

A Kinder Way to Farm

A Special Report For Environmental Organizations



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Executive Summary

Although the agriculture industry currently abuses and slaughters billions of cows every year, well-treated, responsibly bred cows are assets to both dairy and produce farmers. Meat consumption is extremely unhealthy for humans and monumentally destructive to the environment. However, production of organic crops and dairy products can actually benefit the environment when produced in a cruelty-free way. Govardhana Farms serves as an example for other small farms by modifying current organic farming methods and working to establish a cow sanctuary for retired dairy cows and bulls “rescued” from the meat sector.



What the food industry doesn't want you to know about produce

GMOs

GMOs, or genetically modified organisms, are created by merging DNA from different species using gene splicing. When introduced into the market in the 90s, GMOs were paraded as the solution to world hunger for developing nations, because a greater yield could be produced if crops were modified to be pesticide resistant. Instead, pesticide resistant bugs and weeds required the increasing use of these toxins, and although the GMOs may be resistant, humans are not.

The use of GMOs is widespread. It is not limited to the developing world, although most developed nations require GMOs to be labeled so that consumers can have freedom of choice. Canada is not one of these countries, so Canadian consumers are in the dark about which fruits and vegetables have been genetically modified.

Pesticides

Pesticides are toxic substances used commercially to kill living things. They include weed killers (herbicides) and insect killers (insecticides), among others. Trace amounts of pesticides that are sprayed on crops to kill insects ultimately end up being consumed by humans.

Pesticides are carcinogenic. A 2009 study published by the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry revealed that children living in homes where their parents used pesticides were twice as likely to develop brain cancer as children who lived in pesticide-free homes. The National Cancer Institute's studies have shown that American farmers, despite their comparatively healthier overall lifestyles, had startling incidences of leukemia and other forms of cancer.

Note that the same companies that develop and patent GMOs also develop and patent pesticides and herbicides, so there is no cause for these companies to seek alternative methods of farming. That being said, there are ancient techniques, such as the Vedic methods of using cow urine, neem oil, or cayenne pepper, that can keep pests at bay

without harming them, the plants, or ourselves. By using natural deterrents rather than commercial pesticides, we will not upset the ecosystem or jeopardize our own health.

Modern farming methods

The way that we work the land has a direct effect on the plants grown on that same land. Research conducted in Europe has shown that heavy machinery causes soil compaction, which prevents water from draining and nutrients from reaching plant roots. Even with the addition of chemical fertilizers, soil compaction can result in the land becoming infertile.

Furthermore, the tractor's attachments, namely cutters, shredders, scrapers, planters, and seeders, violently trample the land and can even kill small field animals. These modern production methods are also fuel intensive.

Let us now imagine a land which is worked with love, care, and tenderness. Let us imagine a man and his helpers: a team of bulls, donkeys, or horses, patiently and harmoniously tilling the land with animal-drawn tools. Let us imagine a harmonious existence between the land and man. And this harmony will be reproduced within the vegetables that the land then offers to us. This is what we will ingest as we partake of them: no modifications, and no pesticides.



The secrets of commercial dairy production

Bureaucracy of the dairy industry

The Canadian dairy industry operates under a heavily regulated, closed market, supply management system. A commentary by the C.D. Howe Institute reveals that under this system, imported dairy products are tariffed and almost nonexistent, and Canadian farmers are unable to sell milk abroad. Restrictions on both domestic milk production and foreign imports keep prices higher for the Canadian consumer. The immediate beneficiaries of the supply management system are the dairy farmers who own production “quotas,” without which any significant milk production is virtually forbidden. Buying quotas is prohibitively expensive for many farmers, although it ensures a place in the exclusive system.

Under the current system, smaller dairy farms that do not wish to mass produce milk must join cooperatives such as Harmony Milk or Organic Meadow, which are at a disadvantage against much larger companies like Neilson because they must sell their milk at a higher price, and their products are only available at certain outlets. In order to join this system a farmer must wait up to 7 or 8 years to get the certification, bought at a high price. Once he receives the certification he must buy quota, and then must be able to supply this quota. Therefore, cows are sent to slaughter as soon as they cannot provide enough milk. The milk industry is the number one supplier for the meat industry. DFO (Dairy Farmers of Ontario) forbids a person to sell, offer to sell, deliver, or distribute milk unless it is done through the DFO. They have a complete monopoly.

The life of a dairy cow

While a cow’s natural lifespan is 20–25 years, commercial dairy cows in Canada live to be around 5. They are inseminated by humans and kept constantly pregnant, giving birth every year and spending the majority of their days attached to milking machines rather than grazing and enjoying time with their babies. In fact, their calves are immediately separated from them so that humans can drink their milk. If the calf is a female, she will meet the same fate as her mother, doomed to produce milk until her body gives out. If the calf is male, he will only live a few days to a few months before being slaughtered for veal. Male calves, called “bawling calves,” are sent to auction the same day they are removed from their mothers. Beef cattle at Canadian auctions bought by American buyers must be branded,

according to American law. The branding is done without anesthetic. At the end of the day, both male and female cows ultimately end up in the beef market, as even milking cows too worn out to produce milk are shipped off to abattoirs.

Dairy is not an inherently problematic industry. Cows will produce more milk, and higher quality milk, if they are treated well. The dairy industry can remain profitable while still treating cows well in life and not sending them to slaughter in old age, but the link between the dairy and meat industries must be broken. It is difficult to make that a reality when dairy farmers are unable to operate outside of “the system.”



Visnu Priya

If slaughterhouses had glass walls

While dairy cows also have a difficult life, the majority of Canada's beef cows live a life of torture and confinement on a feedlot. They are regularly branded, castrated, and dehorned without anesthetic. To keep them alive and growing at an unnatural rate in unsanitary conditions, the cows are pumped full of drugs. Even so, many develop respiratory problems and "cancer eye." When cows are raised under such circumstances, it is not surprising that there have been so many beef recalls in Canada's recent past.

Canadian cattle can legally be transported into cramped trucks for over 2 days without food or water. At the slaughterhouse, "downers," who are too weak to walk, are dragged with ropes. Healthier cows that are hesitant about marching to their death are shocked with electric prods. Although welfare laws require cows to be stunned before they are killed, lines move so quickly that up to 10% of cattle are chopped apart fully conscious. PETA reports that cattle can even be conscious up to seven minutes after their throats have been slit.

But can foods produced under such poor conditions be safe? In 2014, Canada experienced the largest beef recall in its history due to an *E. coli* scare at Cargill Meat Solutions, a leading meat processor in both the U.S. and Canada. In the United States, Canada's largest beef export market, the USDA has allowed the sale of *E. coli* contaminated meat as long as it labeled "cook only." Even then, it has been sold as precooked and has ended up in school lunches. This is because in order for a USDA complaint to have weight, the company must themselves agree there is a problem.

Why doesn't the government do less to protect the companies and more to protect the consumers? Economists warn that when any industry has a concentration ratio upwards of 4 companies controlling over 40% of the market (known as "CR4"), competitiveness declines and consumer protection weakens as public service intertwines with private interests. Conglomerates are able to set prices and determine food quality. There are 450 milk processors in Canada. Three of them process approximately 80% of the nation's milk. Moreover, Cargill's High River, Alberta and Guelph, Ontario facilities alone make up 55% of the Canadian beef processing market. The meat and dairy industries far exceed the CR4 threshold. This is why slaughterhouses do not have glass walls.

The importance of cows to farmers

Cows are a boon to the agricultural sector, and are in fact much more useful alive than dead. Cattle byproducts, such as dairy, manure, and urine, are extremely valuable. Whereas cow killing for meat consumption is environmentally destructive, raising cows responsibly and using their urine and dung byproducts is environmentally beneficial. Urine can be used as a natural repellent that does not kill the pests that feast on crops, and in this way it proves to be an important element in cruelty-free and healthy farming. Cow dung is well known for its benefits as a fertilizer.

Bulls have been used for centuries as the most ecological “tractor” available. With their help, the land can be plowed and tilled, the harvested goods can be transported, dead trees can be removed from the forest, and much more. The bull is a good labourer and he does not pollute the environment in the way that modern machinery does. The responsible use of cows in modern farming will improve soil fertility and the quality of organic crops.

Cows feed us with their milk, fertilize our land, and keep unwanted pests from consuming our harvest. The bull works the land as a valued partner in agricultural endeavours. Unfortunately, the agricultural industry does not make full use of all the cow’s wonderful qualities, and instead breeds them en masse and cuts their lives brutally short. Meat consumption is not only a major contributor to heart disease and many types of cancer, but is also a leading cause of every significant form of environmental destruction, including air and water pollution, species extinction, deforestation, and greenhouse gas emission.

How to help

There is a kinder way to farm that does not bring harm to the animals, the planet, or ourselves. Govardhana Farms is a new farming operation that demonstrates that organic and cruelty-free farming, where the land and animals are loved and protected, is both possible and profitable. Govardhana Farms currently sells organic vegetables, with the intension of expanding into fruits, grains, and flowers as the operation grows.

The farm was created for the sole purpose of establishing a cow sanctuary in Canada, called ISKCON Govinda's Herd. ISKCON Govinda's Herd was incorporated as a not-for-profit organization in Canada in April, 2015. The purpose of ISKCON Govinda's Herd is threefold:

- (1) To operate a cow sanctuary that is based on Vedic principles.
- (2) To offer educational programs covering such topics as the importance of cow protection and training bulls to work the land.
- (3) To promote cruelty-free farming.

The non-profit is currently undergoing the process of registering as a charity. Visit www.govardhanafarms.ca/cow-protection for more information.



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