Happy Cows: Behind the Myth

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www.HumaneMyth.org
For decades, advertising firms hired by the dairy and veal industry have been producing multi-million dollar campaigns promoting the idea that dairy products from “happy cows” are healthy and wholesome.
These campaigns often feature cartoon depictions of cows that create an aura of child-like innocence around the industry and its products.
Over time, the buying public has come to associate dairy products with positive feelings about childhood and family.
In recent years, some animal advocacy organizations have begun to promote the idea that there are ways of using and killing dairy cows and their offspring that could be fairly described as compassionate, and even certified as humane.
The image of Old MacDonald’s Farm, long debunked by animal advocacy organizations as a marketing myth, is now being promoted by some of the very same animal advocacy organizations.
One press release from a well known animal organization promoting their “Humane Choice” label claimed the animals had the “best life and death offered to any farm animal,” and that they “live their lives as they would have done on Old MacDonald's farm.”
Since both the industry and some animal advocacy organizations are now promoting “humane” dairy and veal products, the public is being convinced that products from operations that “treat the animals right” really are perfectly wholesome.
Indeed, consumption of these “humane” dairy and veal products is increasingly described in the media as a form of activism on behalf of the animals, the environment and small-scale farmers.
But is the public being misled?
Let’s consider some of the realities of the dairy and veal industry, and look at some of what happens to the cows and their offspring regardless of the style and scale of farming operation — even at “Old MacDonald’s” dairy farm.
Reproductive Manipulation

In order to maintain uninterrupted milk production, all forms of dairy farming require that cows become pregnant and give birth to a calf every year.
Reliably inducing pregnancy in each animal each year requires the use of artificial insemination.
No matter what style or scale of dairy operation, the insemination process involves a person forcibly inserting one arm far into the cow’s rectum in order to position the cow’s uterus...
...and then pushing an instrument into the cow’s vagina in order to insert the semen.
The restraining apparatus used for the procedure is commonly referred to within the industry as a “rape rack.”
The bulls who produce the semen are usually housed in closed buildings and rarely go outside.
The semen is typically collected with use of castrated males as “stand ins” for females, because the musco-skeletal structure of females cannot handle the stress of being mounted over and over by the bull for the collection procedure.
These are the kind of things that go on at dairy farms, whether they are large or small-scale operations, whether they are organic or traditional.
Approximately half of all calves born are male, for which dairy operations have no use. Males produce no milk and are not economical to raise for beef production.
A large percentage of male calves and excess female calves are sent to auction immediately after birth, and then slaughtered with their umbilical cords still attached.
The rest are separated from their mothers and sent to veal-producing operations.
The process of separating mother cows from their calves produces extreme distress for the animals, who typically make plaintive cries to each other as they are separated.
In addition to the trauma of being separated from their mothers shortly after birth, male calves used in all forms of veal production are castrated in order to produce more tender flesh.
One common type of veal operation confines calves in crates and feeds them an artificial diet for four months prior to slaughtering them in order to produce a pale, white flesh.
A “new and improved” approach involves confining groups of calves in pens for four months and feeding them an artificial diet prior to slaughtering them in order to produce a pale rose-colored flesh.
Some producers of this “uncrated” veal claim to keep the calves with a "surrogate mother," a "spent" dairy cow who is placed in their enclosure for some period of time.
Until recently, a concerted public education campaign carried out by the animal advocacy movement inspired the public to boycott veal.

Boycott Veal
Are you for veal?
FREE-RANGE MEAT COULD WIN OVER CRITICS
By TERESA J. FARNEY THE GAZETTE

YOU can't call them vegetarians, because they eat chicken, pork, beef — even a hot dog now and then.

But even some of the most ardent carnivores have a real beef with veal and won't get near it. Their reasons have nothing to do with diet or nutritional issues, and everything to do with how veal is produced: from baby calves torn from their mothers a few days after birth, fed an inadequate diet and confined to a cramped crate to keep their muscles underused and tender.

It's inhumane, say a number of animal rights organizations, including the Humane Society of the United States and Farm Sanctuary, and they've long urged consumers to avoid buying veal at stores and restaurants.

Jon Cordonier of Peyton is hoping they'll reconsider veal — his veal, that is. Through his company, Great West Veal Co., he's marketing Highland cattle veal calves raised in what he says is a much more humane way. There are no crates, no hormones or antibiotics, no confinement or skimpy diets.

Gene Bauston, cofounder and president of Farm Sanctuary, sponsor of a nationwide "Say No To Veal" campaign, sees Cordonier on the cutting edge of what appears to be "a mini revolution in farming in general to raise animals humanely."

But now some animal organizations describe producers of "uncrated veal" as being part of a "revolution," and publish lists of restaurants serving it.

www.humanemyth.org
Some large animal charities are even collaborating with the animal-using industry to create high-profile media initiatives and labeling schemes that give this “new and improved” veal a positive image.
The changes in the industry have had a measurable impact on sales. D’Agostino, the 20-store supermarket chain in New York, said that its sales of veal have jumped 35 percent since it began carrying “certified humane” veal only. New York Times, April 2007

Now that both the dairy and veal industry and some large animal charities are promoting this new “kinder, gentler” form of veal production, sales are going up.
It seems these animal advocacy organizations have called off the boycott against veal.

Boycott Over
Transport

When their output declines, typically within two to six years, nearly all cows used for dairy production are transported to auction.
Often suffering from painful udder infections (mastitis) and osteoporosis, "spent" cows suffer greatly during transport to slaughterhouses. Many are not even capable of walking upon arrival.
Disoriented and weakened, calves are also prone to collapse.
At the auction, cows and calves are driven into a bidding ring using sticks or canes and electric prods.
The noise, violence, and over-stimulation of this process is traumatic for these peaceful animals, who become highly stressed when separated from their herd.
Premature Death

At slaughter, most cows and veal calves are stunned by having a metal bolt shot into their skulls. Next, they are raised up by shackles attached to a rear leg, and then their throats are slit while their hearts are still beating in order to push out the blood.
Because the stunning process is designed to make sure that the animal’s heart remains beating, it is not uncommon for cows and calves to still be conscious while their throats are cut open.
Can any of this be fairly considered respectful, compassionate or humane?
The truth of the matter is that each purchase of dairy products or veal directly contributes to more individuals being brought into existence who will endure confinement, social deprivation, mutilation, reproductive manipulation, indignity and premature death.
The truth of the matter is that a recent United Nations report identified animal agribusiness as the number one cause of greenhouse gas impact--more than all cars, trucks, buses, trains, ships and planes combined.
This is the inescapable reality of the dairy and veal industry.
We can do better.
Permitted to exist free of exploitation and slaughter, cows can live 25 years or more.
They have strong familial bonds, just like other animals.
These vulnerable creatures deserve our respect, and our protection.
By eliminating dairy and other animal products from our diet, we can play a very real part in creating a more peaceful world.
Today, there are so many high quality, healthy alternatives.
Consider becoming a conscientious objector. Refuse to support the injustice of the dairy and veal industry, and choose instead a healthful, nonviolent diet.
Don’t buy into the humane myth!
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