



Animals Farmed

September 2017

A Guardian proposal for a series of reporting on the subject of modern factory farming and animal cruelty.



Introduction

The model of farming that is now held up by most governments as the modern ideal has evolved a long way from the farming that we practised for many thousands of years. Modern animal farming relies on vast scale, speed, high levels of antibiotics, growth hormones, high-protein grain feeds and sophisticated technology. It is increasingly a conglomerated, global business, and cruelty to animals is strung through its entirety.

What we get is: cheap meat.

But this model comes at vast cost: pollution (air, soil and water); soil erosion; tree loss; greenhouse gases; the rise of antibiotic resistance; declining biodiversity; and a deplorable quality of life of millions of animals. Some of these problems are being tackled; others are barely acknowledged.

The Guardian will investigate and report deeply on these sprawling issues.

This is a key moment to be looking at industrial farming. Earlier this summer, the incoming head of the World Health Organisation faced a New York Times editorial asking if he would be looking at the impact of factory farming on human health. The UN's special rapporteur on the right to food has spoken out against the model. A new generation of business leaders are asking farms to look again at the way they operate. Vegetarianism and veganism are on the rise in some parts of the developed world. A global campaign #stopthemachine is under way, and will be holding an international conference in the autumn. In the US, farmers wait to see what approach Trump will take to the agricultural sector, while in the UK Brexit may force a massive shake-up for farmers.

Meanwhile, Western agricultural multinationals are trying to move into new territories in the developing world. As they press forward and sign deals with governments in Africa, Asia and South America, however, scrutiny and criticism of the rearing and subsidy model in the global north will only intensify. Yet meanwhile, new models are making themselves known. Must farming be done on an industrial scale? Is there a smarter, modern version? Can small farmers show large farmers a better way? What could animal farming 3.0 look like?



Our approach

In terms of how we would break down the project, we propose a three-pronged approach:

Look at the data

Our data journalism team will seek to examine the data on global intensive farming in fresh, innovative, powerful ways. Our aim, through these data exercises, will be to break news stories as well as throw fresh light on a familiar yet actually under-explored area.

Follow the money

Billions are made from this industry globally.

We need to look at where the money goes and how it perpetuates this machine as the model. How do the mega farmers and "Big Ag" - the big companies dominating the arable markets in seed, equipment and agro-chemicals - wield their influence? What kind of relationship exists between Big Farming and government?

Explore Solutions

We'll report on, interview, interrogate the people who are trying to do things differently. The types of solutions we may examine could include people bucking the Big Ag trends (organic, cooperatives, localism, agroforestry); looking at countries that have regulated or banned factory farming; divestment; and scientific and technical breakthroughs.