

III Consequences and Considerations

Up to this point, the chapters in this book have provided an overview of trends in terrestrial and aquatic meat production and case studies that seek to show how the growth of meat production has been shaped by broader structures, particularly state and economic policies and practices. These case studies provide much needed empirical evidence for why the growth of meat production has not been random or simply compelled by “natural” tendencies, but rather is the consequence of national policies and corporate strategies (chapters 2 and 4). In doing so, some chapters have also provided empirical evidence of the negative consequences of the globalization of meat, such as the treatment of workers in processing facilities (chapter 6) and the unintended environmental consequences of the increasingly global trade in meat (chapter 5). The concluding part III of this book expands our understanding of the environmental and social consequences of meat production, continuing the theme of much of this book, which is bringing empirical data to bear on our exploration of the global meat industry. In providing empirical evidence, the goal is to not simply describe the situation, but to also shed light on what needs to change.

Emancipatory Empiricism

We have set out in this work to offer evidence about the global meat industry with the intent of providing “emancipatory empiricism” (Jakubek and Wood 2018). What we mean by this is the use of systematic social science research methods, such as observations and surveys, to counter stereotypes and cultural biases. Using empirical data for emancipatory purposes allows us to “more accurately describe the relationship between social structure, agency, and the limitations that extralocal forces” place upon individuals’

or communities' abilities to act (Jakubek and Wood 2018, 31). Moreover, in collecting empirical data about social life, in this instance the operation of the meat industry in diverse locations, creates an opportunity to imagine what is possible in the future.

The case studies in this book, in combination with the chapters in part III, speak to the relationship between social structure and agency, and the limits of agency within particular spaces. Specifically, each chapter provides empirical data that begins to fill in the outline of what exactly the "global meat" industry looks like, calling attention to the similarities across spaces (e.g., labor practices in slaughter plants), but also the differences (e.g., diverse state subsidies that have supported corporate meat companies in different ways). Providing these points of data is important for better understanding how policies and practices contribute to the problems we see today, but such data also can guide us in thinking more critically about the solutions. In other words, understanding the operation of the global meat industry in different geographical spaces and at different scales offers a clearer understanding of the growth of meat production, as opposed to simply accepting stereotypes and assumptions about the place of meat in our food system in the twenty-first century. Additionally, we have the ability to think critically about the future and what policies and practices would need to be put in place to create a different type of food system.

In terms of the problems in our modern global meat industry, chapters 7 and 8 shine a light on two of the more damning assertions made against the modern global meat industry today: greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions (chapter 7), and the treatment of animals within the system (chapter 8). These two issues are embedded in the very functioning of the intensification of meat production around the globe. Yet, both of these issues are hard to see on a daily basis.

In the case of climate change, empirical data is required to reveal the effects (e.g., longitudinal data of melting polar ice sheets, rainfall, temperatures). In the case of animal ethics, scholars have argued that intensive meat systems are designed to not be seen (Pachirat 2013). The lack of visibility surrounding animal and human suffering in CAFOs, feedlots, and slaughter houses occurs both because of the distance of most of these spaces from largely urban and peri-urban consumers and because the system is designed to resemble any other type of factory with assembly line production. The factory-like system ensures a division of labor and guarantees monotonous

jobs, which means even those who do have contact with intensive production systems (workers, managers, local community members) can compartmentalize and get on with daily life (oftentimes out of necessity) without seeing the suffering inflicted upon animals as ethically problematic (see chapter 6; Pachirat 2013).

Take for example, live animal transport and how this practice ignores animal ethics and humans' obligations toward animals. Among the more inhumane forms of industrial animal agriculture, the practice has only continued to expand, with global trade in live animals "having grown from approximately US\$7 billion in 2000 to more than US\$19 billion in 2013 (the most recent year for which comprehensive data are available), an increase of almost 300 percent over a period of a decade and a half" (Keogh and Day 2016, 6). Most countries participate in the trade of live animals, but the Australian trade has received the most attention in recent years. Australia is one of the largest exporters of live sheep, the bulk of which go to the Middle East. The journey takes approximately three weeks, and the sheep are packed into poorly ventilated spaces, where temperatures can soar above 100 degrees on the ships during the summer (Glover 2018). These ships generally carry over 50,000 sheep, thus an accepted industry standard for the number of sheep that will die during transport is approximately 1,000, but there are documented instances of much higher numbers of deaths, including 4,000 in 2014 and 2,400 in 2017 (Foster 2018; Towie 2014). These reports of much higher deaths have led some to refer to these as "death ships" (Wright and Muzzatti 2007). Of course, the broader question that must be raised is how we came to a point in history where 1,000 sheep dying in transport is considered "normal" or business as usual.

Generally, trade in live animals is viewed as having limited oversight in the actual movement of the animals (as opposed to the extensive paperwork that is filed for the shipments), but trade has grown due to decreasing barriers to trade over the past two decades. Thus, international trade policies have played a role in increasing inhumane practices toward animals. Whether it is the issue of animal ethics and humans' obligations towards animals, or the impact that meat production has on GHG emissions and climate change, both issues require that we question the structure and place of meat in our food system today and in the future. Our final chapter (chapter 9) will take up the task of thinking about the future and current efforts underway to create change in our food system.

This is a section of [doi:10.7551/mitpress/11868.001.0001](https://doi.org/10.7551/mitpress/11868.001.0001)

Global Meat

Social and Environmental Consequences of the Expanding Meat Industry

Edited by: Bill Winders, Elizabeth Ransom

Citation:

Global Meat: Social and Environmental Consequences of the Expanding Meat Industry

Edited by: Bill Winders, Elizabeth Ransom

DOI: 10.7551/mitpress/11868.001.0001

ISBN (electronic): 9780262355384

Publisher: The MIT Press

Published: 2019

The open access edition of this book was made possible by generous funding and support from MIT Libraries



The MIT Press

© 2019 Massachusetts Institute of Technology

This work is subject to a Creative Commons CC BY-NC-ND license.



Subject to such license, all rights are reserved.

The open access edition of this book was made possible by generous funding from the MIT Libraries.

This book was set in ITC Stone Serif Std and ITC Stone Sans Std by Toppan Best-set Premedia Limited. Printed and bound in the United States of America.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Winders, William, 1971- editor.

Title: Global meat : social and environmental consequences of the expanding meat industry / edited by Bill Winders and Elizabeth Ransom.

Description: Cambridge, MA : The MIT Press, [2019] | Series: Food, health, and the environment | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2019001208 | ISBN 9780262537735 (paperback : alk. paper)

Subjects: LCSH: Meat industry and trade--Environmental aspects. |

Meat industry and trade--Social aspects.

Classification: LCC HD9410.5 .G56 2019 | DDC 338.4/76649--dc23 LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2019001208>

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1