

**Forum:** Youth Assembly

**Issue:** The question of the ethicality of consumption of animal products

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## Introduction

The ethicality of the consumption of animal products is a topic that has been debated upon many times. People have different views on this topic, and there are many perspectives that can be considered when discussing it. Additionally, factors like religion and cultural beliefs (or lack thereof) play a role in the points made for and against the consumption of various products.

One of the main things to understand is that animal product consumption doesn't specifically pertain to meat from animals, but also includes products like eggs, milk, and even fur/skin. Anything that comes from an animal's body is called an animal product.

The issue isn't necessarily surrounding the ethics of eating animal meat, but more so the usage of animal products in general; milk is naturally produced by all mammals, and all non-mammals lay eggs. They can also regrow fur, and to some extent, skin. However, the question lies in whether or not it is ethical to use those products for human gain - the animals do not produce these products for us, so is it fair to use them simply because they don't 'say no'? On the other hand, it is argued that animals don't have the same level of sentience as humans, so it is not that painful for them. Additionally, all people have a requirement of food for the nutrients; some people have deficiencies and are unable to find a sufficient source of the nutrients, and animals are the richest source of these.

## **Definition of Key Terms**

### **Animal product**

The term 'animal product' refers to any product that comes from the body of an animal. This includes but is not limited to: flesh, fat, blood, eggs, milk, fur, and skin.

### **Animal-industrial complex**

The animal-industrial complex (AIC) refers to the systematic exploitation of animals, and includes all economic activities that involve animals. Some industries that are a part of the AIC are food, animal testing, medicine, clothing, labour, transport, tourism, entertainment, selective breeding, etc.

### **Food industrialisation**

Food industrialisation refers to the technical evolutions in the way food is made, from production to processing, catering and distribution. For example, mechanisation is the introduction of machines into a process to reduce the amount of human or animal labour required, and has led to the usage of machines for processes like preparing fresh meat for shelf life.

### **Fast fashion**

Fast fashion is the mass production of cheap, poor quality, disposable clothing. Fast fashion companies create cheap and trendy clothing by copying high-end designs, manufacturing, and sending them to retail stores globally in less than a week.

### **Animal testing**

Animal testing refers to the experiments and procedures performed on living animals, with the purpose of research in biology and diseases, testing the effectiveness of new medicinal products, or even testing the safety of products such as cosmetics, food additives, pharmaceutical products, etc.

## Key Issues

### Ethics of eating meat

Meat consumption is possibly the biggest grey area in terms of its ethicality. Many argue that eating an animal's meat is unethical, because it violates animal rights and basic interests. Animals' main interests are to stay alive, live in natural, decent conditions, make free choices, be free from constant fear and pain. By raising them just to eventually kill and eat them, it is a direct violation and disregard of these interests.

In contrast with this, it is the natural cycle of animals to live, reproduce, and then die, so if they are doing so in a more controlled environment, they are still fulfilling their life's purpose; humans just get a benefit from that animal's life. Additionally, animal meat is a very rich source of nutrients like vitamins, minerals, and protein (among others). Without a properly planned diet, plants and alternative foods are not always able to sufficiently provide people with the essential nutrients. They then have to consistently rely on supplements and medicines, which they could avoid by eating meat.

### Food industrialisation

Due to the increasing demand in animal products, and the food industrialisation that occurred, many machines are now used in the place of humans. The animal-industrial complex spurs the mass killing of animals in slaughterhouses, as well as performing inhumane surgeries and alterations on them for economic purposes. In fact, it is estimated that approximately 80 billion animals are slaughtered each year. Some of the inhumane processes that are carried out by many farms is keeping cows impregnated and constantly lactating. This allows them to maximise milk production and reap the economic benefits, while failing to acknowledge the impact of taking away the cow's calves and raising them for the same activities. Furthermore, the actual milking processes are not gentle and can cause damage to the cows or other animals being milked. Practices like selective breeding are also used, for example to produce animals with juicy and enjoyable meat, and keep the animals fat to produce the largest

amount of profitable meat possible, while again failing to acknowledge the health impacts this has throughout the entire animal's life. The natural life expectancies of such animals are very significantly decreased just from such practices; the natural lifespan of a cattle is up to 20 years, and their life expectancy in slaughterhouses is 18 months.

Not all industrial farms follow these practices, however they are widely spread methods, all aimed to improve the economy, maximise their own profits, and provide the general public with high quality products.

## Clothing

Various animal skins and pelts are used to make human clothing. According to anthropologists, it was after the last ice age when humans began wearing clothes made from animal skin and fur, as protection from the changing climates. Today, animals are skinned and/or killed en masse for the purpose of fashion.

One of the original reasons for such a high consumption of animal products in fashion is the usage of fur. Originally, fur was used out of human need for warmth in the cold climates, however it soon evolved into a symbol of social status and represented wealth. For example, from the 11th century, European royalty frequently wore fur coats, fur capes, and fur accessories made from mink, sable, and chinchilla fur. Since then, the use of such animal furs and skins has only increased, now becoming a key part of the fashion industry, especially high fashion.

## Fast fashion

The concept of fast fashion began in the 1990s, when clothes were being produced cheaply and on a large scale. Currently, fast fashion is extremely harmful to the environment and to animals, but is extremely popular because of its appeal and major economic impact. The overconsumption of this however, is what had the most detrimental effect on animals. Additionally, this idea of fast fashion is

continuing to increase in popularity - the global market size is projected to reach US\$ 260930 million by 2028, from US\$ 210190 million in 2021, at a current annual growth rate of 3.1% during 2022-2028.

Firstly, fast fashion requires a lot of materials, so billions of animals are slaughtered in the fashion industry each year. According to the FAO (United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization), in 2018 for leather production alone, 2.29 billion animals were killed, including cows, calves, goats, pigs, and buffalos. Meanwhile, the wool industry causes the deaths of animals like sheep, goats, and rabbits. All of these animals live in cramped cages and pens, go through painful chemical treatments, and are always exposed to dangerous substances with long-term disastrous effects on their health. Fur clothes are also considered 'trendy', and animal pelts from foxes, rabbits, and minks are commonly used for fur clothing like coats and jackets. All of these deaths do not account for the exotic and endangered animals that are killed for their skin every year.

All of these clothes and pelts are obtained through extremely unethical and inhumane methods, including the trapping, caging, and cruel skinning of animals. It often involves painful and unnatural processes to make the skin, fur, or leather a better fabric for clothing; hunting of extremely young animals is common due to the softness of the skin.

### **Animal testing**

Animal testing has had an ongoing debate on whether or not it should be banned for many years. During these tests, various animals like rats, mice, fish, guinea pigs, hamsters, and sometimes even monkeys and chimpanzees, are experimented on. Experiments may include exposure to toxic chemicals, forceful injection of potentially harmful chemicals and drugs, and surgical procedures, among others. These tests may also require prolonged periods of physical restraint, confinement, starvation, dehydration,

and purposeful causing of distress. After the testing is done, some animals are re-used for later experiments, but most animals are killed. There is an estimate of 110 million animals in the United States alone that are killed annually for experiments, biology lessons, medical training, cosmetic and other chemical related testing.

Most countries are not transparent about the number of animals used and killed for these purposes, because the statistics are extremely high and could lead to action being taken against them. The processes themselves are inhumane and would be violations of human rights if they were performed on humans. A lot of people argue that animal testing should be banned and alternative testing methods can be found.

On the other hand, many believe that animal testing should be continued, because many scientific breakthroughs and medical advances were made through animals. For example, research in cows led to the creation of the world's first vaccine (for smallpox). The polio vaccine was created after studies with mice, dogs, and monkeys. Multiple drugs used to treat fatal diseases/conditions would not have been possible without animal research and testing.

## **Major Parties Involved and Their Views**

### **China**

China has an extensive history of both meat production and consumption, and is currently one of the largest global producers and consumers of meat. Meat consumption dates back to prehistoric eras; the importance and value of meat has changed over time according to different dynasties, but it has always been a key part of Chinese culture. As per the FAO, total meat production of China reached 86.45 million tonnes in 2014, accounting for 27.19% of the world's total meat production.

In terms of animal testing, China legally required companies to perform safety tests and provide safety reports of cosmetic products being imported into the country, however, starting from 1 May, 2021, this requirement was lifted. Animal testing was not

made illegal, however, so this step is only the first in the right direction, as many companies still continue such practices.

## **Australia**

Australia is among the top meat-eating countries, with their cuisine and regular diets being heavily meat concentrated. In 2019, there was an annual consumption of 89.6kg per capita; this means that on average, one person consumed 89.6 kilograms of meat in one year.

With regards to animal testing, it was legally banned on 1 July 2020. The ban applies to new ingredients used exclusively in cosmetics manufactured or sold in Australia, including those imported by a supplier or retailer. These products cannot use animal testing data to prove their safety. Even so, while animal testing does not occur much in Australia, products which have been tested on animals are imported into the country.

## **Bangladesh**

Bangladesh is considered to have one of the world's lowest animal consumption rates, with the expected meat consumption per capita amounting to around 0.83 kilograms per person by 2025 (however, this figure discounts fish). This low meat consumption is a result of Bangladeshi cuisine, which is centred around rice, curry, and lentils. An average daily diet in the country consists of rice (which takes up almost two-thirds of the diet), some vegetables, pulses, and small quantities of fish if available. Products like milk and meat are only consumed occasionally and in small amounts, due to the lack of affordability - meat is expensive to buy, and the country's economy is largely based around agricultural practices due to the population living predominantly in rural areas.

**Development of Issue/Timeline**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Event</b>	<b>Outcome</b>
<b>1920</b>	Factory farming	Factory farming is a type of intensive agriculture, where the farm animals are confined in strictly controlled conditions. It is designed to maximise production and efficiency, while minimising costs, however it is extremely inhumane. For example, thousands of birds were kept in one shed to increase egg production.
<b>1938</b>	United States Food, Drug & Cosmetic Act	This was signed into law, and stated there should be some safety testing of cosmetic products before they could be sold. This led to companies beginning to test their products on animals.
<b>1966</b>	Animal Welfare Act	It is a federal law that regulates the treatment of animals in research and testing, which has led to the protection of many animals.
<b>1990</b>	Fast fashion	As discussed previously, fast fashion is a concept where clothes



		are mass produced in cheap manner on a very large scale. For this, a lot of animal skins were required, hence the number of animal killings increased exponentially.
<b>2018</b>	Global meat increase since 1998	Since, 1998, global meat consumption increased by 58%. Along with its impact on animal lives, such a large increase in meat consumption is marginally harmful to the environment and human health.

**Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue**

**Animal Welfare Act (AWA)**

The AWA was signed into law on August 24, 1966. It is the first federal law in the US which regulates the use of animals for research and testing. The act sets basic standards of care that have to be provided for any animals being used, including housing, handling, sanitation, food, water, veterinary care, and protection from weather extremes.

Multiple amendments have been made to the AWA over time, and some of the main requirements which were added are:

- require a veterinarian’s certificate for animals in interstate transport
- require all federal agencies - including the Army, Air Force and National Institutes of Health - using laboratory animals to show they fully comply with the Act
- increased fines for violations of the law from \$2,500 to \$10,000 per violation, per animal, per day

## **Possible Solutions**

### **Vegetarianism/Veganism**

Many people have adopted a dietary restriction for themselves, to prevent and reduce the consumption of animal products. Vegetarianism is the abstention from eating meat and poultry, or any by-product of animal slaughter. While some vegetarians remove meat and such foods from their diet for health reasons, moral vegetarianism is the view that it is morally wrong to eat meat and therefore resist eating it. Veganism is a similar idea, however vegans also avoid consuming dairy products, or any by-product of an animal. Both vegetarianism and veganism encourage self restraint on consuming products which cause pain to animals, so if the practices become widespread enough, they could have a significant impact.

### **Decrease demand of animal products**

Decreasing the demand of animal products would vastly improve the high consumption rates, and this decrease can be achieved in multiple ways. One of the main methods is to raise awareness via social media or other platforms which can spread information on a large scale, to inform people about the impacts of animal product consumption. Additionally, by introducing alternatives for animal products, like meat alternatives or synthetic, biodegradable faux fur, the demand for the original animal products would be reduced, especially if the alternatives are cheaper and/or easier to find.

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