

Crocodile Tears, Compassionate Carnivores, and the Marketing of “Happy Meat”

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“I weep for you,” the Walrus said:
 “I deeply sympathize.”
 With sobs and tears he sorted out
 Those of the largest size,
 Holding his pocket-handkerchief
 Before his streaming eyes ...

“I like the Walrus best,” said Alice, “because you see he was a little sorry for the poor oysters.” “He ate more than the Carpenter, though,” said Tweedledee. “You see he held his handkerchief in front, so that the Carpenter couldn’t count how many he took: contrariwise.” “That was mean!” Alice said indignantly. “Then I like the Carpenter best—if he didn’t eat so many as the Walrus.” “But he ate as many as he could get,” said Tweedledum. This was a puzzler. After a pause, Alice began, “Well! They were both very unpleasant characters—”

—Lewis Carroll, *Alice Through the Looking Glass*

The “locavore” movement, promoted by authors such as Michael Pollan and Barbara Kingsolver, and farmers such as Joel Salatin (the featured personality of both *The Omnivore’s Dilemma* and the documentary *Food Inc.*), helped to pioneer small, local farms as an ethical and sustainable alternative to the factory farm system. However, while the issue of how much one should actually care for individual animals is mentioned, it is a point of ambivalence. For example, within the pages of *The Omnivore’s Dilemma* (2006), Pollan quotes Salatin as saying that he doesn’t mind killing animals because, “that’s an easy one. People have a soul, animals don’t; it’s a bedrock belief of mine. Animals are not created in God’s image. So when they die, they just die” (p. 331). In subsequent interviews, Salatin explains that he allows children as young as eight or nine to come to his farm and “slit some [animals’] throats” (Corrigan, 2010). Likewise, Pollan, while raising the issue of animal welfare, places greater emphasis on animals as a collective species than on individual animals, and ends *The Omnivore’s Dilemma* with a story of killing wild pigs, which he enjoys so much that he compares it to the experience of being high.

There is, however, a new genre of texts that, while arguing for the same small-scale pasture-based farms and citing these earlier "locavore" works, do so primarily out of an explicit concern for the animals themselves. In the same manner that locavores attempted to invert the animal rights arguments in terms of the environment (by claiming that eating meat was the most environmentally sustainable action one can take), these related texts attempt to invert an even more basic idea of animal rights: that one should eat meat because he or she cares about animals.

Because these arguments focus on the suffering of animals, they have become popular and effective. This popularity is demonstrated in a host of newspaper articles, such as "Guess Who's Coming As Dinner" (Rubin, 2008), "Why Vegetarians Are Eating Meat" (Lennon, 2007), "To Abstinence and Back" (Dubecki, 2011), and "Veal to Love, Without the Guilt" (Burros, 2007). As these titles suggest, even former advocates for vegetarianism have started advocating for the purchase of "humane" meat. Mollie Katzen, the author of one of the most famous vegetarian cookbooks, the *Moosewood Cookbook*, first explained to *Newsweek*: "I'm very happy that people can make the definition of 'vegetarian' be a positive statement about vegetables rather than a negative statement about meat—I don't eat this, and I don't eat that.' I'm sick and tired of the no's" (Springen, 2008, p. 2). She reiterated this point in an article in *Food and Wine*: "For about 30 years I didn't eat meat at all.... Lately, I've been eating a little meat. People say, 'Ha, ha, Mollie Katzen is eating steak.' But now that cleaner, naturally fed meat is available, it's a great option for anyone who's looking to complete his diet" (Lennon, 2007).

To try and understand the rationale behind the justifications for "humane" meat, in this chapter I pay particular attention to one specific small-scale farmer: Catherine Friend, who has written two books, *Hit by a Farm* (2006) and *The Compassionate Carnivore* (2009). Friend raises animals, primarily sheep, and claims to both love her sheep and, at the same time, to love eating them. As both a writer and a farmer, Friend provides a uniquely helpful insight into what "humane farming" actually entails. However, to be clear, I focus on Friend only as a representative of a far larger movement, as each of the arguments I raise against her applies to other well-known advocates for either "local" or "humanely" raised meat.

Meet Fluffy—She'll Be Your Lamp Chop Tonight

In contrast to Salatin's statement encouraging young children to "slit some throats," or Pollan's experience of masculine bonding while personally hunting pigs in Santa Cruz, Friend's writings are filled with constant remorse for the suffering and death of "her" animals. In the chapter "Meet Fluffy—She'll Be Your Lamp Chop Tonight," Friend writes about the act of killing one of her lambs:

The act of paying someone to kill our animals never ceases to briefly—and sharply—take my breath away ... In one week this living, breathing, playful lamb would be dead—on purpose.... He couldn't be a pet. He was already slated to be meat. I suddenly noticed his heart-shaped face, the black spots gently splashed across one ear, his perky tail. How could I pay someone to kill him? I tapped the lamb's head one more time, then fled ... I wanted

to tap the lamb's head one more time but was too embarrassed to show such affection in front of the man who would kill the lamb. I imagined it would make his job harder ... I sat in the pickup and cried. My contacts blurred, my nose filled ... I couldn't stop crying. (2009, pp. 29–32)

Friend appropriates the discourse of feminist care ethics from such writers as Carol Adams (1990) and Josephine Donovan (2007), but inverts the original meaning. It is now precisely *because* of an ethic of personal and identified care that Friend claims that one is required to raise and kill animals for human consumption. Friend even pens, unironically, an open “Letter to My Lambs,” which includes the sentence, “I wish you a safe journey, and I honor your role in my life,” (2009, p. 35) as her partner takes the lambs to the slaughterhouse.

The manner in which advocates for humane meat, including Friend, try to make sense of this contradiction between a deep emotional connection to the animals they raise and their own active part in the animal's death, is by arguing that buying humane meat represents a “buy-cott” or a way to “stay at the table.” In other words, they claim that paying to support humane meat—“buy-cotting,” instead of boycotting—represents the most effective means to protest against the mistreatment of animals in factory farms. As Friend writes in a section entitled “A Seat at the Table,”

some people believe the best way to help livestock animals is to stop eating them altogether. Yet despite the deeply felt and admirable sentiments behind these calls to vegetarianism, I've always wondered whether the act of becoming a vegetarian or vegan has any positive impact on the lives of animals. Instead, I believe that remaining “at the table,” if you will, is more effective than walking away. (2009, p. 247)

The essential argument is that by purchasing “humanely raised” or “happy meat” people can make more of a difference in the lives of animals than if they were vegetarians or vegans. From the position of both animal ethics and personal care for animals themselves, Friend argues that the most important action someone can take is to buy humanely raised meat. Therefore, she takes particular aim at vegetarians and vegans because of their supposed failure to, in her words, “remain at the table.” As Friend explains in more detail,

people who remain at the table and support sustainable, responsible, and humane agriculture by purchasing meat from these farmers are sending a message to those farmers: “Keep doing what you're doing. Don't stop. We'll buy your product.” When consumers purchase our meat, it allows us, the small and sustainable farmers, to remain at the table, to grow and thrive and provide humanely raised meat to increasing numbers of people. Because farming is a business, there won't be a product unless there is a demand. People who become completely vegetarian for the sake of animals are basically getting up from the table and leaving the room. Although they might work to help better animals' lives through their words, those words won't keep a sustainable farmer in business. Only dollars will. (2009, p. 248)

Friend concludes that, based purely on compassion for animals, not only should people who currently eat meat not choose to become vegetarian, but also that vegetarians themselves need to start consuming humanely raised meat: "If there are carnivores who enjoy eating meat but are considering going veggie for ethical reasons, or vegetarians who'd like to become flexitarians and allow a little meat into their diet but feel too guilty, consider this: the more of us who remain at, or join, the table by seeking out and buying humanely raised meat, the stronger our numbers, and the more animals that will be raised in sustainable, humane systems instead of as widgets in a factory" (2009, p. 249).

This is the essence of the argument for changing from a vegetarian or vegan diet to becoming an "ethical" or "compassionate" carnivore: Compassionate carnivores claim that they deeply love and care about animals, and their primary concern is animal welfare. They believe it is possible to create ethical, and sustainable, small-scale farms that promote animal welfare and protection of the environment. They believe that neither vegetarianism nor veganism can make a difference, since these practices represent only a passive boycott, and not the active creation of a viable alternative (i.e., vegetarians and vegans are simply "leaving the table"). In contrast, compassionate carnivores argue, purchasing "humane" or "happy" meat is a force that actively creates a separate, humane way to raise animals. Therefore, they believe, each act of purchasing humanely raised meat directly helps to end factory farming, save the environment, and improve the welfare of animals, while allowing customers to continue to consume meat. However, despite the large and growing popularity of such claims, there are several significant problems with any argument for humanely raised meat.

I. It Is Not Physically Possible to "Humanely" Raise Animals on a Large Scale

The primary problem with the compassionate carnivore idea is the same as with the earlier "locavore" argument: It is not possible to raise the large number of "free-range" or "pasture-raised" animals for which both groups advocate. I addressed this same argument in an earlier essay:

While locavores imagine all factory farms eventually turning into more sustainable small-scale family farms, that ideal is simply not physically possible given the world's current rate of meat consumption. According to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization's recent report *Livestock's Long Shadow*, over fifty-five billion land animals are raised and slaughtered every year worldwide for human consumption. This rate of slaughter already consumes thirty percent of the earth's entire land surface (approximately 3,433 billion hectares [8483.128 acres]) and accounts for a staggering eighty percent of the total land utilized by humans [for any purpose at all] (Steinfeld et al., 2006). Even when the land currently used for feed crop production is subtracted, as theoretically it might be in a fully local farm system, the total area *currently* occupied by grazing alone still constitutes, in the words of the report "26 percent of the ice-free terrestrial surface of the planet" (ibid., p. 272).²

My point is that it is physically *impossible* to raise the number of animals that humans *currently* consume in the type of free-range pasture for which Friend and the other "compassionate carnivores" advocate. There is literally not enough land left on the planet to do so.

Furthermore, meat consumption is projected to double by 2050. As the UN report cited above explains, "Growing populations and incomes, along with changing food preferences, are rapidly increasing demand for livestock products, while globalization is boosting trade in livestock inputs and products. Global production of meat is projected to more than double from 229 million tonnes in 1999/01 to 465 million tonnes in 2050, and that of milk to grow from 580 to 1,043 million tonnes" (Steinfeld et al., 2006, p. xx). To make those numbers more comprehensible, currently the world's population is approximately 7 billion people, who consume over 55 billion land animals a year. It is predicted that by 2050 the world's population will grow to 9 billion, and meat consumption is predicted to double as developing countries (such as China, India, and Brazil) become more wealthy and, consequently, can afford to eat more meat. As Karen Holmes explains in *Earth Trends*,

**TABLE 14.1: HISTORICAL RATES OF INCREASE IN WORLD MEAT CONSUMPTION
(IN METRIC TONS)**

	1961	2002	Growth
World	71,342,694	246,771,601	3x
Australia	1,097,602	2,229,695	2x
Botswana	15,691	48,294	3x
Brazil	2,083,936	14,530,350	7x
China	2,524,470	67,798,988	27x
Congo	12,340	48,298	4x
Cuba	213,964	363,364	1.7x
Egypt	308,338	1,589,690	5x
France	3,596,544	6,049,705	1.7x
Iceland	15,352	24,331	1.6x
India	1,695,165	5,456,264	3.2x
Israel	66,013	612,225	10x
Japan	724,197	5,595,697	8x
Peru	224,495	922,784	4x
Saudi Arabia	38,983	1,050,117	28x
South Africa	587,103	1,746,914	3x
United Kingdom	3,626,262	4,701,244	1.3x
United States	16,867,139	36,329,095	2x

Source: Figures based on statistics collected by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and displayed online by Earth Trends, the World Resources Institute, from *Meat Consumption: Total*, in their *Agriculture and Food Searchable Database*.

a shift in global dietary patterns is taking place, one that will have far-reaching implications for international trade, the rural economy, agricultural land use, and the environment. Simply put, the world is eating much more meat than ever before.... The experience of Japan could provide a glimpse of things to come. As its economy expanded, meat consumption increased 360 percent between 1960 and 1990 (Shah and Strong 1999: 19). (2001)

In other words, we have the dual problems of both more people in total and people eating more meat in general. It is a physical impossibility to raise an additional 55 billion animals on open and expansive pasture land (not taking into consideration an additional 2.2 billion people), particularly since the current demand for meat and dairy is only met through the increasing use of confined animal feeding operations (or CAFOs) worldwide. Therefore, "free-range" meat can never represent more than a novelty item for privileged consumers, since the primary impediment to worldwide consumption of pasture-fed animals is not, as the proponents wish to suggest, market forces limiting supply and demand, but is instead the limited amount of ice-free land left on the entire planet.

II. Humanely Raised Meat Is Neither Sustainable Nor Helpful to the Environment

Even if such a conversion were theoretically possible, the ecological effect would be devastating. Like the "locavores" before them, the "compassionate carnivores" routinely mention the ecological impact caused by "factory farms." While these critiques are true, what compassionate carnivores fail to mention is that open, free-range, pasture-feed production also causes many of the same ecological impacts. For example, in the chapter entitled "That Is One Heck of a Hoofprint," Friend makes the claim that "livestock emit about 18 percent of the world's annual quantity of methane, one of the bad boys responsible for global warming. They produce this methane as part of their digestion process, and most of it comes out in burps ... we can solve the animal welfare and environmental issues surrounding meat by getting into grass [i.e., animals raised on grass-feed pastures]" (2009, p. 247). Such statements are misleading. The source Friend cites for this indictment of factory farms is an article in the *Christian Science Monitor* entitled "Humans' Beef with Livestock: A Warmer Planet" (Knickerbocker, 2007), which, in turn, reported the findings of the original United Nations' report, *Livestock's Long Shadow*. However, neither the original report, nor the article cited, make the argument as Friend describes it. While it is true that livestock produce a large amount of methane, through burps and flatulence, this is not the primary reason the report cites for livestock's effect on climate change, and it would still be the case, if not worse, if these cattle were raised in pasture, since the cattle would still emit burps and flatulence. The report's main critique, in terms of climate change, is against deforestation. Deforestation is primarily caused by attempts to clear forests to create pasture to raise exactly the type of free-range and grass-fed animals for which Friend advocates. As the report states, under the section entitled "Atmosphere and Climate Change," "The livestock sector accounts for 9 percent of anthropogenic CO₂ emissions. The largest share of this derives

from land-use changes—especially deforestation—caused by expansion of pastures and arable land for feed crops” (Steinfeld et al., 2006, p. xxi). The report further explains this point in the “Land Degradation” section:

Expansion of livestock production is a key factor in deforestation, especially in Latin America where the greatest amount of deforestation is occurring—70 percent of previous forested land in the Amazon is occupied by pastures and ... rangelands, with 73 percent of rangelands in dry areas, have been degraded to some extent, mostly through overgrazing, compaction and erosion created by livestock action. (ibid.)

The same report suggests that meat and dairy from pasture-fed animals would be equally devastating in terms of biodiversity, which is decreased through the expansion of pastures for free-range grazing. The UN estimates that livestock production (including free-range and pasture-fed animals) represents *the leading cause of species extinction*. As the report explains:

We are in an era of unprecedented threats to biodiversity. The loss of species is estimated to be running 50 to 500 times higher than background rates found in the fossil record. Fifteen out of 24 important ecosystem services are assessed to be in decline.

Livestock now account for about 20 percent of the total terrestrial animal biomass, and the 30 percent of the earth’s land surface that they now pre-empt was once habitat for wildlife. Indeed, the livestock sector may well be the leading player in the reduction of biodiversity, since it is the major driver of deforestation, as well as one of the leading drivers of land degradation, pollution, climate change, overfishing, sedimentation of coastal areas and facilitation of invasions by alien species. (p. xxiii)

As with climate change, the report suggests that in terms of biodiversity, pasture-raising animals, because of factors such as deforestation and habitat destruction, actually causes more biodiversity loss than factory farms. To be clear, it is not my argument that we should “exonerate” factory farms, since it has been determined that they are grossly detrimental to the environment (see Gurian-Sherman, 2008; Natural Resources, 2005; Pew Commission, 2008). It is my argument, though, that when advocates for either “humane” or “free-range” farms dismiss all environmental critiques of livestock production as applying only to “factory farms,” such claims are ill-informed. Issues of the carrying capacity of the earth cannot be addressed by switching to humanely raised meat. The question of how to sustainably and ethically raise and kill 55 billion (much less 110 billion) animals per year is simply a question without an answer. *No* strategy—*not* intensification and *not* free-range, pasture-fed animals—overcomes the basic limits of our planet’s carrying capacity. As Lee Hall has previously argued,

environmentalists warn that the chemicals and sicknesses which plague animal factories can also contaminate soil, water, animal products, and our own bodies. These concerns about factory farms are warranted. But ecological problems don’t stop there. A cow with

access to fresh air and pasture is still a cow, and cows need plenty of water and food... The rumination of cows produces methane gas, which matches the global warming potential of carbon dioxide 21 times over. And the animal-based farm uses far more land than that taken by the growing of vegetable crops and the use of sloped areas for fruit trees... Which brings us to another reason that we just cannot afford to waste any more time attempting to reform animal farms: the exigency presented by the biggest set of extinctions and the most ominous climate indicators in modern history. Designing campaigns around more space for animals destined to wind up on plates at trendy restaurants and pricey grocers is environmental malpractice. Joining their energies and educating relentlessly, the environmentalist and the animal advocate could effectively shield what little pristine environment is left in the world, and what freedom is still possible for animals who call it home. Thinking and working together, they could replace the fantasy of sustainable and humane animal farming with a plain-speaking movement that gets to the point: We just don't need to buy what animal agribusiness is selling. (2005)

III. Consumers (and Producers) of Free-Range Animals Still Support Factory Farms

Since it is not physically possible to produce the large amounts of free-range meat that American consumers currently demand, those who purchase meat, including producers of "free-range" or "humanely raised" meat themselves, regularly consume meat from factory farms. As Jonathan Safran Foer puts it in *Eating Animals*, "We shouldn't kid ourselves about the number of ethical eating options available to most of us. There isn't enough nonfactory chicken produced in America to feed the population of Staten Island and not enough nonfactory pork to serve New York City, let alone the country.... Any ethical-meat advocate who is serious is going to be eating a lot of vegetarian fare" (2009, p. 256). Of all the meat produced in the United States, 99% is produced on factory farms—a statistic agreed upon even by free-range farmers.³ This is true not only for meat, but also for milk and eggs. As the *New York Times* explained in a 2010 article, only 1% of eggs are even labelled "free-range" (How hens, 2010). Of this 1%, much of the chickens' advertised access to the outdoors is an illusion, since exits may be very small or may only be accessed by a few birds that are closest to them. Because of the paucity of humanely raised meat, compassionate carnivores must either primarily eat vegan (since dairy cows and egg-laying hens are treated poorly) or consume meat, eggs, and dairy produced on factory farms. Unfortunately, most compassionate carnivores choose the latter. Even Catherine Friend, who lives on a supposedly "happy meat" farm, and has written multiple books detailing the horrors of factory farms, routinely buys factory-farmed meat. Friend even quantifies how much factory farmed meat she eats: "Before I was a farmer, 100 percent of my meat came from a factory. After we started farming and eating our lambs, that figure dropped down to perhaps 90 percent. But since I have been paying and working to replace the factory meat, I'm happy to report considerable success. Most weeks, about 50 percent of my meals are made from happy meat, 25 percent are meatless, and 25 percent are from factory farms" (2009, p. 240). If someone who

raises “happy meat” herself reports eating factory-farmed meat at least a quarter of the time, it is difficult to imagine that customers who have more limited access to such meat could do better.

And Friend repeatedly assures her readers that they do not need to stop eating factory-farmed meat, but can set other, more easily attainable, goals: “The statement ‘I want to eat more humanely raised meat’ is so vague, you won’t know what to do next. Try something more specific, like ‘I want to eat one meal a month from animals raised humanely.’ Or ‘I will buy three dozen eggs a month that come from uncaged hens.’ Or ‘I will make four phone calls this month in search for happy meat.’ Or ‘I will find a source for pasture-raised butter’” (2009, p. 199). The problem with these ideas is that the eating one meal a month from animals raised humanely will make no significant difference in either the lives of animals or to the environment. Although setting the goal “I will never eat animals who have been raised in factory farms” would be just as “specific” as any of the goals that Friend lists, she never suggests or recommends this, as even she herself does not follow this standard because she views it as too inconvenient and not “compassionate” enough to herself. Bruce Friedrich, a long-time animal advocate, has put forward this same critique:

What does it say that the leaders of the “ethical meat” charge, like my friends Eric Schlosser and Michael Pollan and even the Niman Ranch farmers, regularly pull money out of their pocket and send it off to the factory farms? To me, it says that “ethical carnivores” is a failed idea; even the most prominent advocates don’t do it full-time. I have met countless people who were moved by Eric’s and Michael’s arguments, but none of them now eat exclusively Niman-type meat. They are either vegetarians or they continue to eat at least some factory-farmed animals. (Foer, 2009, p. 214)

To her credit, Friend, along with many other advocates for humanely raised meat, does raise the argument that she herself, or her readers, may wish to reduce their intake of meat. The problem is that this is discussed in exactly the same wholly token manner, as though skipping meat for one meal per month will in some way undo the damage of regularly subsidizing factory farms.⁴

We can, therefore, see that purchasing “happy meat” does not necessarily entail the more traditional boycott of factory farms. Instead, it seems to operate from the premise that the occasional consumption of a humanely raised meat product represents an effective form of activism that “offsets” (in much the same way as a carbon offset) the cruelty and the environmental degradation that factory farms cause. Whether pasture-fed animals are, in reality, better for the environment or for animal welfare is an idea that should be questioned. But, even if they were, the minor dietary shifts called for by advocates of humanely raised meat would not represent a significant change in livestock policy. From an economic viewpoint, changing one meal a month from factory-farmed to humanely raised meat, or finding a pasture-fed source for butter, may help individual small-scale farmers since they can subsist on a small volume and charge high prices, but such a change will have little impact on large-scale agribusiness. Reducing the consumption of factory-farmed meat to only 25% of one’s diet seems insufficient if the goal is a boycott intended to leverage economic power on behalf of both animals and the

environment. A vegetarian who purchases no factory-farmed meat, or a vegan who not only purchases no factory-farmed meat but also purchases no factory-farmed dairy or eggs, represents a more effective form of economic advocacy than a compassionate carnivore who gives a quarter or more of her "food dollars" to factory farms. The purchasing of humane meat suggests that occasional and ineffective changes can cause significant improvement. It appears that the net effect of the idea behind humane meat is to help individual consumers feel better about their continued consumption of factory-farmed flesh.

IV. The Big Lie: "Humane Meat" Is Neither "Happy" Nor "Humane"

Not only do compassionate carnivores still consume factory-farmed meat, but the way in which the animals are raised is also far from what most consumers would consider "humane," or "compassionate." In the chapter entitled "To Certify or Not to Certify," Friend provides a self-disclosed laundry list of actions she undertakes that prevent her from meeting the Animal Welfare Standards for Sheep. For example, she uses herding dogs, does not allow her sheep to lie down comfortably during transport, does not provide continuous access to shelter, and, most importantly, "docks" (amputates) their tails without the use of anesthesia. Here is how she explains this last action:

To dock a tail, some farmers cut it off. Others slide a tight rubber band onto the tail, cutting off blood circulation to the tail so that it eventually atrophies and falls off... I keep finding books written by interviewing authors who pounce on farmers with this question: "And you do this procedure without anaesthesia?" The farmers never have a good answer, because the question doesn't make any sense to them. We do occasionally cause animals pain or stress, but the expense and time of administering some sort of anaesthesia isn't practical ... I'm basing my opinions not on scientific research studies of whether an animal feels pain, or on how much, but on observation. The pain fades. (2009, pp. 130–131).

While I am sure Friend is correct in saying that the pain does, in some sense, "fade," nonetheless, I worry that her own personal observations, devoid of any reference to the scientific research on the topic, underestimate the suffering these practices cause. For example, as Michael C. Morris documented in the *Journal of Agricultural And Environmental Ethics*, tail docking is an unnecessary practice, kept primarily out of tradition, that when done without anesthesia can lead to a lifetime of "chronic post amputation pain" (2000, p. 207). In 2008, the Farm Animal Welfare Council in Great Britain produced the "Report on the Implications of Castration and Tail Docking for the Welfare of Lambs." This report reached the same conclusion as Morris: tail docking is kept primarily out of tradition, causes all sheep a great deal of pain, and, particularly when administered without anesthesia, causes a lifetime of "phantom limb pain" (p. 13). Moreover, while Friend makes no mention of it in *The Compassionate Carnivore*, in her earlier book, *Hit by a Farm*, she chronicles that she not only cuts off her sheep's tails but also castrates

her male lambs without the use of anesthesia.⁵ If the majority of the scientific community believes that tail docking inflicts significant levels of pain, there is a complete consensus that castration causes intense pain and results in long-term chronic pain (Farm Animal Welfare Council, 2008, p. 26).

Friend is in no way unique in her omission of animal welfare. For example, Joel Salatin uses similar practices of animal cruelty, including confinement, denying food, allowing overcrowding, and using conventional slaughterhouses (Ball, 2011). Every farm I can find that markets itself as “humane” still engages in many of the same practices as its “factory farm” counterparts. These include grinding up male chickens at birth; using animals who have been selectively bred into shapes that cause disease, suffering, and early death; forced and repeated pregnancies; separating family members for profit; and killing animals in the same slaughterhouses and identically “inhumane” conditions.

Moreover, the only enforcement mechanism that Friend, Salatin, Kingsolver, Pollan, and many other advocates of local or humane meat endorse is individually visiting a farm and trusting what the farmer self-reports as his or her standard of care. (Pollan refers to this practice as going “beyond the bar code.”) For example, in her chapter “Visiting a Farm,” Friend includes 12 actions a consumer is supposed to take when visiting a farm, concluding with “Don’t argue with the farmer.” Even the section entitled “Ask questions” warns:

When you ask questions, keep an open mind. You might learn something new about animals. Just because a farming practice isn’t sanctioned by a certifying body, or hasn’t been mentioned in this book, or hasn’t been written about in the *New York Times* doesn’t mean it’s bad or wrong. Remember that farmers are fiercely independent, and most of us have very good reasons for doing what we do on our farms. (2009, p. 221)

While such a system of self-reporting may be most desirable for farmers, it is less clear how it can result in substantial improvement in the lives of animals. Not only does such a standard make it even more difficult to access the already rare “humane meat,” since each farm must be individually visited by each consumer, but it also shifts the entire burden of determining animal welfare to consumers, who are limited to rare, and nonconfrontational, visits. How does even the most well-informed consumer know to ask whether the farmer engages in tail docking, and how many are confident enough to protest when the farmer claims that such practices are necessary to protect the health of the sheep?

Friend further diminishes this already low standard of care by repeatedly assuring her readers that they should not hold individual farmers to too high a standard. In the chapter “Finding a Farm,” she tells us to “build relationships with farmers. Give them a little leeway if their places aren’t perfect” (p. 216), and in the chapter “Get Real about Your Goals,” she concludes that consumers should “avoid setting absolutes in what you will or will not accept in your happy meat” (p. 198). In the same manner that she says it is acceptable for a consumer to purchase and consume factory-farmed meat, Friend argues that a consumer should not be that strict on the standards of the humane farms from which they do purchase their “humanely” raised

meat. It is unclear how such a system of double tokenism (which includes token consumption of "humane" meat from animals that only a token effort has been made to raise more humanely) could ever result in an actual improvement in the lives of animals and represent an effective form of economic activism.

V. Profit and Marketability, or "Altruism Doesn't Pay the Taxes"

The underlying reason that prevents individuals from purchasing humane meat to help animals is the failure of anyone in the movement to confront the reality that standards of care will be undercut in a system in which animals are raised and sold for profit. The most revealing aspect of Friend's discussion of her animal husbandry practices is not her admission of performing tail docking and castration, but the fact that she never provides anesthesia for any procedures. Moreover, the only reason she suggests for never providing anesthesia is the cost—in other words, it is cheaper and easier to dock tails without paying for anesthesia—even though, as cited earlier, this is the recommended practice from an animal welfare standpoint. This represents the most significant problem with the entire argument that one should purchase "humane meat"—the manner in which it ignores that animal agriculture gains a profit by steadily watering down standards for animal care. There is no acknowledgement that when animals are regarded as an agricultural commodity that must be routinely produced for sale, there exists a permanent and inherent contradiction between the welfare of the animals and the profit of the business, since lower animal standards (if unperceived) always result in increased profits. Let me give the clearest example of what I mean. Friend and her partner, Melissa, are both committed feminists who claim that they began farming as way to combat traditional gender roles and heteronormativity. One would least presume that in formatting a "humane" standard of care, acts of forced female copulation would represent an area of particular ethical concern; however, for purely financial reasons, the two women personally hold down a female goat and force her to have what is clearly undesired sex in order to effectively match their breeding program. In a chapter that is actually entitled "Let's Just Forget This Ever Happened," Friend describes the practice:

At Mary's, we led Ambrosia [Friend's female goat] to the converted chicken house, into a building about twenty feet by ten feet, with bare board door and Bozeman [the male goat] came flying in, eyes wild, lip curled at the scent of Ambrosia. Our goat took one look at this creature and began running. I couldn't blame her. Not only do intact bucks reek with an indescribable scent, but this guy's head and neck were oily, greasy, and matted with something foul ... Ambrosia wasn't buying it. Who could blame her? We watched Bozeman chase in a circle for five minutes. "Is this how goat sex usually goes?" I finally asked. "No," Mary said. "Usually the doe stands still. Ambrosia must be near the end of her cycle. She can still get pregnant, but isn't willing to stand still." She sighed. "I'm afraid we have to hold her." Groaning, we stepped forward. Melissa grabbed Ambrosia's collar but she twisted away. Mary and I cornered her but she slipped past us. Finally it took all

three of us to catch Ambrosia. Then, unbelievably, we restrained her head and torso while Bozeman, loopy with lust, flung himself on her and began thrusting his hips. No one said a word as Bozeman concentrated on the task at hand, and Ambrosia grunted indignantly. I held my breath to avoid Bozeman's aroma. Finally I muttered, "Can I still call myself a feminist after this?" (2006, p. 146)

In this scene, what is so meaningful is not only the clear suffering the female goat Ambrosia is experiencing, but also how Friend herself believes that she should not be supporting what is occurring. The only reason she does is for profit. It is not the case, as with tail docking and castration, that Friend wishes to disagree with the scientific consensus on the painfulness of these procedures, choosing to believe that "the pain fades." In this scene, Friend herself believes that what is occurring is wrong, unpleasant, ironic, and unethical, but she continues to participate because it is necessary for her farm be able to run at all. As a for-profit business premised on breeding and killing animals for human consumption, even core values of animal welfare are, at times, sacrificed when it is perceived as necessary for profitability. And Friend is not alone in this prioritization of profit over animal care. Salatin is even more open about the fact that his basic motivation is maximizing profits, even if it conflicts with animal welfare. In an interview in the *Guardian*, after railing (for some time) about the "evils of Wall Street," Salatin is asked why he does not use "heritage" birds (birds that have not been selectively bred for greater profitability, and consequently, live short, unnatural, and painful lives). Salatin explains:

I'm not opposed to heritage breeds. We have some heritage breeds. Here's the problem though: marketability.... We tried heritage chickens for three years and we couldn't sell 'em. I mean, we could sell a couple. But at the end of the day, altruism doesn't pay our taxes. And I'm willing to say: "You know what? I don't have all the answers and I pick my battles and compromises." (Wood, 2010)

Although they frequently deny it, both local and "humane" farmers are small-scale businessmen and women concerned, ultimately, with profit and marketability. As such, they have managed to "rebrand" their product in order to create a niche market in which animals are raised under marginally "improved" animal welfare standards for significantly higher profit—hence the emphasis on the acceptability of making "compromises," and the counterintuitive argument that it is fine if consumers (and farmers themselves) still purchase factory-farmed meat, as long as they *also* purchase the small-scale farmer's product. And, likewise, the continued insistence that these supposedly improved conditions should neither be too closely examined ("don't argue with a farmer"), or enforced. The emphasis is less on the reality of the animals' lives (mutilations, castration, forced breeding, genetic breeding, and so on), than it is on the "brand name" quality of the product, which is now, supposedly, both more "local" and more "compassionate." This is why the emphasis is on a "buy-cott" of "happy" meat instead of a firm boycott of factory farms: the true goal is to increase the farmers' sales (buy more), and not to actually decrease production, or consumption, of factory-farmed animals. As a business model, such a

strategy has been remarkably successful; however, from the standpoint of concern for animals (or, for that matter, the environment), the benefit is significantly less clear. And, to be clear, these are structural problems inherent in the profit-based system of animal husbandry, which no amount of purchasing humane meat, no matter how successful or widespread, can alleviate. It is not difficult to imagine that as small-scale farmers become larger and more removed from the animals they raise, and, most importantly, better known as a "brand" name, the animals will start to fare worse. This process is exactly what has already happened in the case of the largest, and most well-known, producer of humane meat, Niman Ranch. The original founder, Bill Niman, was forced out by shareholders who wanted to lower standards (while keeping the same name and price for the meat) to increase profitability. The new CEO of Niman Ranch uses an argument identical to the one presented by Salatin to justify these actions: "I think idealism can pay.... But it has to be couched with practicality" (Finz, 2009). Even if someone had visited Niman Ranch in the beginning and been satisfied with the level of animal husbandry used there, they would now be buying a product no longer raised, or even approved, by Bill Niman. In fact, Bill Niman no longer eats Niman Ranch meat, because of his concerns about the care of animals (*ibid.*). Therefore, in the best "test case" available, the support of small-scale farms failed, ultimately, to significantly help animals, farmers, or the environment.

Conclusion: "Compassionate" Conservatives

Doug Wead, a former presidential advisor, was the first person to coin the phrase "compassionate conservative." He expanded upon this idea in books such as *The Compassionate Touch* (1977), and speeches such as "The Compassionate Conservative," which he famously gave at a Washington charity dinner. The essential notion was that conservatives should feel the pain of the poor, even though they did not have to change any of their actual policies to assist them (for example, funding programs to help the poor). This idea became one of George W. Bush's key slogans during his presidential campaign against Al Gore in 2000. Despite the rhetoric, many of Bush's critics could not find any significant difference between his views toward the poor and those of any other conservative. As the admittedly biased former president Bill Clinton described it, in practice, compassionate conservatism meant only, "I want to help you. I really do. But you know, I just can't" (Cowles, 2009).

A remarkably similar logic is at work in the new term *compassionate carnivore* and the attempt to market "happy meat." They, too, express frequent and powerful moments of concern for the welfare of animals, but, like the compassionate conservatives before them, they fail to translate this care into the real or systematic change that actual care for animals entails. Instead, again, like the compassionate conservatives before them, compassionate carnivores insist that the "free market" will solve all of the ethical concerns confronting animals. However, as the example of Bill Niman shows, such faith seems misguided. It will always be in the economical self-interest of the farmer to water down his or her standard of care if the public cannot perceive the changes. As Salatin's decision not to use heritage birds, and Friend's failure to use anesthesia and her willingness to personally engage in forced female mating demonstrate, when profit and

animal welfare contradict each other, it is the consideration of profit that triumphs. What is of greatest concern to me about the “happy meat” movement is not that it is physically impossible or ecologically unfeasible. It is not even that most practitioners still regularly purchase factory-farmed meat, or even that they still universally engage in a wide panoply of practices of animal husbandry that are neither “compassionate,” “happy,” nor “humane,” and that they violate even the most deeply held views of the farmers and consumers themselves. No. What most concerns me is that these expressions of feelings of care for animals serve only to mask the simple reality that for the entirety of their lives, these animals live only as buyable and sellable commodities who exist wholly at the whim of their “owners.” Such a view changes an issue of social justice (captured in the idea of animal “rights”) to one of mere charity, which, consequently, can be compromised, or abandoned at will. Therefore, I wish to suggest that the “compassion” of the carnivore has less to do with the animal, and is instead about the human feeling of guilt. Writing a letter to lambs “wishing them a safe journey” as they are being taken to slaughter does not make sense if we think in terms of the lambs themselves, who, of course, cannot read, do not care about the letter, and will all soon be killed. It only makes sense if we think in terms of the humans: the human writing the letter and the humans reading it in reprint form.

However, my goal is not to dismiss Friend’s feelings or those of any other “compassionate” carnivore. These feelings of care—demonstrated by Friend’s inability to butcher the lambs herself and her clear discomfort with the forced mating of her goat, Ambrosia—are hopeful signs. What is needed is a transition from a profit-driven practice of advocating the purchasing of humane meat to advocating for vegetarianism and veganism. I believe that both compassionate carnivores and the idea of a “buy-cott” versus a boycott have something important to teach us: while humane meat is an ecological and ethical impossibility, vegetarianism and veganism are not only a boycott of meat, but also a “buy-cott” of meat-free businesses and practices. Vegetarians and vegans are not passively “leaving the table”—it is not as though we are fasting. Instead, we are self-consciously choosing to use our food dollars to actively and affirmatively create a new system of diet and consumption. We are, in addition to the traditional boycott of meat, also actively creating (and supporting) vegan growers and providers, by choosing vegan items at the grocery store and vegan restaurants, and even vegan options at non-vegan restaurants. These actions make it easier and more convenient for people to choose the vegetarian or vegan option. A consumer who is deciding if he or she will purchase a “sustainable meat” entree or a vegan entree is not deciding between an “active” versus a “passive” force, but between visions of future dietary changes that he or she wishes to help create. The claim that vegans are not taking an active stance on how animals are raised is simply factually untrue. What vegans are saying is that we not only reject the abuses of factory farms, but also tail docking and castrations, medical procedures performed without the use of anesthesia, forced breeding, the use of genetically modified or selectively bred animals so misshapen that their lives are both painful and cut artificially short, painful transport, and ultimately slaughter, as well as the basic idea that the only value of an animal life is as an agricultural commodity. We are therefore employing not a mere percentage but the entirety of our food dollars to help support and create a different type of food system. For, at the deepest level, while my opening quotation from *Alice Through the Looking Glass* may

seem overly dismissive of the emotional pain of those who called themselves "compassionate carnivores," this is not my intent. Instead, I hope that those who are truly concerned with the suffering and deaths of animals can join with animal rights activists, not to promote "happy meat," since such a goal is, in fact, an impossibility, but instead to help promote ending the consumption of any kind of meat, eggs, or dairy. As Friend herself writes, "because farming is a business, there won't be a product unless there is a demand" (2009, p. 248).

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Notes

- 1 This is not a word that Friend uses, but it captures the arguments she makes in favour of eating meat. For a review of the history of the term, see Monroe Friedman, "A Positive Approach to Organized Consumer Action: The 'Boycott' as Alternative to the Boycott," *Journal of Consumer Policy* (1996).
- 2 For further discussion of this point, please see my essay, "'Green' Eggs and Ham? The Myth of Sustainable Meat and the Danger of the Local" (2009).
- 3 As Farm Forward, an organization that works to support "humane" farms, admits, "the reality of meat is unambiguous. And at Farm Forward we don't pull any punches when we face inconvenient realities: Most of the animals raised and killed for food (more than 99 percent, to be precise) come from unsustainable and cruel factory farms or, in the case of sea animals, other industrial operations.... Every person who adopts a vegetarian diet reduces suffering and environmental degradation *and* helps stretch the small supply of non-factory meat, dairy, and eggs currently available for those who choose to eat meat. As long as the demand for non-factory animal products exceeds the supply to this degree, it is best to avoid even these products. But whatever our approach to eating ethically, the important point to remember is that withdrawing our financial support from factory farming reduces the greatest barrier to a humane, sustainable agriculture: the wealth and power that the factory farm industry draws from the money we funnel to it daily" (Farm Forward, 2011).
- 4 As Friend again writes on occasionally skipping meat: "I always remember my one rule about changing the way we eat meat, and that's to be compassionate, first, toward yourself. That means that if you're in a restaurant and hate all the meatless options, don't flail yourself with a bamboo cane because you chose the factory meat.... Choosing the meatless meal over the factory meat may not amount to a large percentage of your diet, and that's okay, but your choices will be more consistent with your values" (Friend, 2009, p. 238).
- 5 While Friend has now moved on to a "band" method of castration, here is how she originally describes that procedure: "Melissa gave each lamb a shot of vitamins, dipped the navel in iodine, attached a plastic, numbered ear tag, felt for a fully belly to make sure it had been nursing, then checked for sex. If it was a male,

she pulled out a nasty-looking tool called a burdizzo, a silver, clamp-like thing. She found the slender cords running to the testicles, slid the burdizzo jaws over these cords, then apologized. We'd both grimace as she squeezed the jaws together, crushing the cords so the testicles would eventually atrophy" (2006, p. 18).

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