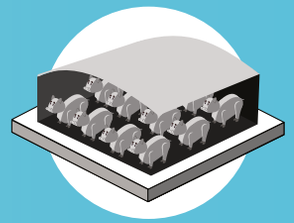
LIVESTOCK PRODUCTION COMPARISON

MCE is committed to supporting food system reform to protect the health of our environment as well as the health and well-being of essential food system workers and frontline communities. Each component of the food system affects the social, economic, and environmental sustainability of our food. This tool contrasts the steps in the industrial livestock production system with those in an environmentally-responsible livestock production system to show the externalized impacts of the industrial food system.

Industrial Livestock Production

Estimates show[1] that over 90% of American meat comes from concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs) or factory farms. That means that most of the time, the meat and animal products we eat come from an industrial livestock production system. Looking at industrial livestock production from a supply chain perspective, we can trace negative externalities throughout the system: from subsidized feed to workers' rights and safety to a whole lot of animal waste.

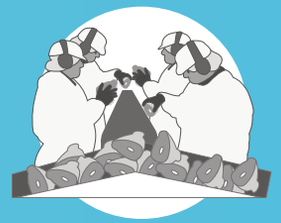


PRODUCTION

Livestock animals that are raised in confinement[2] live their lives indoors with hundreds to thousands of other animals. To increase growth and prevent disease, confined animals are fed an unnatural diet of subsidized corn and soy[3], given hormones and antibiotic. Confined animals have a disturbingly short, stressful and unhealthy lifespan[4].

WORKFORCE

Minimal health and safety protections are in place for food and farm workers, including CAFO workers, who are directly exposed to animal waste, air pollution and other occupational hazards[5]. Up to 73% of United States farm-workers are immigrants[6], many of whom may be undocumented or work under temporary work visas that may be exploited by their employers.



PROCESSING

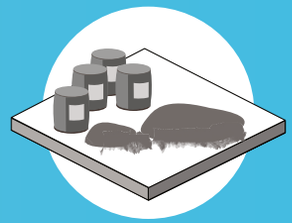
The slaughter and processing industries are considered some of the most exploitative industries in the country[7], and rely heavily on immigrants, refugees, and workers of color. Pervasive COVID-19 outbreaks in meat processing plants continue to shed light on the gross inadequacy of workplace safety measures[8].

DISTRIBUTION

Meat processing is a major bottle-neck in the food supply chain because four massive corp-orations control 55-85% of production[9]. Not only has this level of consolidation led to dramatic price increases[10], but plant closures and disruptions present manor food security risks[11]. With few processors, farmers must travel farther to processors and their products may ultimately be sold to consumers hundreds of miles away.

CONSUMPTION

Animal stress[12] can increase food safety risks and reduce the overall nutritional quality of animal products.

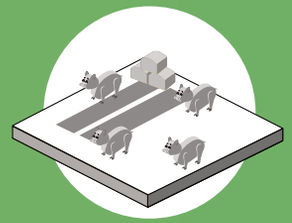


WASTE DISPOSAL

A single CAFO generates as much waste as a small city[13]. Existing regulations on how to store, treat, and use this animal waste are not sufficient[14] to protect the air, water, and surrounding communities from possible contamination.

Environmentally-Responsible Livestock Production

In contrast, an environmentally-responsible livestock production system better serves our health and economic resilience each step of the way. You can support environmentally-responsible producers in the St. Louis region through MCE's Known & Grown program[15].

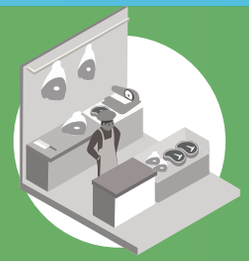


PRODUCTION

Animals have access to the outdoors and engage in natural behaviors like grazing and foraging for food. Proper grazing can actually improve soil health and fertility[16], providing added benefits of carbon sequestration[17], water and nutrient management in the face of a changing climate.

WORKFORCE

Environmentally-responsible farms provide good jobs with working conditions that are respectful, safe and adequately protect workers' health; migrant workers have pathway to legalization and citizenship as desired.



PROCESSING

Independent, small-scale meat processing increases food system resilience[18] by providing more direct access to both farmer and consumers - if there is adequate infrastructure in place.

DISTRIBUTION

Independent and environmentally responsible livestock producers and processors have better access to local and regional markets for their products, making their products more accessible to consumers.

CONSUMPTION

Meat and dairy products from pasture-raised animals tend to be healthier, leaner overall and richer in omega-3 fatty acid, antioxidants, and vitamin E[19].

WASTE DISPOSAL

Grazing animals may naturally reintegrate their waste products into soil in appropriate amounts to act as a fertilizer, rather than a contaminant.

LIVESTOCK PRODUCTION COMPARISON

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