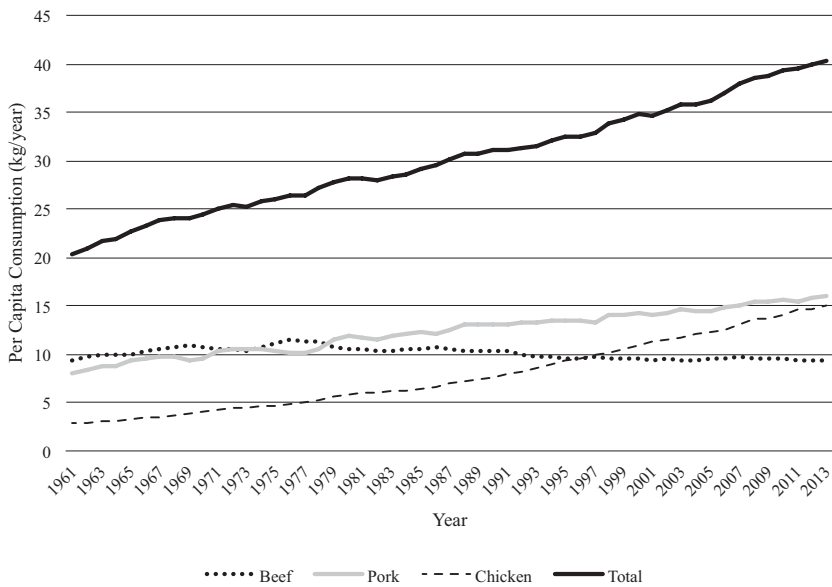


The Global Meat Industry, 1960–2016

Several dimensions of the global meat industry are important to consider: production, consumption, economic value, animals consumed, and corporate concentration, among others. We will look briefly at these dimensions since they reveal how much the industry has grown, expanded and shifted geographically, and gained in its economic significance to the broader world economy. While some scholars have recently examined changes in the global diet and the emergence of the “neoliberal diet” (Otero 2018), this research has tended to focus on the increased global consumption of oils, sugars, and processed foods. Although meat has not received as much attention in this evolving global diet, rising meat consumption should undoubtedly be part of discussions of the changing global diet (Weis 2013a). This is clear when we look at how these dimensions of the global meat industry—consumption, production, and total value—have changed over the past five decades.

Global meat consumption and production have risen sharply and steadily since 1960. Turning to consumption first, figure 1.1 shows the growth in global per capita meat consumption from 1961 to 2013. Annual global per capita meat consumption was 20 kg in 1961, and it climbed steadily over the next five decades. By 1988, per capita meat consumption had risen by 50 percent to 30 kg/year. And in 2013, it reached 40 kg/year—double the per capita meat consumption in 1961. This increase in global consumption was centered on pigs and chickens, as per capita beef consumption actually declined during this period from 11.5 kg/capita in 1976 to 9.3 kg/capita in 2013. Per capita consumption of chickens increased the most, from 4.8 kg in 1976 to 15 kg in 2013. During the same period, the per capita consumption of pigs increased from 10.2 kg to 16 kg.

The increase in per capita meat consumption, of course, has not been spread evenly across the globe. Some countries and regions saw larger increases than others, and some even saw a decrease in meat consumption. Thinking about the geography of global meat consumption leads to several questions. Is meat consumption concentrated in particular areas? Where has meat consumption increased the most over the past several decades? Has meat consumption increased only the global north? Countries in the global north—including Australia, Canada, the European Union, and the United States—do have high levels of per capita meat consumption. At

**Figure 1.1**

Global per capita meat consumption, 1961–2013

Source: FAO 2019.

113.9 kg/capita, the United States has among the highest per capita total meat consumption. In recent years, some other countries have also had a per capita meat consumption increase. China, Japan, and South Korea all saw dramatic increases in per capita meat consumption, from 5 kg/capita in 1961 to as much as 68 kg/capita in 2013. Even in countries that the FAO identifies as the “Least Developed Countries,” annual per capita meat consumption increased from 6.4 kg in 1961 to 10.9 in 2013, with the most significant increase occurring between 1994 and 2010, from 6.6 kg to 10.4 kg. Therefore, the total increase in per capita meat consumption has been smaller for the poorest countries than in the global north, but it increased nevertheless.

Contrary to the overall trends, some wealthier countries experienced a decline in per capita meat consumption. Most notably, total per capita meat consumption in some European countries has decreased since the 1990s. For example, per capita meat consumption in Denmark decreased from 99.3 kg in 1995 to 80.1 kg in 2013.² France saw its per capita meat

consumption decline from a high of 91.8 kg in 1998 to 79.8 kg in 2013. The Netherlands also saw its per capita meat consumption fall from 92.8 kg in 1998 to 77.9 in 2013. Even in the United States, per capita meat consumption has declined recently from a high of 124.2 kg in 2006 to 113.9 in 2013. Other countries had stable per capita meat consumption. In Germany, for example, meat consumption was 82.5 kg in 1998 and 82.7 in 2013. Despite these examples of declining or stable per capita meat consumption in the global north, the overall global trend has been an increase in per capita meat consumption.

Furthermore, at the same time that global per capita meat consumption increased, the world's population grew from 3 billion people in 1960 to 7.4 billion people in 2016. Therefore, per capita meat consumption increased as the size of the population also increased. While per capita meat consumption increased by about 100 percent from 1961 to 2013, the world's population increased by about 146 percent. Thus, the increase in total (i.e., not per capita) global meat consumption was tremendous, as the world came to have more than twice as many people who, on average, consume twice as much meat. How we have produced enough meat for such an explosion in consumption can be better understood by looking at the trends in global meat production.

Figure 1.2 shows that total global meat production of land animals—cows, pigs, and chickens—increased from about 45 million metric tons in 1960 to 259 MMT in 2016. While per capita meat consumption increased by 100 percent and the world's population increased by 146 percent during this period, global meat production increased by almost 500 percent. During this period, beef production increased from 23 MMT to 60 MMT, pork production increased from 19 MMT to 109 MMT, and chicken production increased from about 2 MMT to 88 MMT. Thus, while production increased for each type of meat, the most significant increases came in the production of pork and chicken. Another way to view this increase in global meat production is by looking at the number of animals slaughtered each year, as seen in figure 1.3. In 1961, about 173 million cows were slaughtered, 376 million pigs, and 6.5 billion chickens. In 2014, the slaughter of animals for meat rose to 300 million cows, 1.4 billion pigs, and 62 billion chickens. Here again, the slaughter of cows was the smallest increase, though it was still a 73 percent increase. The really significant increases, of course, came in the numbers of pigs and chickens slaughtered each year:

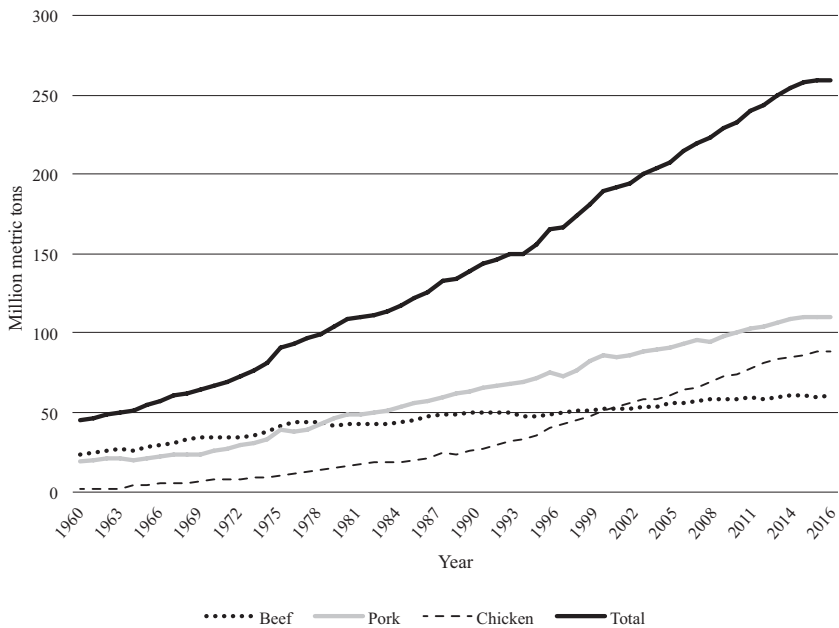


Figure 1.2

Global meat production, 1960–2016

Source: USDA FAS n.d.

from 1961 to 2014, the number of pigs slaughtered for meat increased by about 270 percent, and the numbers of chickens killed saw an increase of more than 900 percent. The expanding global meat industry, then, rested on an incredible increase in the number of animals kept and slaughtered for meat. This expansion in meat production, as this volume aims to document and explain, required a tremendous amount of resources—land, feed grains, labor, water, and money—and it brought with it a series of substantial consequences—environmental pollution, animal and human exploitation, and even food insecurity. This expansion of global meat production, which has relied on raising and killing so many more animals over the past several decades, has rested on the spread of concentrated feeding operations (CAFOs). These industrial livestock operations concentrate large numbers of animals in relatively small geographic spaces to maximize efficiency, often at the expense of the health and general well-being of the animals, the environment, and surrounding communities.

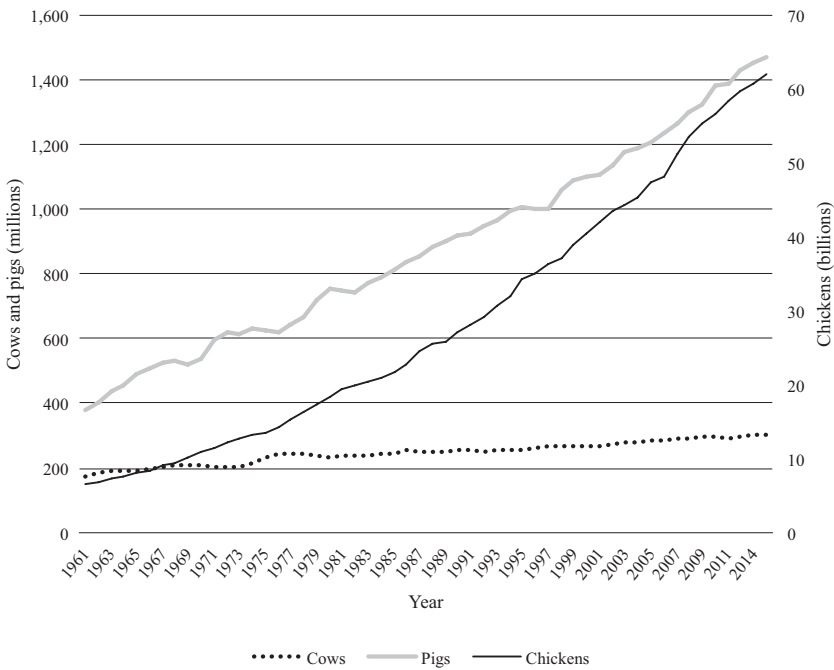


Figure 1.3

Number of animals slaughtered in global meat production, 1961–2014

Source: FAO 2019.

Given the sharp increases in consumption and production, it should not be surprising that the economic value created by the global meat industry has likewise increased dramatically, as seen in figure 1.4. In 1961, the total economic value produced by global meat production was about US\$65 billion (in constant 2004–2006 dollars). By 1990, the economic value from meat production was US\$176 billion, and it was US\$366 billion by 2014. Since 1990, the economic value of global meat production more than doubled, controlling for inflation. This economic value is not spread at all evenly across farmers, peasants, workers, and corporations, or between countries in the global south and north. Rather, corporations in the global north (especially, in the United States) and industrializing countries (specifically, Brazil and China) have reaped the lion’s share of this greater value in meat production.