101 Reasons Why I’m a Vegetarian

By Pamela Rice
Pig Smarts: Intelligence comparable to primates’

1 There are many subsidies to the meat industry, but the biggest break, by far, comes in the fact that the Animal Welfare Act does not apply to food animals. Consequently, what once at best might have been described as animal husbandry is now nothing more than factory production. With virtually no laws to protect them, cruelty and abuse of farm animals are institutional. If farmers were forced by law to give their animals spacious environments, clean surroundings, fresh air and sunlight—if it weren’t legal to simply administer drugs to animals who would otherwise die from the conditions they live in—cheap fast food could never exist. Ultimately, low prices have kept demand high and allowed the industry to grow. Virtually all of the now over 8 billion animals slaughtered for food in the United States every year are the product of a swift-moving assembly-line system, incorporating dangerous, unprecedented and unsustainable methods of efficiency. Farming in the United States has been allowed over the last generation to grow into a grim corporate monstrosity, the scale of which is hard to comprehend or even to believe.

2 When the Clean Water Act went into effect in 1972, it was decided that agriculture, specifically, should be exempt. According to the EPA, of the 60 percent of rivers and streams considered “impaired,” agricultural runoff is identified as the primary pollution source. Incredibly, five tons of solid manure—not including dead animals, used bedding and residual organic material—is produced annually for every U.S. citizen (see #22).

3 After reviewing 4,500 scientific studies and papers on the relationship between cancer and lifestyle, a team of 15 scientists sponsored by two leading cancer research institutions advised that those interested in reducing their risk of many types of cancer consume a diet that is mostly fruits, vegetables, cereals and legumes. They declared that up to 40 percent of cancers are preventable, with diet, physical activity and body weight appearing to have a measurable bearing on risk. In 1996 the American Cancer Society released similar guidelines, including the recommendation that red meat be excluded entirely from the diet.

4 More than 100 species of marine fish were listed by the World Conservation Union as threatened or endangered in 1996. Once-common species such as cod and halibut are being driven to commercial extinction. Fishers, using modern techniques such as sonar, drift nets, bottom-fishing super trawlers, longlines and floating refrigerated fish-packing factories are, ultimately, not only putting themselves out of business but rapidly destroying ocean ecosystems. The seemingly endless frontier that once was the ocean no longer exists. Early in 1998, 1,600 scientists from around the world declared that the oceans were in peril. They warned that swift action was imperative to prevent irreversible environmental degradation (see #92).

5 The Humane Slaughter Act (HSA) requires that animals be rendered unconscious with one swift application of a stunning device before slaughter. In today’s slaughterhouse this requirement is often not adhered to. For poultry birds (not legally recognized as “animals”), it is never followed. In the case of large mammals, the HSA, for all intents and purposes, is not enforced by the USDA, so the law serves in no other way than to make people think that food animals are protected from cruelty. Conveyor lines are pushed to breakneck speeds, frequently causing cattle, pigs, horses and sheep to be shackled and throat-slit without first being stunned. Animals often are skinned, boiled and butchered alive.

6 The Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine, a group of 4,500 medical doctors, revealed in 1995 that annual health-care costs directly resulting from the nation’s meat-centered diet are between $23.6 billion and $61.4 billion—comparable to costs associated with cigarette smoking.

7 It might be easy on your conscience to consume the flesh of a creature perceived to be stupid, dirty and brutish. It may be surprising to some, however, that pigs are highly intelligent. Ask Professor Stanley Curtis of Pennsylvania State University. He taught several pigs to understand complex relationships between actions and objects in order to play video games. Curtis, along with his colleagues, found pigs to be focused, creative and innovative, equal in intelligence to chimps.

8 The senseless waste of the world’s growing meat-centered diet is illustrated by the following hypothetical statement: “If everyone adopted a vegetarian diet and no food were wasted, current [food] production would theoretically feed 10 billion people, more than the projected population for the year 2050,” according to the Population Reference Bureau, a Washington, D.C.-based research group. Even today, 840 million people are malnourished and nearly 50,000 die of starvation every day.

DEDICATION
“101 Reasons Why I’m a Vegetarian” is dedicated to my husband, Alan Rice, who maintained a constant flow of valuable reference material streaming my way—with which this “mighty convincer” would have been a lot less convincing. —Pamela
Antibiotics: Animal-growth stimulant on the farm

In the United States, farm animals receive 30 times the antibiotics that people do—not so much to treat infection, but to make the animals grow faster on less feed. Though perfectly legal, the practice is, in effect, promoting the selection of antibiotic-resistant bacteria. Some of these bacteria can cause human diseases that physicians are finding difficult to treat. The practice is adding to the general worldwide crisis of drug-resistant disease. Each year, 60,000 Americans die because their medications were ineffective in combating bacterial strains.

Every year, on average, each American becomes sick and 9,000 people die from something they ate. That something was probably of animal origin. The government’s strategy in controlling dangerous bacteria is to inspect meat during processing—something it isn’t doing very well lately (see #24). Except in rare instances, neither the USDA nor the FDA has any regulatory powers on farms where pathogens originate. With the exception of E. coli O157:H7, dangerous bacteria are legally considered “inherent” to raw meat. It’s up to consumers to neutralize pathogens with cooking. Two of the “legal” ones—campylobacter and salmonella—account for 80 percent of illnesses and 75 percent of deaths from meat and poultry. One hamburger can contain the meat of 100 different cows from four different countries. One infected animal can contaminate 16 tons of beef.

The best way to show a link between disease and diet is to look at living populations that eat differently from one another. Any Western doctor who practices in areas of the world where the people subsist primarily on plant foods will quickly notice that his patients are not suffering from the same health problems and deadly diseases that plague the West—diseases such as heart disease, gallstones, appendicitis, varicose veins, hemorrhoids, colorectal cancer, diverticulosis and hiatal hernias.

Jim Mason and Peter Singer write in their book Animal Factories, “Instead of hired hands, the factory farmer employs pumps, fans, switches, slotted or wire floors, and automatic feeding and watering hardware.” As with any other capital-intensive system, managers will be concerned with the “cost of input and volume of output. …The difference is that in animal factories the product is a living creature.”

Eating a plant-based diet guards against disease, first in an active way, with complex carbohydrates, phytochemicals, antioxidants, vitamins, minerals and fiber; then by default: The more plant foods you eat the less room you have for the animal foods that clog arteries with cholesterol, strain kidneys with excess protein and burden the heart with saturated fat. The American Dietetic Association acknowledges a relationship between a vegetarian diet and reduced risk of coronary-artery disease, hypertension, diabetes, obesity and certain types of cancer.

Meat packing is the most dangerous occupation in the nation. Workers may be kicked or bitten by struggling animals who have not been properly stunned. They may be crushed by animals falling off the line. Poultry workers typically make a single movement up to 20,000 times a day and suffer repetitive stress disorders at 16 times the national average. Turnover at plants can be as high as 100 percent per year.

An inspection system based on statistical sampling and microbial testing—Hazard Analysis Critical Control Points (HACCP)—was officially instituted in slaughterhouses in January 1998. Only one in 300 beef carcasses and one in 20,000 chickens will be sampled. As much as 25 percent of broiler chicken and 45 percent of ground chicken is allowed to test positive for salmonella.

Factory hens today are forced to live in “battery” cages stacked in rows, four high, by the thousands. Each will be confined to about 48 square inches of space. (This page is 81 square inches.) After months of confinement, necks will be covered with blisters, wings bare, combs bloody, feet torn. Manure fumes and rotting carcasses will force poultry workers to wear gas masks. When the hens become what the industry matter-of-factly refers to as spent, producers will truck the mutilated birds—often long distances—to slaughter, or they will gas them, or grind them up while still alive, to be used as feed for the next flock.

The Centers for Disease Control estimates that campylobacter infects 70 to 90 percent of all chickens. Campylobacter infections give their human victims cramps, bloody diarrhea and fever and lead to death for up to 800 people in the United States each year. For 1,000 to 2,000 people per year, infection will lead to Guillain-Barré syndrome, a disease that requires intensive care for several weeks. A September 1997 sampling of supermarket chicken in Minnesota found 16 percent infected with an antibiotic-resistant strain of campylobacter.

An English study that compared the diets of 6,115 vegetarians and 5,015 meat eaters for 12 years found that the meatless diet yielded a 40 percent lower risk of cancer and a 20 percent lower risk of dying from any cause. According to William Castelli, M.D., director of the famed Framingham Heart Study, vegetarians outlive meat eaters by 3 to 6 years.
19 Half of every butchered cow and a third of every butchered pig becomes either by-product material or waste. In addition, 920 million animals die on U.S. factory farms before reaching slaughter. What's an industry to do with all this death and gore? Call the renderer, straightaway! Recycling, they call it. Lips are exported to Mexico for taco filling; horns are made into gelatin; other parts are fashioned into everything from drugs to aphrodisiacs. Don't forget cosmetics. The rest is minced, pulverized and boiled down for more products. Some is dried to a powder to be mixed into animal feed. In America it is nearly impossible to be a vegan—one who lives entirely free of animal products.

20 The Animal Welfare Act "excludes...farm animals such as...livestock or poultry used or intended for use as food or fiber...." Some federal laws on the books concern farm animals during transit and slaughter, but these are far from adequate. State statutes fail to make up for the federal-protection void. Essentially, no matter how cruel, if a farming practice is established to be "accepted," "common," "customary" or "normal," anti-cruelty statutes nearly invariably will not apply. Such a legal environment serves to grant carte blanche to the development of still other cruel practices and technologies. In general, the animal cruelty laws that do exist are rarely enforced. Fines for violations are negligibly small, and prosecutors often must demonstrate that a defendant was in a particular mental state when he committed a cruel act in question.

21 Our modern dairy cow lives with an unnaturally swelled and sensitive udder, is likely never to be allowed out of her stall, is milked up to three times a day and is kept pregnant nearly all of her abbreviated life. Her young are usually taken from her almost immediately after birth. A cow living in today's modern milk factory is, as John Robbins puts it in his book *Diet for a New America*, "bred, fed, medicated, inseminated and manipulated to a single purpose—maximum milk production at minimum cost."

22 Waste from livestock in the United States amounts to 130 times the waste produced by people (see #2). Every time it rains excess phosphorus and nitrogen from the urine and feces seep into our waterways causing algae blooms to spread. Another result of agricultural runoff has been the proliferation of dinoflagellates—these being a class of algae that manifest themselves as red tides. In 1991, *Pfiesteria piscicida* was discovered to be a particularly nasty dinoflagellate. It has the ability to ambush its prey by stunning it with a disorienting toxin before sucking its skin off. This nearly indestructible one-celled creature, or "cell from hell," as it soon became known, killed a billion fish within North Carolina's estuaries in the summer of 1995. People who come in contact with the tiny predator often experience memory loss and disorientation as well as grotesque sores on their skin. In 1982 there were 22 known species of harmful dinoflagellates. In 1997 there were over 60.

23 Bulls who are castrated are much easier to handle than those who are not. Their meat is also more marketable. There are three castration methods, two of which shut off the blood supply so that the testicles either are reabsorbed into the animal's body or simply fall away after a couple of weeks. In a third method, the scrotum is cut so that the testicles can be pulled out. Anesthesia is rarely given before any of these procedures, and sometimes operations are botched. One livestock expert advises would-be emasculators, "Sloppy castration means lower profits."

24 By concealing a camera on his body, an employee of a Rapid City, South Dakota, slaugh-
Abundance converted to scarcity

Animal Foods:terhouse was able to obtain a videotape for CBS-TV's 48 Hours. The tape showed how a plant with over 300 employees that processes an average of 50 cows per hour with only four USDA inspectors “keeps the line moving.” It showed workers taking dangerous shortcuts in cleaning up fluid that had broken out of an abscess from a piece of chuck beef—a severe violation of USDA rules, which require an extended clean-up procedure. A USDA veterinarian commented, “I can say from my experience of nine years and in talking to other food inspectors around the country, this probably goes on on a daily basis.”

Breast cancer rates show little reduction from typical levels found in the West until fat consumption is cut back to 10 to 15 percent of calories—a rate virtually impossible to achieve on the standard American meat-centered diet. Americans eat an average of 37 percent of their calorie intake as fat.

Egg laying is an extremely private matter for a hen. A hen will normally seek a secluded place to lay. But the egg industry, which thwarts this and every other instinct embodied in the hen, keeps her crammed for her entire life inside a small wire cage with four to eight other cellmates. Imprisoned here, her body will be robbed of potential offspring she will never see.

Meat production takes abundance, then reduces it to scarcity. On average, you need 16 pounds of grain to produce 1 pound of feedlot beef, 6 pounds of grain to produce 1 pound of pork, 3 pounds of grain to produce one pound of chicken and 5.3 pounds of fish meal to produce 1 pound of farmed fish.

In 1997 a bird virus jumped to a human for the first time in history. By early 1998, the avian influenza strain H5N1 had killed 6 people as well as entire flocks of chickens in Hong Kong. Fearing that the strain might be signaling the beginning of a pandemic of human influenza (see #35), authorities slaughtered and buried 1.3 million poultry-market chickens in the city over a chaotic 3-day period.

As gigantic hog-confine operations more and more dot the nation, issues of odor impose themselves on entire communities. Fumes carry 150 volatile compounds that can become airborne on dust particles. “In the summer, when they start pumping effluent, it wakes you up. You are gagging,” vented one neighbor of a hog factory in a March 1998 New York Times article.

A male calf born to a cow—what does a farmer do with this by-product of the dairy industry? If he is not immediately slaughtered, a newborn calf is likely to be taken to a veal factory. There, he will be locked up in a stall and chained by his neck to prevent him from turning around for his entire life. He will be fed a special diet without iron or roughage. He will be injected with antibiotics and hormones to keep him alive and to make him grow. He will be kept in darkness except for feeding time. The result? A nearly full-grown animal with flesh as tender and milky white as a newborn’s. The beauty of the system from the standpoint of the veal industry is that meat from today’s so-called crate veal still fetches the premium price it always did when such flesh came only from a baby calf—just a lot more of it.

When we calculate the cost of livestock production, top-soil degradation should be part of the equation. Huge amounts of land are required to supply feed grains, forages and pastures. About 54 percent of U.S. pasture land is over-grazed; erosion is the result. About 90 percent of U.S. cropland is losing soil to wind and water erosion at 13 times the sustainable rate.

Polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) are highly toxic chemicals once used widely in a number of industrial applications. Though they are now banned in the United States and other Western countries, their residues have tended to accumulate in the fatty tissue of fish. In the fall of 1996, a study showed that prenatal exposure to PCBs, even relatively small amounts, can impair intellectual development in children. Aside from fish, PCBs can be found in other high-fat foods such as cheese, butter, beef and pork. Women who plan to become pregnant were also advised by the study to avoid foods containing PCBs because the chemicals can remain in their bodies for years.

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It is predicted that farmers will more and more turn to another low-cost and virtually unregulated form of feedstuff: chicken manure. It’s not illegal, and yes, animals will grow eating excrement. According to the FDA, the practice is safe if the feces are allowed, during composting, to reach high enough temperatures that harmful bacteria are destroyed. The problem is, farmers rarely take all the necessary steps in the composting process.

When researchers reviewed 500 medical articles on cows’ milk, they found that not one characterized the bovine secretion as an “excellent food, free of side effects.” Two-thirds of the human population, in fact, experiences sensitivity to milk sugar. U.S. milk is so imbued with drug residues, some say consumers should probably be purchasing it by prescription (see #46).

Dr. Benjamin Spock said that cows’ milk “causes internal blood loss, allergies and indigestion and contributes to some cases of childhood diabetes.” Dr. Spock even linked cows’ milk to anemia in babies.

Because of animal agriculture, the world sees a global pandemic of influenza three or four times per century. Ducks are often the original incubators for a new subtype. In turn, pigs are periodically able to act as hosts for both the avian viruses as well as human ones. Within the pigs’ lungs, the transspecies viruses swap genetic material, creating a new strain that may be passed back to humans. Historically, the most fertile place for this to happen has been south China, where billions of pigs, domesticated ducks and people all live in close proximity to one another.

Beef cattle are best suited to moist climates, like those of Europe, where they evolved. But in the United States, they are concentrated in the West on the driest land. Native grasses long ago have been overrun by heartier foreign varieties brought here on bovine hooves. Grazing usually takes place along fragile riparian zones—the strips of land along rivers and streams where wild species of plants and animals concentrate and regenerate. These delicate ecosystems, which serve as natural purifiers of the water, are summarily trampled flat and contaminated by manure.

Adult-onset diabetes is irrefutably linked to fat in the diet. Researchers have found that when diabetics adhere to a low-fat, high-fiber, complex-carbohydrate (vegetarian) diet they are often able to reduce or even eliminate their insulin dosages. Tragically, as people around the world increasingly adopt meat-based diets, their incidences of this disease—which leads to aggressive atherosclerosis, gangrene, blindness and kidney failure—rise dramatically.

After years of selective breeding and with the help of modern milking practices, a cow today is robbed of many times the milk her calf would take. The strain on her body is equivalent to what a human would experience jogging six hours per day. On the farm of yesteryear, “Bessie” might have lived 20 years. Today, once her milk-producing abilities diminish, after about four years, she will be slaughtered and ground to hamburger. In February 1994, the Monsanto company inflicted yet another horror on our friend: a genetically engineered bovine hormone that boosts her milk production by as much as 40 percent. The dairy industry, which was already awash in excess milk (thanks to government handouts), is now begging for price supports.

U.S. subsidies to ranchers on public lands cost American taxpayers about $500 million annually. To eliminate predators to livestock—real or anticipated—one program uses steel-jaw leghold traps, firearms, cyanide and poison gas to exterminate thousands of black bears, mountain lions, bob-
cats, foxes and coyotes every year.

40 Though osteoporosis is a disease of calcium deficiency, it is not one of low calcium intake. One cause of the bone disorder is too much protein in the diet. Excess protein can leach calcium from the bones. Famed diet innovator Nathan Pritikin has noted that African Bantu women on low-protein diets take in a third of U.S.-recommended daily allowances of calcium. “They bear nine children during their lifetime and breast-feed them for two years. They never have calcium deficiency and never break a bone.” The typical meat-eating American is eating about five times as much protein as needed.

41 In 1978, the number of USDA meat inspectors was 12,000 (see #70). Today, 7,500 are employed to cover 6,500 private meat and poultry plants. Inspectors have about 2 seconds to examine a poultry carcass and 30 seconds to examine an entire cow. A word to the wise: Cook your meat thoroughly...to neutralize those maggots, abscesses and animal diseases gettin’ past the watch.

42 An egg producer may consider not disposing of his hens, even though their egg-laying abilities have run their course. He knows that he can get egg production to resume as before by inducing the birds to molt via a forced starvation—up to 14 days. No U.S. law prevents this cruel practice.

43 According to the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, poultry processors have the worst record for not allowing their employees to use the toilet freely on the job. In March 1998, the agency announced that the abuses were so bad that it would have to implement explicit directives to protect workers.

44 In any factory-farm operation today, a percentage of the animals will be sick or crippled. The industry calls them “downers.” Federal law does not protect them in any way. Downers are dealt with conveniently. Veterinary care is not wasted on them. If unable to walk, a downer will often be dragged by chain or pushed with a tractor or forklift to slaughter. These animals may be left to starve or freeze to death. The downer phenomenon would be drastically reduced if stockyards refused to receive them.

45 A single hog factory in Milford, Utah, is expected to house an unfathomable 2.5 million hogs by 2000. Since hogs produce a whopping 32 times their own weight in excrement per year, waste storage and treatment were paramount concerns for the facility’s planners. The cool, dry Utah weather was at first considered ideal for keeping odor to a minimum. Early on, however, it was found that such a climate actually works to slow bacterial growth vital to the process of waste decomposition. Expansion at the facility continues nonetheless.

46 To ward off under infections, farmers administer antibiotics to their cows (see #9). The U.S. government allows 80 different types to appear in specified concentrations in the final product and claims that less than 1 percent of the country’s milk yield is dumped for violation limits. The problem is, the government tests for only four of the antibiotics.

47 If you like the idea of being welcome at the places where your food is produced, don’t count on your local poultry grower to allow you to see his birds any time soon. Just barely holding on to life in their drugged-up, overbred and chronically immunodeficient state, chickens and turkeys in today’s factory systems must be carefully segregated from the possibility of infection being brought in from the outside. If even slightly lax in applying rigorous measures of “biosecurity,” farmers over wide geographic regions can be forced by a mass outbreak to destroy millions of birds at a time.

48 Animal feces and urine, in today’s quantities, need to be categorized as hazardous industrial waste because of the bacteria, wormy parasites and viruses they carry. Fumes can be so potent, and even explosive, that a plume can kill a man on the spot. Still, the most common method of storage for animal waste is an open-air cesspool (see #69).

49 Animal foods are the main reason for foodborne illness. When produce or drinking water are the direct cause, the contamination is usually found to have originated with animal waste (see #2). Due to faster line speeds at slaughterhouses today (see #70), fecal matter is getting on carcasses a lot more often. In 1984, 2,000 deaths were caused by something a person ate. Only ten years later, that number rose to 9,000. A mere 1 to 10 microbes of E. coli O157:H7 in a hamburger can kill a child.

50 One of the most important things you can eat has no nutrient value whatsoever: fiber. Plant foods, grains in particular, are replete with it. Animal muscle has next to none, which is why those with meat-based diets have such high incidences of colon cancer. Early fiber researcher Denis Burkitt, M.D., observed: “Of all cancers, colon cancer is the one which is most characteristic of modern Western culture.”

51 In 1991 the Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine came out with the New
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Four Food Groups. They are: fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and legumes (beans and peas). Meat and dairy are termed “optional,” not considered necessary for good health.

52 Animal agriculture routinely mutilates farm animals for its own convenience. Animals are branded or ear-notched for identification. They are debeaked or tail-docked to reduce the effects of stressed-out violence between them. Calves and piglets are castrated for other economic reasons (see #23). And, perhaps the most abhorrent, boar bashing is also utilized. Justification? Boars with broken noses are less likely to fight.

53 A male chick born with the genes of an egg-laying hen is an annoying by-product to the industry. Not biologically worthy of becoming a broiler, and with no law to protect him, he will be disposed of in the least expensive way that hatching operations can devise. Most commonly, the industry will throw him into a bag with a thousand other male chicks to slowly die by suffocation.

54 Though believed to be a panacea for our time, fish farming, or aquaculture, is even more disruptive to the environment than fishing the seas. The construction of pens along shorelines is a major reason for the decimation of mangrove forests, those places where fish reproduce. Some fish will not breed in captivity, so fish farmers must acquire stock from the wild. These species will have less chance to replenish their numbers. Farmed fish often escape into the wild, corrupting the genetic purity of wild species and spreading disease at the same time. Shrimp are fed on a mashed-up aquatic protein mix. So-called biomass fishing extracts fish indiscriminately. The fish that are caught may be endangered or may be the food on which endangered fish live. Huge amounts of “nutrient” pollution emanate from fish farms, just as with all intensive animal agriculture.

55 The continued adoption of high-fat diets in newly affluent nations around the globe threatens to wreak financial disaster on fragile developing economies, according to a February 1998 study published in an American Heart Association journal. Without treatment infrastructures in place, the inevitable need for high-tech therapies (to combat the diseases of a rich diet) threatens to strain national coffers vital for economic growth.

56 An early ’90s EPA report found that 95 percent of human exposure to dioxin, a known carcinogen, comes from consuming red meat, fish and dairy products. Later, chicken and eggs were added to the list. Dioxin builds cumulatively in fatty tissue. The only way to flush it out is through rigorous fasting or via lactation. When a batch of dioxin-contaminated soybean feed entered the food chain in 1997, the FDA set limits on concentration at one part per trillion. If all animal foods were held to this standard, it is likely that many would not be cleared for human consumption.

57 Heart disease does not have to be a death sentence or mean a life of cholesterol-lowering drugs and bypass surgery. By prescribing a vegetarian diet, regular exercise and spiritual nourishment for his heart patients, Dean Ornish, M.D., proved that the progression of this number-one killer can be halted and even reversed.

58 A major part of the horror inside a factory farm today is the noise. Hog-factory workers will wear ear protection against the din of squealing animals banging against
their metal cages. To hear what this sounds like, call 919-549-5100 x467.

59 The efficient mass production of animal bodies for gustatory purposes is fast becoming a widespread and lucrative end for genetic engineering and cloning. These virtually unpoliceable technologies threaten to usher in a brave new feedlot of animal monoculture and cruelty. The future will bring us perfect fat-to-lean-ratio designer pigs, genetically engineered fast-growing fish, pre-vaccinated chickens, and more super-milk-producing cows. Josef Mengele would be impressed.

60 In 1982 hamburger sickness—or E. coli O157:H7 poisoning—was rare. Today, up to 5 percent of cows harbor the deadly bug. Every year as many as 20,000 Americans get sick from E. coli contamination and 500 die from it. Milder symptoms may range from diarrhea and abdominal cramps to red-blood-cell destruction. Those who survive a more serious bout may become blind, suffer from seizures, kidney failure or paralysis or need to have some or all of their bowels removed.

61 From the animal-feed breadbasket of the nation’s Midwest, massive amounts of fertilizer, pesticides and manure travel down the Mississippi River till they end up in the Gulf of Mexico. The high-nutrient content of the waste causes an eco-chain reaction that ultimately ends with microscopic organisms robbing the bottom of the ocean of oxygen. Any animal living there will have to relocate or suffocate and die. The phenomenon is known as hypoxia. Scientists have dubbed affected areas “dead zones.” The gulf’s dead zone in 1997 covered an area the size of Hawaii.

62 In what is still the most comprehensive study of diet and lifestyle ever made, the China Project found that animal protein is linked to chronic disease. The findings from this grand epidemiological study are especially compelling because the data collected allow meaningful comparisons between populations with similar genetic backgrounds yet with nonhomogeneous diets and lifestyles.

63 One by one we’re hearing of people downed by the very mysterious new-variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease, a brain-eating affliction that experts say is a human version of bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE), or mad-cow disease. Those unlucky 23 Britons and 1 Frenchman who contracted it since 1986 probably became infected after eating beef from cows that had been fed brain and nerve tissue of scrapie-infected sheep. Death from the disease is inevitable, often prolonged and definitely hideous. Recent evidence confirming the transspecies link gives credence to the notion that the disease, which has a 15- to 20-year incubation period, may someday become much more widespread. Though feeding ruminant remains back to ruminants was made illegal in the United States in August 1997, the imprudent practice of recycling animal parts back to livestock has been going on for decades. It is not unreasonable to believe that it could be only a matter of time before America suffers its own version of the English saga, which saw over 170,000 cattle infected with mad-cow disease. That will be something to worry about if it comes. Until then, it may be a good idea to remember that over 2,600 people in the United States die from cardiovascular disease every day. Beef eating has plenty to do with it, too—there’s no mystery about that.

64 Though considered more healthful than beef, fish is still a high-fat, high-calorie, fiberless food imbued with artery-clogging cholesterol. It is concentrated with protein (see #62), so it raises the risk of osteoporosis and kidney problems and it often is laden with dangerous toxins absorbed from polluted environments (see #32). In 1994, the EPA issued more than 1,000 warnings against eating fish from chemically contaminated waters.

65 The 1971 food-issue classic Diet for a Small Planet introduced to the world the fine art of “protein combining.” The rigors of such food alchemy, imagined or otherwise, had the unfortunate effect of keeping many people away from the vegetarian lifestyle. “There is little danger of protein deficiency in a plant-food diet,” author Frances Moore Lappé has emphatically stated. The only exceptions, she notes, are those unlikely diets consisting strictly of fruits, junk food or certain tubers.

66 In today’s slaughterhouse the strategy is to pump out animal flesh the cheapest way pos-
Protein Dilemma: Don’t worry; go vegetarian

sible and then worry about hygiene later. Antidotes to the consequences of fast and dirty operations come in many forms and have become an industry in and of themselves. Today we have acidic-solution carcass misting, alkaline-solution sprays, steam/vacuum technology, high-temperature carcass washes, steam pasteurization, chlorine sprays and food irradiation. The industry also awaits the “promise” of what it calls probiotics, technologies that in various ways will eliminate pathogens from the intestinal tracts of animals—pathogens that were incubated by factory farming in the first place.

67. In 1995, a USDA study found that “greater than 99 percent of broiler carcasses had detectable E. coli.” Though in most cases the E. coli strain was not the dangerous one (O157:H7), the finding points to the unsavory fact that nearly all chicken comes in contact with fecal matter some time during processing.

68. Today the poultry industry is a vertically integrated oligopoly, meaning that a few giant chicken companies control production from chick hatching to grocery-store delivery. Squeezed into the arrangement is the contract grower. The big company owns the birds; the grower supplies the labor and the factory confinement hardware. The situation often appears good to the grower when she signs her first contract and goes into debt by several hundred thousand dollars. It’s not long before she finds that the multi-billion-dollar corporation she has contracted with is now calling all the shots and that the debt she incurred has, in essence, reduced her to little better than indentured servitude.

69. The passage of local laws favoring massive corporate pork operations in North Carolina recently propelled the state into the number-two spot in national hog production. In terms of sewage, twice the human population of New York City might as well have moved to North Carolina. University studies estimate that half of the some 2,500 open hog-manure cesspools (euphemistically termed “lagoons”), now needed as part of hog production there, are leaking contaminants such as nitrate (a chemical linked to blue-baby syndrome) into the groundwater. In the summer of 1995, at least five lagoons broke open (see #48) letting loose tens of millions of gallons of hog urine and feces into rivers and onto neighboring farmland. No mechanical method of retrieval exists to clean contaminants from groundwater; only nature is able to purify things again. And that can take generations.

70. The Reagan and Bush administrations were lax in enforcing antitrust laws. Consequently, between 1984 and 1994 a third of U.S. packinghouses went out of business. A more powerful industry was able to get faster kill speeds approved even while the number of line employees was being reduced. Meat and poultry safety has been suffering ever since. Early in 1998, it was found that 138,593 “critical” citations were made by USDA regulators against the country’s 6,400 processing plants in 1996 alone. Each infraction cited had the potential to sicken consumers if the food had been distributed. Due to loopholes in the law, plants were almost always allowed to continue operating.

71. Turkeys today have been selectively bred to such an extent that their huge breasts make it impossible for them to accomplish the sex act on their own. The industry must artificially inseminate them. The job is nearly as dehumanizing for the workers—who must work rapidly for long hours and low wages—as it is deplorable for the tortured breeder birds, who are essentially raped once or twice a
Carnivore Conflicts: Threats to world peace

week for 12 to 16 months until slaughter.

72 Nearly all commercial chick-
ens die during bleed-out af-
ter a circular blade severs their
necks. They are not humanely ren-
dered unconscious by the electrifi-
cated bath in which their heads are
first plunged. Chicken processors
keep voltages there only high
enough to immobilize any inconve-
nient flailing. Many birds miss both
the low-voltage stunning and
throat slitting. Every day 30,000 to
60,000 broiler chickens die in the
scald tank that follows the bleed-
out chamber.

73 Legally, the term “free-
range” is virtually mean-
ingless. The federal government has
only the vague requirement that
the animals from which such meat
is derived have access to the out-
doors. This could mean one small
opening for thousands of birds. There is nothing to prevent an an-
imal so designated from being mu-
tilated, crowded, drugged, trans-
ported and slaughtered just like any
other factory-farmed animal. In
March 1998, Consumer Reports
found free-range poultry actually
more contaminated with salmon-
ella and campylobacter than ordi-
nary poultry.

74 When manure from an egg
farm holding over 4 million
hens began attracting flies that in-
fested an entire town in Ohio, a
consulting entomologist brought in
beetles. Sure enough, the flies be-
came less of a problem after the
beetles burrowed holes through the
manure allowing it to dry. Unfortu-
nately, soon it was the beetles that
began infesting the town.

75 The tiny, mostly impover-
ished nation of Albania re-
cently became the setting for an
epidemiological study that com-
pared the diets of two segments of
its population. One segment sub-
sists on foods that are mostly of
animal origin; the other enjoys what
is today termed the Mediterranean
diet, which consists mainly of fresh
fruits and vegetables, cereals and
olive oil. Death rates were found to
be notably higher in the segment
that primarily consumed animal
foods. The researchers announced
that the study can well serve as a
model for health-policy planners
everywhere.

76 As “carnivore” conflicts be-
come more global, disputes
will continue to regularly reach the
highest levels of world govern-
ments. If it isn’t USDA secretary
Dan Glickman prodding the Euro-
pean Union to accept U.S.-hor-
mone-injected beef, it’s Vice Presi-
dent Al Gore involving himself
with international disputes about
poultry processing. In July 1997, a
fishing dispute between Canada
and the United States erupted into
an all-out crisis when a flotilla of
Canadian fishing boats marooned
an Alaskan ferry for three days.
The dispute was over salmon
rights. Even President Clinton
worked to quell the discord. The
United Nations says that over 100
countries today are embroiled in
fishing disputes.

77 The population explosion
should not be thought of ex-
clusively in terms of people—not
when the combined weight of the
world’s 1.3 billion domesticated
cattle exceeds that of the entire hu-
man population. Cattle disrupt
ecosystems over half the world’s
land mass. In the last half century,
alone, more than 60 percent of the
world’s rangelands have been dam-
aged by overgrazing, the most per-
vasive cause of desertification.

78 The iron in animal foods is
more readily absorbed than
the iron in plant foods. Once this
was thought to be an advantage of
meat, but researchers have found
that just as with protein you can get
too much of a good thing. Excess
iron can be a catalyst in the forma-
tion of free radicals.* Overloading
on it can lead to increased risk for
cancer and cirrhosis of the liver,
heart disease, arthritis, diabetes and
infertility. A vegetarian is likely to
have safer levels of stored iron.

79 Animal foods are high in
sodium, which causes the
blood to retain water. They also
cause plaque to build up in the ar-
terries, narrowing the flow area for
blood. Combine these phenomena
and you have a recipe for a disease
that afflicts about 30 million Amer-
icans: high blood pressure. You can
take calcium channel blockers and
diuretics to control it, but you risk
losing intellectual function if you
do, studies warn.

80 After four decades of steady
growth in worldwide grain
harvests, the so-called Green Rev-
olution appears to have come to an
abrupt end. Starting in 1990, aver-
age growth rates have slowed to
less than a sixth of those revolu-
tion-worthy levels. Unfortunately,
this is just about the time when the
world needs to produce more
grain than ever. Human popula-
tions (mostly in developing na-
tions) are exploding, and many of
the new mouths are clamoring for
meat—a disastrous combination.
Inefficiencies in food production
are not what the world needs, but
that’s exactly what animal agricul-
ture gives us (see #27). To make
matters worse, as worldwide de-
mand for meat increases, the envi-
ronmental degradation caused by
animal agriculture will grow more
catastrophic, further slowing grain
production. Grain prices will rise
as carryover stocks diminish. In
the near term, higher prices will

* Free radicals are unstable molecules that will
attack other molecules, setting off a chain re-
action of cellular destruction.
Heart Disease, Stroke: Scourges of the West

hardly be noticed by the haves of the world. But for those 1.2 billion people whose daily income is about $1 a day and who spend 70 percent of it on food, price increases for grain will become a threat to survival.

Food animals are transported in all weather. When it is brutally cold, animals may freeze right to the sides of trucks or become frozen in the urine and feces that build up on truck floors. In hot weather, heat stress will kill many. Losses, however, are figured into the cost of doing business. According to swine specialist Kenneth B. Kephart, “Even with a zero death rate that might be associated with providing more space on a truck, the hogs that we save would not be enough to pay for the increased transportation costs of hauling fewer hogs on a load.”

When meat, fish or poultry are barbecued, dripped fat over the open flame sends up plumes of smoke that coat the food with carcinogens. Other unhealthy chemicals are created just by extended cooking times. Chemists are telling meat eaters today to keep those grill times down. Even environmentalists are saying that restaurant grilling is a major source of soot and smog. But you can’t not cook your meat! How else are you going to kill all of those deadly bacteria?

The storybook image of the American farmer is mostly a thing of the past. Today the person who actually gets close to farm animals is just a hired hand of agribusiness. In the broiler or layer shed of tens of thousands of birds, for instance, the main job to attend to is culling dead birds from cages. Through careful calculations, conditions are maintained intense enough to keep costs down, but not so intense that mortality rates cut into profits.

Due to a growing specialization in the several stages of cattle production and to producers seeking the best price at every step of the process, your hamburger may have come from a steer who suffered the brutality of transport between Mexico and the United States two or three times. The USDA and the financial community hail this back-and-forth animal shuffling as a development that shows how the various “cattle sectors” can “complement” one another through “free trade.” It’s not likely that the steers who suffer these junkets share the zeal of the industry analysts.

Clog up your arteries with a diet loaded with saturated animal fat year after year and you’re putting yourself at risk for the great killers of the Western world: heart attack and stroke. Of course you can always opt to forestall the inevitable with repeated angioplasty—a $16,000 medical procedure done with a balloon-tipped catheter that flattens plaque against artery walls, thus opening up passageways for blood flow. But a vegetarian diet—along with regular exercise—can have the same effect and clear out the plaque too.

Under current fish-inspection rules, the nation’s 6,000 fish-processing plants are visited by government inspectors at most once a year and as little as once every three years, at which time only a few samples may be taken for later evaluation. Individual fish are not inspected by any U.S. agency. Though every fish processor is required to keep ongoing records of safety procedures specific to its operation, no regulations whatsoever pertain to the 100,000 fishing vessels that bring seafood to market.

Fishing can do a lot more than just make a species extinct; it can strip an ecosystem of a vital component. Oyster beds, for instance, function like giant, natural water-filtration systems in the Chesapeake Bay. Once abundant, oyster harvests have dwindled to 1 percent of 19th-century numbers. Today it takes more than a year for the mollusks to filter the water in the bay. A hundred years ago the process would have taken place in a week.

As hog feces and urine collect in giant cesspools around factory farms, the sludge is broken down naturally by bacterial digestion. Hazardous nitrogen is eliminated, but in the process it is converted into ammonia gas. With subsequent rainfalls, the ammonia is returned to the earth, polluting rivers and streams.

In central California, 1,600 dairies produce the feces and urine of a city of 21 million people. Not enough surrounding land is available to absorb it all. In July 1997, when the San Francisco Chronicle reported that the surplus cow sludge was polluting local waterways, only one state official was employed to track it all down. Once he located a source, frequently far upstream, he often discovered that a drainage ditch had deliberately been built. Violation notices that he wrote up were often simply ignored. In one case that made it to court, the judge imposed a relatively minuscule fine of $10,000. The dairy was soon polluting again. The deputy district attorney in the area commented that the case was only the tip of the iceberg.

The second leading cause of cancer death among men—prostate cancer—is not just an in-
Carcass Contamination: Fecal fried chicken

94 *Salmonella DT104* is a particularly infectious pathogen that originated in European cows in the late '80s. From cows, it spread to other livestock, household pets, wild animals and eventually to people. You identify it by the antibiotics to which it is resistant—at present, five of them. Sickness from it can be deadly. For the moment, only one class of antibiotics—fluoroquinolones—will usually kill it, but even these seem to be losing their effectiveness. It's becoming clearer every day that the only way to fight pathogens is to outlaw the filthy, squalid conditions of factory farms as well as the practice of administering antibiotics to farm animals (see #9).

95 In order to raise grain-fed cattle, farmers in midwestern and western states draw water from aquifers. Rainfall that would normally replenish these natural underground lakes often cannot keep pace. Texas has lost 14 percent of its irrigated area since 1980 because of aquifer depletion.

96 A USDA microbiologist declared in a *Time* magazine story on processed poultry that “the final product is no different than if you stuck it in the toilet and ate it.” No wonder: A 1978 USDA rule allows poultry processors to wash contaminated birds rather than discard them or cut away affected parts. “Wash,” as interpreted by the poultry industry, means “communal dunk” in what amounts to a virtual fecal soup that ensures salmonella cross-contamination.

97 To produce foie gras, male ducks are force-fed six to seven pounds of grain three times a day with an air-driven feeder tube. This torturous process goes on for 28 days until the ducks’ livers, from which the pâté is made, bloat to six to 12 times their normal size. About 10 percent of the ducks don't make it to slaughter. They die when their stomachs burst.

98 The largest egg producer in the midwest—Buckeye Egg Farm—houses 7.1 million hens, who produce 4.5 million eggs every day out of two factories. The company, which was fined nearly $2 zillion for labor and environmental violations in 1997, actually plans to increase production. With four new facilities in the works, the total number of hens will come to 15 million within a 20-mile radius.

99 In 1995, 683,000 people died prematurely as a result of atherosclerosis-related diseases. In other words, they died largely as a result of their meat-eating ways. This figure represents 29 percent of all deaths for that year.

100 A heat wave in July 1995 killed about 4 million chickens east of the Chesapeake Bay on the Delmarva Peninsula in a single weekend. (Unofficial counts were as high as 10 million.) Such catastrophic losses are not uncommon, especially in southern states, though you may not always hear about them. No farmer is compelled to report when they happen, even though the mounds of dead birds can be an environmental hazard. If local soil is sandy, as it is in the Delmarva region, burying carcasses (the cheapest, most common solution) will contaminate the groundwater, no matter how carefully it is done.

101 A symposium of scientists predicted in 1995 that energy shortages, exhausted land, scarce water and a doubling population will impose more of a plant-based diet onto America’s dinner tables by 2050. They acknowledged that this diet, borne of scarcity, would “actually be a healthier one.” Surely, the sooner we all get used to it the better!
20. Beyond the Law" (see #1), pp. 3–12.  
26. Prisoned Chickens (see #5), pp. 54–55.  
34. "Power of Your Plate" (see #10), p. 352.  
40. "A Sea of Trouble" (see #5), p. 122.  
41. "A Sea of Trouble" (see #5), pp. 157–158, 189, 196.  
42. "Prisoned Chickens" (see #5), pp. 54–55.  
43. "Power of Your Plate" (see #10), p. 352.  
45. "A Sea of Trouble" (see #5), pp. 74–75.  
46. "Outbreak" (see #10), pp. 3–12.  
55. "A Sea of Trouble" (see #5), pp. 74–75.  
56. "Outbreak" (see #10), pp. 3–12.  
The VIVA VEGIE SOCIETY is a nonprofit, 501(c)3 charitable organization dedicated to public education about vegetarianism. When the group was formed in 1991, its sole objective was vegetarian street advocacy—reaching out to New York City pedestrians with the group’s hallmark publication, “101 Reasons Why I’m a Vegetarian.” Then as now, founder Pamela Rice would wear a signboard—created by her sister, Julia Fauci—which reads “Ask Me Why I’m a Vegetarian.” In 1992, VivaVegie outreach expanded to include a newsletter to a paid membership. The VivaVine continues to publish five times a year.

In 1997, member Janet Bloor donated a “pea pod” costume to the group. Penelo Pea Pod quickly proved to be a spectacular success in drawing interest from pedestrians. Our grande dame of vegetableland has become an invaluable aid for VivaVegie activists distributing vegetarian literature.

In the spring of 1994, VivaVegie commissioned the construction of a full-size replica of a veal crate. First appearing on Mother’s Day, 1994, the crate has been a powerful tool in building awareness about cruelty in today’s food-animal production.

In the fall of 1993, the VivaVegie Society sent “101 Reasons Why I’m a Vegetarian” to every member of the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives. Including the current edition you now hold in your hand, 65,000 copies of the “mighty convincer” exist in print.

VivaVegie makes annual appearances at the Greenwich Village Halloween Parade, the Easter Parade on Fifth Avenue and Nathan’s Fourth of July hot-dog-eating contest at Coney Island. Other events where the group projects its message include Earth Day, Veal Ban Day, World Vegetarian Day, the Great American Meat-Out, the Farm Sanctuary Walk for Farm Animals and the Mermaid Parade. Advocates also regularly participate in street fairs or go out on short notice setting up a table with pro-vegetarian literature for no special occasion at all.

Over the years, the VivaVegie Society has regularly enjoyed coverage of its street activism via major news organizations, including CNN, The New York Times, CBS-Radio and New York One, as well as other media outlets too numerous to mention.

The founder of the VIVA VEGIE SOCIETY, author of “101 Reasons Why I’m a Vegetarian” and VivaVine publisher, Pamela Rice,* has lectured to university and high school audiences as well as to vegetarian groups. She emceed Big Apple Vegetarians’ awards dinner in December 1994 and its Vegan Jeopardy in February 1996. Ms. Rice was also the cocurator of a first-of-its-kind vegetarian art show at Sunnen Gallery in the SoHo district of New York City in the spring of 1995. She is available to speak upon request.

Vegetarian Center of New York City

With the aid of nonprofit status, which was obtained in 1997, the VivaVegie Society was able to open the Vegetarian Center of New York City in March 1999. The Center serves the vegetarian community as a clearinghouse for information on vegan products, local restaurants and other groups. It functions as a meeting place, an archive, a research room and a news bureau. VivaVegie invites you to support the Center with your volunteer help and financial contributions.

*Also known as Pamela Teisler.

VivaVegie Society, Inc.
P.O. Box 294
Prince Street Station
New York, NY 10012
http://www.earthbase.org/vivavegie/

Call 212/591-2914 to hear a hotline message from the VivaVegie Society, or to make a pledge to the Vegetarian Center of New York City.

Find a useful order form on the second page of the references (back of this page).