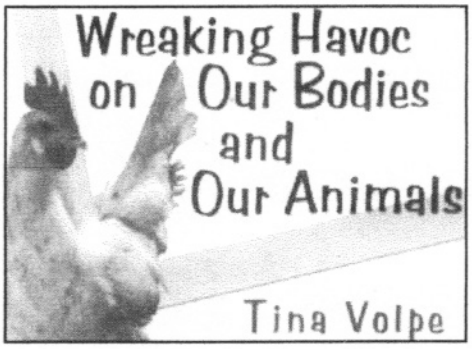
Book Review: The Fast Food Craze: Wreaking Havoc on Our Bodies and Our Animals



Book reviewed by Laura Bucci

I'm embarrassed to say that even though I've been a vegetarian for 16 years, I was ignorant of the full extent of animal cruelty within agribusiness. But at only 137 pages, The Fast Food Craze allowed me to quickly grasp the current state of US agribusiness and how it affects our health, farm animals' health and their lives. Tina Volpe offers a good introduction to the business and through this presents a case for vegetarianism.

The Fast Food Craze starts by taking the appeal out of fast food by revealing some of the violations of the fast food giants. These range from misleading advertising about health benefits, to using genetically altered ingredients, to human rights violations, and animal cruelty. An undercover investigation of one of Kentucky Fried Chicken's slaughterhouses that ironically won "Supplier of the Year" revealed severe animal cruelty, where workers "ripped the animals' beaks off", "twisted their heads off", and "squeezed their bodies so hard that the birds expelled feces."

Volpe clearly shows that with profits as its priority, agribusiness ignores the connection between animal health and human health. And while government and state agencies agree that consumers should be informed of the risks, they may not always publish and enforce recommendations because of their pro-business stance. In any case, the powerful meat industry is reluctant to adopt recommendations by the FDA even if it means that prion-infected animals can be fed to other animals destined for the dinner plate.

We have lost touch with farm animals and perhaps that's partly why compassion is lacking. I was surprised to read that "chickens are as smart as mammals, including some primates," piglets will learn their names and respond when called, and cows "exhibit affection and loyalty to humans". Each of these animals is discussed in its own chapter, offering interesting information about the animal's capabilities. Volpe attempts to elicit compassion by showing us the human element, offering other people's personal stories of farm animal rescues, and then contrasting these with the hard and cruel facts of farm animals lives.

Volpe's tone alternates from purely factual to emotional. Her compassionate tone might move some readers, "...baby cows...cry out in the night, so lost, confused and lonely because they were ripped immediately from their mother's loving care, so that the human race can drink her milk, the milk that was intended for that baby cow. Are we insane? Or, is America just living in the darkest of ages?". However, I favoured the parts of the book that offered objective accounts and analyses and were devoid of religious and emotional overtones.

A chapter on quotes from well-known names, and a list of famous vegetarians and vegans in the appendix are dubious additions to this small book. Isn't this a shallow approach to any issue? More relevant information in the appendix includes Food-borne illnesses, Fats and Cholesterol, websites, magazines, cookbooks, and references.

What are we to do? Volpe asks. Vegetarianism is offered as a solution. Although I doubt it takes just one book to change a meat eater's habits, the information in this book did prompt me to ask questions and consider veganism. Perhaps presenting other options, though, such as responsible shopping and more humane food options, might further capture the attention of the general public.

Low-fat, vegan diet beneficial for Type 2 diabetes

Canadian and US researchers recently discovered postive and dramatic improvements in people diagnosed with Type 2 diabetes who switched from oral medications to a vegan diet. Type 2 diabetes is linked to blindness and kidney failure and can cause fatal heart disease.

Normally, people living with Type 2 diabetes are subjected to a strict regimen of oral medications and a carefully monitored diet that dictates calorie intake and carbohydrate consumption. However, in the study, the oral medicatons and no-carb diet were replaced with a vegan diet. After 22 weeks, subjects on the vegan diet lost almost twice as much weight as those on the traditional regimen, and reduced both their cholesterol and blood sugar.

The study was published in the August edition of Diabetes Care, a journal of the American Diabetes Association.

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