

Chinese Take Out

Few of us consider the origin of the plastic wrapped cuts of meat we purchase in the grocery not connecting that our food no longer comes from animals that meander and graze across verdant fields. Instead mean animals are largely raised in CAFOs, a 20th century livestock/land arrangement that unnaturally concentrates them and their wastes in one place all of which not surprisingly takes a staggering toll on the environment.

The meat monopoly is controlled by four multi-billion-dollar transnational companies—Tyson, JBS, Cargill, and Smithfield—producing about 85 percent of the factory farm meat in the U.S., making it difficult for ranchers to sell their livestock to anyone other than the Big Four. Two of the Big 4 are foreign owned: Brazil-based JBS, which owns Swift, Smithfield Beef, Pilgrims Pride, Tyson Mexico, 1855, and Cargill pork, making it the largest producer of fresh beef and pork in the world. The other foreign owned company is Smithfield owned by Shaunghui China.

At the end of 2012, China's Shaunghui's also owned \$900 million worth of American farmland; and in 2013, when Shaunghui purchased the US Smithfield, it became the largest meat processing company in China. At \$7.1 billion — 30 percent above its estimated market value — Smithfield was the largest-ever Chinese buyout of an American company. The Chinese now own 1 out of every 4 pigs raised in the U.S. Also included in the 2013 deal was \$480 million worth of prime American farmland. China's meat production expanding into the heartland of America met a real need for the Chinese as a mere 11 percent of their land is suitable for farming, and an estimated 40 to 60 percent of this arable land is today severely degraded by pollution, erosion, salinization and/or acidification. Chinese rivers have also dwindled, and 75 percent are severely polluted.

Smithfield operates a total of 2,700 hog CAFOs in 12 states and ranks third in terms of the animal manure produced by hog CAFOs in the U.S. In 2014, China-owned Smithfield discharged 3.6 million tons of toxic pollutants from its hog slaughtering plant in Tar Heel, North Carolina making it tops in toxic pollution released into water supplies--more than U.S. Steel Corp or Exxon Mobil. The vast majority of this toxic water pollution is nitrates, which are linked to birth defects, bladder and thyroid cancer, blue baby syndrome, autoimmune disease, and reproductive problems.

In 2015, Smithfield asked a US federal judge to forbid people living near facilities from mentioning the fact that the company is Chinese-owned when arguing nuisance lawsuits in court. More than 500 North Carolina residents have brought suit against the company, saying the manure lagoons are harming their health and lowering property values. And Smithfield is expanding to meet Chinese market needs even though the good people of North Carolina strenuously object to further expansion as the waste and runoff remains on American soil. Just how much waste are we talking? A single manure lagoon can contain 4.3 million gallons of urine and feces, which is then sprayed on nearby fields carrying stench and the fine mist wherever the wind blows fouling up neighboring properties and leaving residents recourse only through long and expensive legal process in the courts.

A CAFO can have as many as a hundred thousand animals in a space so tight there is no room for turn around and, because of these unnatural growing conditions, animals must be injected with antibiotics, while fed GMO corn and other feed fillers. Growth hormones are also injected to get them profitably to market more quickly encased in those neat plastic-wrapped selections presented in the meat case for you.

In 2014 *TIME* magazine reported that PetSmart will follow suit in taking Chinese pet treats off its store shelves:

Over 1,000 dog deaths have been linked to problems with the imported jerky treats, but this problem goes back years...Food and Drug Administration has been investigating thousands of reports of pet illnesses linked to jerky treats going back to 2007, most of which involve Chinese products, though there's been a spike since last October.^[1]

American pet owners boycotted Chinese pet treats, yet ironically few know or care about Chinese-owned meats produced for themselves and their children. Animals unnaturally raised in US for corporate profit and worldwide distribution is not only inhuman but the hidden costs to the environment and ultimately our nation's future health aren't covered by the thrifty prices affixed to the neat bloodless meat cuts at your local grocery.

Bottom line: If this concerns you, then what can you do? Locally source your own food to know the origin of your meat. Know also what your meat eats, because your life and your family's health may depend upon it. You cast your vote and perpetuate growing systems with every food dollar spent.

References:

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[1] <http://time.com/107922/china-pet-food-contamination-recall-video/>