

Poison in Food

Extract From a Statement to the British Nutrition Foundation

Unfortunately, under great pressure, we all tend to adopt expedients. When there is great pressure on supply or costs, then quality is sacrificed. We see this in agriculture, when rotation of crops is abandoned, when we create vast stretches of monoculture, and when generally we take out more than we put in so as to produce more in the short term. Sacrificing the long term to the benefit of the short term. This is equally true in the food industry generally and in intensive farming. The intensive farmers remind us that, if we want a growing population, abundant food and reasonably priced food, then we need to adopt practices which allow for fast, efficient, economic and mass breeding and rearing of animals. This is perhaps true. But, unfortunately, these practices, whether we like it or not, and whether we admit it to ourselves or not, result in sacrificing quality for quantity. By quality, I do not mean just culinary taste. I mean nutritional values, and the long-term effect on our health and on that of our children. Intensively reared animals are different. They live in totally artificial conditions. They are fed differently, and they receive, directly or indirectly, unnatural quantities of hormones, antibiotics and other chemicals so as to speed their growth and to protect them immediately from infectious diseases.

I do not propose to discuss the moral case for or against rearing animals in this concentrated way. I would rather touch on some of the physical differences that seem to be the result of intensive production. Intensively reared animals are often injected with substances which result in water retention. Thus, part of the increase in the size and weight of the animal is directly attributable to the fact that it has unnaturally retained water.

Also, it has been found in research carried out at the Nuffield Institute of Comparative Medicine that the fat content of intensively reared and free-range live-stock is quite different. Animals lay down two kinds of fat: adipose storage fat, mainly consisting of non-essential saturated fats, and structural fats, rich in essential long chain polyunsaturated fatty acids. In free-ranging animals, there appears to be roughly one part of adipose fat to three parts of structural fat. In intensively reared animals, these figures seem to be reversed. It is adipose fat that is associated with some diseases of degeneration caused by over-consumption of animal fats. Structural fats contain high proportions of phospholipids, which are essential in the production of nerve tissue. Since nerve cells, including the brain, develop during early childhood, and since the structure, once complete, cannot be regenerated, any interference with the intake of phospholipids in young children may have serious and irreversible effects. Also, the long-term effects of the use of hormones have still not been satisfactorily assessed. The industry could be marketing products with unknown long-term hazards.

The reports of health inspectors who carry out autopsies on intensively bred animals make grisly reading. Malignant tumours are common-place. A high proportion of some animals have some form of cancer at the time of slaughter. Current regulations in the U.K. do not forbid the sale for human consumption of carcasses from which cancerous tumours and other diseased portions have been removed. As a result of these unnatural practices, we are creating products that differ more and more from their natural counterparts. So we treat them with artificial colouring agents and with artificial flavouring agents, so as to try and make them resemble the real thing. And we do not even really know the long-term effects of the use of many of these colouring and flavouring agents.