklift and slaughtered, its limp, moist tissue hung on a long conveyer belt with hundreds of others.

I see hundreds of chemically-injected chickens packed into a dark barn with no hope of seeing sunlight in their lifetime.

I see immigrants pulled from their houses like criminals, taken away from the lives they've spent years building for themselves and their families, working for the same food company that courted them into the country.

I see pink slime, a dubious compilation of cartilage, connective tissue, tendons and ammonia being served as chicken nuggets and hamburgers in public school lunches. [*excerpt*]

Keywords

Surge, Surge Gettysburg, Gettysburg College, Center for Public Service, food costs, animal cruelty, feed costs, meat production, food production, vegetarian

Disciplines

Agricultural and Resource Economics | Agricultural Economics | Agricultural Education | Agriculture | Animal Sciences | Dairy Science | Food Processing | Food Science | Health Policy | Nutrition

Comments

Surge is a student blog at [Gettysburg College](http://www.gettysburg.edu) where systemic issues of justice matter. Posts are originally published at surgegettysburg.wordpress.com Through stories and reflection, these blog entries relate personal experiences to larger issues of equity, demonstrating that –isms are structural problems, not actions defined by individual prejudice. We intend to popularize justice, helping each other to recognize our biases and unlearn the untruths.

SURGE

[VERB] : to move suddenly or powerfully forward or upward

THE COST OF AFFORDABLE FOOD

December 4, 2013

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Anger floods over my body whenever these images pop up. Not only are animals being raised without the humane treatment they deserve, but products coming from industrial factories are being sold to consumers under deceitful circumstances.

While there is plenty of blame to go around, an integral early figure in this current food crisis is Earl Butz, Secretary of Agriculture from 1971-1976, whose stated goal was to significantly lower the cost of food in the U.S. With his motto of "[get big or get out.](#)" his policies saw small farms shut down one by one across the country, replaced by large commercial farms and agribusiness. Once farmers realized they could produce abundant amounts of corn cheaply, it became the staple of the food industry. Even though cows and chickens don't eat corn naturally, [it came to constitute the majority of these animals' diets](#) because of its ability to make the animals fatter faster, and for less cost to the companies raising them. This led to poorer health for the animals, a problem which was furthered by the shift away from letting the animals roam free in a field to instead keeping them locked in small pens surrounded by other animals.

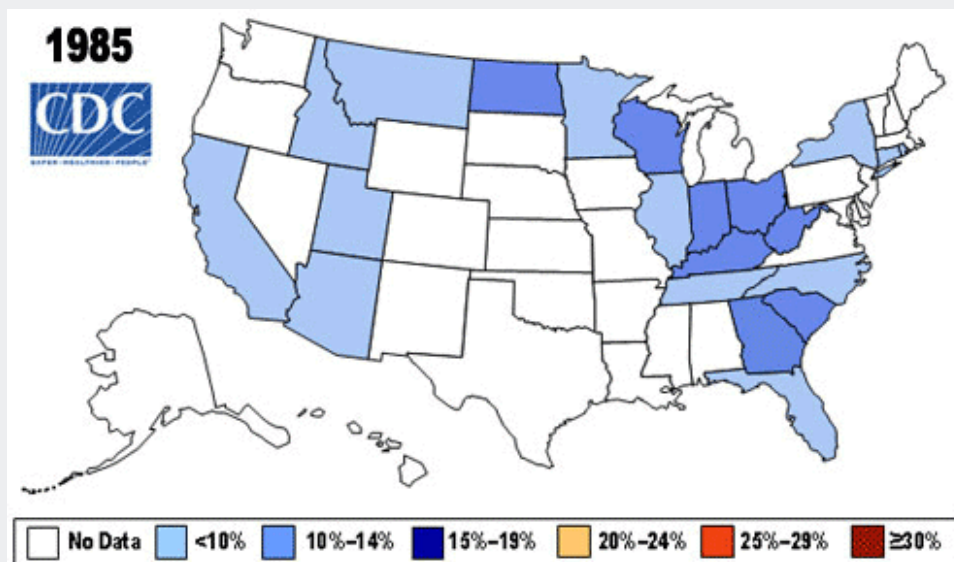
We often hear about the pesticides used on fruits and vegetables, but if you're thinking only produce can be saturated with chemicals, you might want to think again. In the race to produce the most food for the least cost,

meat is contaminated with higher level of chemicals — [synthetic growth hormones](#), [antibiotics](#), [arsenic](#), and [pesticides](#) — than any plant product. Through injections or feed, animals accumulate the chemicals in their fatty tissue, which is directly passing to our plates.

In addition to the effects on human health (cancer, birth defects, and developmental problems in children to name a few), the chemicals are also damaging our environment, [contaminating our soil, water supply and air](#).

What began as a sincere attempt to make food more affordable has created an industry that will do anything to increase their profit margin, with no regard to the wide-ranging negative effects their new techniques have.

The high rate of obesity in America is another side effect of the lower cost of food. There is a direct and undeniable correlation between the lowering of food prices since the 1970s (and the subsequent rise in processed foods with high fructose corn syrup) and the rise in obesity.



And, with cheap food comes cheap labor. When America became a top producer of corn, trade policies forced many Mexican farmers out of business. As a result, unemployment in Mexico increased, driving a wave of citizens to seek economic opportunities across the border. Immigrant labor comprises nearly half of agricultural industry's workforce, helping U.S. companies keep up with the high demand of meat and produce.

We already know from [Our Gendered Food Chain](#) that the hardworking men and women in these jobs are often faced with poor working conditions, little bargaining power, sexual harassment, and wage disparities. Despite the fact that we desperately need these workers just to keep our food system afloat, many continue to face deportation while our government (who created the policies) and corporations suffer little consequences for their own actions.

There's a lot of injustice that goes into our food: corn, chemicals, and exploitation of laborers just begins to scratch the surface. So even though we think we know what we are eating, it's always good to take a second look at what's on our plate. Our world's health, environment and economic stability depend on it.

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<http://surgegettyburg.wordpress.com/2013/12/04/the-cost-of-affordable-food/>