

A living nightmare

What Canada's food animals go through on the way to your dinner plate

BY SOPHIA MAXWELL

There are many reasons why people choose to adopt a vegetarian diet: for their own health, out of respect for animals, for the environment, as a statement against human hunger, for religious reasons, ethical reasons, etc. This is not a new concept. Throughout history, many great thinkers and spiritually enlightened people such as Pythagoras, Plato, Leonardo Da Vinci, Mahatma Gandhi, Henry David Thoreau, George Bernard Shaw, and Albert Schweitzer have chosen vegetarianism.

Many have justified the consumption of animals on the grounds that animals are inferior creatures placed on this earth solely for human use. Moreover, people have convinced themselves that animals do not have the same physical and emotional feelings as humans so that they can feel better about exploiting them. This is exactly the same justification that white slaveowners gave for subjugating blacks and using them as slaves. But animals are thinking and feeling creatures who have complex behavioral patterns, and intense bonds to their offspring.

If you think that the animals you are eating spent an idyllic life grazing in the pasture or roaming about the farmyard before a very quick and painless death, think again. The reality is that today's system of animal agriculture treats animals like inanimate objects. Animals raised for food are not bred on farms; they are bred in factories. This type of high-tech agribusiness is flourishing in Nova Scotia and beyond.

John Robbins, the author of two excellent books on vegetarianism, *Diet for a New America* and *May all be Fed*, has visited many of these factory farms. He gives this description of the way chickens are treated:

"Birds are crammed so tightly into warehouses they can hardly move, filthy with their own excrement, showing every evidence of having been driven insane by the stress of such a completely unnatural situation."

All types of food animals are raised in confinement, with just about every natural instinct thwarted. They never feel the warmth of the sun or the grass under their feet, never have a chance to play or develop loving relationships with others of their own kind.

Once the "fattening-up" period is over, the animals are transported to the slaughterhouse. In Canada, more than 447 million food animals are transported to slaughterhouses each year, to feed an industry that slaughters 3,500 food animals every minute of every working day. The animals are transported in appalling conditions, and left without food or water for extended periods of time. As a result of these conditions, millions of animals die before they get to the

slaughterhouse. Once at the slaughterhouse, the animals are supposed to be stunned to unconsciousness before being slaughtered, but these stunning methods don't always work, and many animals move in pain along the disassembly line.

Approximately 50% of Canadian poultry plants do not comply with "humane" stunning and killing methods. The animals which survive the trip to the slaughterhouse are shackled and hung upside down, and electrically stunned in water before being bled. Many of these chickens completely miss the stunning device and are conscious when their throats are cut.

A 1995 study of Canadian livestock plants found that 20% of these plants were also not in compliance with "humane" killing methods. When animals arrive at a "packing plant", they are generally kept in a holding area, then stunned by an electric current, shackled into a conveyor, stabbed and bled to death. When the animals see what is ahead, they become very fearful and panic-stricken. When pigs are slaughtered, workers have to wear ear protection because the noise of their fearful cries is deafening.

When the stunner does not work (which happens quite often), a 1992 investigation by People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals found that, "animals can kick their shackles off while they are being hoisted up on the inclined conveyor, and they actually run panic-stricken in the area of the blood pit until they are trapped and then shot with a stun gun." At other times they do not make it out of their shackles, and are still struggling and moving while they are being hoisted, stuck, bled and skinned. Smaller plants often use less "standardized" killing methods. Recently, the Yarmouth Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals received an eyewitness account of two men on a sheep farm holding down a lamb while repeatedly hitting it on the head with a hammer.

While some people may consider vegetarianism "wacky", there is a great deal of merit to the proposition that ingesting the flesh of these animals whose lives and deaths have been so horrific is definitely unhealthy from a spiritual standpoint. Furthermore, it has been proven in study after study that a vegetarian diet is healthier from a physical standpoint.

"2000 problem" will cost universities millions

BY TONY ROSE

REGINA (CUP) — Canadian universities are facing a ticking time bomb with older computer systems not programmed to handle the turn of the new century.

Although universities have known about the problem for years, most institutions don't yet have the money to replace large systems. At many campuses, library databases, student registration software and administration systems will either malfunction or die on January 1, 2000.

"The 2000 problem is going to cost universities across the country millions of dollars in replacement and upgrading costs," said Jim Clark, a computer science professor at the University of Toronto. "It's a major problem."

Like the transaction systems used by banks and insurance companies, many university sys-

tems and software packages were never designed to deal with the switch from the 20th to the 21st century.

The problem lies in the way that computers and software packages keep track of dates.

Many older computers and software packages are only capable of changing the last two numbers of the year. Come the year 2000 some computers will switch their date to 1900 and some others will simply crash.

At the University of Guelph the entire accounting and budgeting system has to be replaced because the computers and system will not be able to make the switch to 2000.

The computer department in Guelph is employing a test and assess approach to determine what systems and hardware will have to be replaced.

At the University of Regina, the 2000 problem strikes a very important resource. MAX, the computer that runs the library's on-line reference system will not survive the turn of the millennia.

This problem is not isolated to just computers. Any piece of electronic equipment that keeps track of the date such as a fax machine, may also be at risk.

An additional problem exists with utilities like fax machines. Computer systems may be repairable with specially designed patches that will allow the computer to deal with the turn of the millennium. Fax machines, though, will be far more difficult to modify and many may need to be replaced.

There are some systems, however, that were designed to survive the date change.

"[Other systems] were designed to survive 2000 or will survive because software companies are addressing the problem by releasing software patches that will allow the systems to make the switch to 2000," said Art Exner, Director of Computing Services at the University of Regina.

U of R Director of Library and Information Services Bill Maes describes the year 2000 as a "brick wall" for MAX. Replacing the system will cost the university about \$500,000.

The university does not have the money to pay for the new system. However, through a possible one time capital funding grant from the provincial government and a possible loan, the university should be able to replace the system.

Sustain Our Oceans?

BY CAROLYN SHAW

Are you concerned about the governance of the world's oceans? If so, you may be interested in attending a lecture series titled "The UN's Role in Conserving and Sustaining the Oceans" which is scheduled to be held at Saint Mary's University.

This lecture series tackles today's marine issues from a global perspective. Topics on the agenda include the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, sustainable development, freedom of navigation, fisheries conservation, straddling stocks, protection of the marine environment, and the conservation of coastal and marine biodiversity, among many others.

Topics are addressed weekly by guest speakers who are international experts in their fields. Listeners are also given the opportunity to voice their opinions and present questions. The variety of speakers and open discussions will provide a broad objective analysis of each of the topics presented.

The lecture series is also an International Development Studies course at SMU and is part of the Fisheries and Coastal Seminar Series. The course is taught by Evelyne Meltzer, president of Meltzer Research and Consulting, and Adjunct Professor at Saint Mary's University.

Public Lecture Series

October 31 - The International Oceans Commission (IOC) and the Role of Marine Science in Achieving Sustainable Ocean Use.

November 7 - The United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) and the Protection of the Marine Environment.

November 14 - The UN: Sustaining Fishing Communities and the Coastal Zone in the 21st Century.

November 21 - The Biodiversity Convention and Conserving Marine and Coastal Biodiversity

November 28 - The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD): What role does it play in ocean trade and balancing Third World Interests?

All lectures are held in room 201 of the Student Centre at SMU from 1-2:30 P.M.

Professor Meltzer has had extensive experience working on ocean governance and resource management issues. She emphasizes the need for an interdisciplinary examination of the issues. She also encourages students to explore the role of the UN, national governments, non-governmental organizations, and individuals in achieving sustainable ocean use.

As a student in Professor Meltzer's class, one is continuously made aware of the complexity of the problems facing the

world's oceans and the ways in which the international community deals with these issues. This course not only provides one with a great appreciation for the big picture, but also presents a unique look into the socio-economic, legal, and political dimensions of marine issues. Students are invited and strongly encouraged to audit the class discussion following the public lecture. For more info, email meltzer@fox.nstn.ca or cshaw@is2.dal.ca.