The preceding chapters have detailed many of the human health, environmental, and animal welfare problems stemming from animal agriculture—particularly when conducted on an industrial scale. All of those problems would be diminished if Americans switched to a more plant-based diet.

Although millions of people have adopted healthier, more plant-based diets, change is hard, because diet is embedded in our family traditions and culture and perpetuated by major industries. It will take more than occasional public service messages, newspaper articles, and official reports to get the bulk of the population eating a “greener” diet.

This chapter suggests a variety of government programs and policies—few of which would be easily obtained—that would help move Americans toward a more plant-based diet. Recognizing that not everyone would or should become a vegetarian, we suggest means of both obtaining healthier animal products and improving how...
animals are raised. Consumer demand will be the most important factor in changing what people eat, what food marketers offer, and what farmers grow. But nutrition- and environment-based food and farm policies could improve diets indirectly. To that end, some of the policy options suggested here would “internalize” the health and environmental costs of producing animal products. That would mean paying a little more at the supermarket, but paying less in the form of higher medical costs and a degraded environment. As Joel Salatin, a Virginia farmer who is a passionate advocate of small farms and local agriculture, is quoted in Michael Pollan’s *The Omnivore’s Dilemma*, defending the sometimes higher prices small farmers charge:

> I explain that with our food all of the costs are figured into the price. Society is not bearing the cost of water pollution, of antibiotic resistance, of foodborne illnesses, of crop subsidies, of subsidized oil and water—all of the hidden costs to the environment and the taxpayer that make cheap food seem cheap.¹

Our focus here is on government actions, but companies could act a lot faster voluntarily. Some progressive companies and farmers, large and small, alternative and mainstream, already are producing healthier foods, minimizing their impact on the environment, and raising animals humanely. We hope other companies will emulate them.

One activity not discussed below, but important, is research. It is crucial that government continues to invest generously in objective scientific and economic research on health, the environment, and animal welfare. That research will provide insights on the effects of different diets and farming methods and suggest ways to improve government policies and industry practices.

**Improving Human Health**

The federal government invests billions of dollars a year in the food stamp program, school lunches and breakfasts, and similar programs. It feeds millions daily at cafeterias in its hospitals, mess halls, office buildings, and prisons. It spends tens of millions of dollars a year on nutrition research and provides sensible nutrition advice. But the government makes poor use of its knowledge, resources, and facilities when it comes to preventing heart disease, diabetes, and other diet-related diseases and saving the tens of billions of dollars that are now wasted on treating those often-preventable diseases. The recommendations outlined here challenge the government to put its words into action.
1. Increase Fruit and Vegetable Consumption

Consuming more nutrient-dense fruits and vegetables is one of the most important dietary changes that consumers should make. Eating more fruits and vegetables is heartily endorsed by the 2005 Dietary Guidelines for Americans, because doing so would add vital nutrients to diets and could displace less-healthy foods. The government should show that it means what it says by sponsoring programs, including the following, that would have a real impact.

- Intensive media campaigns should be initiated to encourage people to consume more fruits and vegetables (as well as whole grains and beans). Currently, the “5 A Day” program of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, which encourages people to eat more fruits and vegetables, receives only about $5 million in annual funding and has negligible impact. Other media campaigns should discourage the consumption of fatty meat and dairy products, soft drinks, and salty processed foods. The overall budget should be at least $150 million per year (50 cents per person).

- The U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA’s) highly successful Fruit and Vegetable Snack Program provides a free serving each day of a fruit or vegetable to schoolchildren. Unfortunately, the program only has the funding to reach several hundred schools. Considering that it benefits both children and farmers, it should be expanded nationally at an annual cost of roughly $4 billion. That would be a far smarter investment than the $20 billion paid in some years to grain, cotton, and rice farmers.

- In the Food Stamp program, bonus stamps could be provided for the purchase of fresh, frozen, canned, or dried fruits and vegetables. Similarly, as the Institute of Medicine has recommended, the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program should provide more fresh fruits and vegetables and less juice, cheese, milk, and eggs. The USDA is required to rewrite its regulations by November 2006.
City and state governments should sponsor more farmers’ markets, especially in low-income communities, to help distribute locally grown fresh produce.

2. Reduce the Fat Content of Meat

Because animal fat promotes heart disease, it would be helpful if beef and pork were as lean as possible. (Hog farmers are raising far leaner hogs than they did several decades ago.) Certain breeds of cattle tend to be lower in fat, and younger animals usually are lower in fat than older ones. Fat content is also increased by the high-grain diets cattle eat at feedlots. The government should implement policies that lower the fat content of meat products.

- The approximate fat content of cattle could be assessed at the slaughterhouse, with a modest per-pound tax levied on higher-fat cattle. The revenues from that tax could be used to reward ranchers and feedlot operators who deliver lower-fat cattle to market, encourage farmers to raise lower-fat breeds and feed cattle grain for shorter periods of time, and encourage consumers to choose lower-fat and pasture-raised beef products. Though pigs are slimmer than ever, analogous programs could ensure that that healthy trend continues.

- The USDA has standards of identity that limit the fat content of certain processed meats, but the current limits are a generous 30 percent by weight in ground beef and hot dogs and 50 percent in pork sausages. (The average hot dog now contains more than twice as much fat as protein.) Those high-fat products provide a ready market for fat trimmings from cattle and hogs and clog consumer arteries. The fat limit for ground beef and hot dogs should be lowered—perhaps over several years—to 20 percent and for pork sausages to 25 percent. Judging from the many lower-fat products already on the market, companies could lower the fat content and still provide good-tasting foods.

3. Reduce the Fat Content of Milk

The saturated fat in cow’s milk is a leading cause of heart disease. Although individuals now can choose lower-fat dairy products, the fat that is removed inevitably returns to the market in the form of butter, cream, ice cream, or other high-fat products. To reduce the volume of saturated fat entering the food supply, dairy pricing policies should be revised to encourage farmers to deliver lower-fat milk. Producers that deliver milk lower in saturated fat could be paid more. The money could come—in a zero-sum manner—from lower payments for milk that is higher in saturated fat. Several approaches can improve the nutrient content of milk.
• Use breeds of cows that provide milk with less total and saturated fat, and, within those breeds, select for propagation individual cows whose milk is lower in fat.
• Add conjugated linoleic acid to the cows’ feed or change feed in other ways to lower the total fat content of milk by about 25 percent.2
• Add canola seeds (the source of canola oil) or other sources of unsaturated oil to cows’ feed to lower the saturated fat and increase the unsaturated fat content by 20 percent each.3

4. Label Food More Effectively

The familiar Nutrition Facts label on packaged foods is used daily by millions of people, but it has not been as effective as some had hoped in improving diets and promoting health; also, fish, produce, and unprocessed meat and poultry are not required to have nutrition labels.

• The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the USDA should develop a more effective labeling system to supplement the Nutrition Facts label. One option would be to require companies to put a symbol on the front of a product’s package to highlight the food’s overall nutritional value. Foods would be rated according to their content of saturated fat, sodium, vitamins, and other nutrients and then required to put a green (“any time”), yellow (“sometimes”), or red (“seldom”) circle or square on the front label. An alternative more palatable to industry would be to establish a voluntary system, as the United Kingdom and Sweden have done (see image). Such straightforward front-label symbols would be a great help to hurried shoppers, children, and others.

• Steaks, ground beef and poultry, and other fresh and frozen meat and poultry products are not required to provide nutrition information on labels. The USDA should order such labeling, which would help people avoid fattier foods.

• While nutrition information is on most packaged foods, people choose blindly when they eat out. Chain table-service restaurants should be required to list on their menus the calorie, saturated and trans fat, and...
sodium content of each item. Fast-food restaurants should be required to post the calorie content of each item on their menu boards.\(^4\)

5. Prevent Foodborne Diseases

Animals harbor a wide variety of microorganisms that do not harm the animals but can cause serious and sometimes fatal diseases in humans. Farming and processing practices, as well as the federal government’s regulatory system, should be improved to minimize the toll of foodborne diseases. Aside from eating (and producing) less meat, actions to prevent food poisoning include the following.

- The health and food-safety responsibilities of the USDA, FDA, and other federal agencies should be consolidated into a single independent agency, as several other countries have done. The current multi-agency system is inefficient and suffers from a severe conflict of interest: The USDA is charged with both promoting the consumption, and regulating the safety, of meat and poultry products. A new, streamlined public health agency should be empowered to levy stiff fines, recall tainted products from the marketplace, and inspect foreign processing plants.
- Congress should give the federal government a specific mandate to reduce hazards in the food supply. Pathogen-reduction and enforcement authority are largely lacking from our existing meat and poultry inspection laws.
- The USDA should require cattle ranchers to use bar-coded or radio-frequency identification tags or retinal imaging to track individual cattle from birth to the slaughterhouse and to help pinpoint sources of food poisoning and mad cow disease. Such systems are already in use in Europe, Canada, Japan, and other countries. Fresh produce and grains should carry information on the country (and possibly the state and farm) of origin to facilitate traceback in the event of contamination.
- Food-safety measures—from the farm to the supermarket—should be upgraded. Vaccinations, feed additives, carcass washes, temperature controls on trucks, and other measures are needed to minimize the presence of pathogens. On egg farms, for example, layer hens should be certified as *Salmonella*-free, and any eggs that might be contaminated with *Salmonella* should be pasteurized or cooked in processed foods.
- Outbreak reporting systems should be improved to encourage more thorough investigations and more specific information on the food sources of the outbreaks. When animal pathogens are found in plant-based foods, investigators should identify how and where the contamination likely occurred.
6. Prevent Antibiotic Resistance

Many farmers add medically important antibiotics to livestock feed to compensate for overcrowded and unsanitary conditions. That practice, however, increases the likelihood that bacteria harmful to humans will become resistant to antibiotics and cause infections that are more difficult to treat. To maintain the effectiveness of those invaluable drugs for human medicine, Congress should ban the routine feeding of medically important antibiotics to livestock. Indeed, scientific research and a few major producers have found that feeding antibiotics to healthy chickens, hogs over 50 pounds, and grass-fed cattle is largely unnecessary. A ban, as likely would occur if pending bipartisan legislation (S.742) were to pass, would not prevent farmers and ranchers from using antibiotics to treat sick animals.

7. Stop Promoting Unhealthy Meat and Dairy Foods

The beef, pork, dairy, and egg industries, with administrative assistance from the USDA, “tax” themselves to raise war chests for advertising (for example, “Pork–The Other White Meat,” celebrity “milk mustache” ads, “Beef Gives Strength,” “The Incredible Edible Egg”) and research. Together, those industries spend tens of millions of dollars annually promoting their products—a sum that dwarfs what the government and industry spend to promote the consumption of fruits, vegetables, and whole grains. Although some of the advertising features lower-fat types of meat and milk, all of it serves as an advertisement for foods that contribute to health and environmental problems. It is hypocritical for the government to facilitate the promotion of foods that are inconsistent with its own dietary guidelines. Congress should eliminate federal involvement in the milk, cheese, beef, pork, and egg programs or limit the advertising to the healthiest products.
8. More Healthful Meals at Government-Run Facilities

Federal, state, and local governments directly feed millions of people every day at schools, government cafeterias, military bases, prisons, and hospitals. Government could easily promote healthier diets at those facilities by providing more dishes based on fruits, vegetables, beans, and whole grains. Animal products served should be low in fat and salt and made from animals raised humanely and without medically important antibiotics. Nutrition information should be provided. Such government efforts would promote health; create markets for healthier foods; and set an example for other large employers, hospitals, colleges, and restaurants.

Improving the Environment

A nation’s stewardship of the environment reflects its consideration of future generations. Today, though, farmers apply copious amounts of fertilizer and pesticides to vast acreages of crops destined for animal feed, polluting the environment and possibly harming wildlife, farmworkers, and consumers. Raising large numbers of cattle, hogs, and poultry in concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs) generates air and water pollution.

Numerous state and federal laws are aimed at protecting the environment, but some of those laws have limited applicability to agriculture. Moreover, in its regulation of the industry, the federal government sometimes has gone in the wrong direction: The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has exempted some 14,000 poultry, egg, dairy, and hog farms from potential fines of up to $27,500 per day for polluting the air or water with animal manure.

To tackle the noxious problems caused by CAFOs, local and national citizens’ groups, including Public Citizen and Global Resource Action Center for the Environment, are seeking to stop the building of new large animal feeding operations. In 2003 the American Public Health Association joined in, urging federal, state, and local governments to impose a moratorium on new CAFOs until adequate scientific data on the “risks to public health have been collected and uncertainties resolved.” Counties in Iowa, Missouri, North Carolina, and other states where the hog industry has been most aggressive are beginning to approve moratoriums on CAFOs.

Shifting to a more plant-based diet is one sure way to lessen numerous environmental burdens. But since not everyone is going to do that, federal and state governments should adopt new policies to protect the environment from large-scale animal agriculture. The following measures also would nudge people in a more plant-based direction by slightly increasing the costs of producing beef, pork, poultry, eggs, and milk. After all, it is only
fair that livestock producers—and consumers of animal products—bear the full economic costs of their activities. Even the Farm Foundation, which is supported by the cattle, hog, and other industries, acknowledges that “reflecting the true cost and value of manure and byproducts in prices of products or services might provide an incentive for producers and processors to adopt systems that maximize profits while being environmentally friendly.”

1. Prevent Air Pollution from Factory Farms

Factory farms that raise cattle, hogs, and poultry are major air polluters. Governments should limit the density and total number of animals. The EPA should aggressively enforce the Clean Air Act, Superfund (a waste abatement program), and Community Right-to-Know laws as they apply to CAFOs.

2. Prevent Water Pollution from Factory Farms

In its place, nutrient-rich manure is a valuable resource. But the 1 trillion pounds of animal waste generated by animal feeding operations frequently pollutes nearby streams and rivers. When manure lagoons on hog farms are breached—because of major storms, equipment breakdowns, or operational errors—the waste pollutes groundwater and nearby waterways, contaminating the water and killing fish. In addition, nutrients in animal manure applied to cropland often pollute waterways.

- Water pollution would be best mitigated by raising fewer animals and limiting the size of CAFOs. Short of that, the EPA has mandated that CAFOs, as well as smaller or less-intensive feeding operations likely to cause water pollution, obtain permits to limit pollution. Those permits include comprehensive nutrient management plans, the requirements of which are designed by the USDA and vary by state. Management plans
are not now, but should be, subject to public review to promote enforce-
ment. The plans also do little to stop the construction or operation of
open-air lagoons of dirty, smelly manure. Stringent Clean Water Act
permits with enforceable provisions should be used to prevent pollution
from CAFOs’ manure storage facilities and when the manure is spread
or sprayed on fields. Considering how troublesome manure lagoons have
been, the EPA could ban ones over a certain size.

● The USDA’s Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) gives
individual CAFOs up to $450,000 to cover the cost of building, improv-
ing, or upgrading their manure lagoons and effluent sprayfields. How-
ever, as the New York Times put it, that largesse helps farmers “comply
with regulations that don’t mean much to begin with.” EQIP grants
encourage the use of large-scale lagoons and sprayfield systems, because
they do not limit the size of the operations that receive the grants. EQIP
support should be limited to smaller, less environmentally harmful live-
stock facilities.

● To prevent phosphorus pollution of waterways, the USDA should
courage farmers to use more appropriate animal feed. Two com-
mon approaches are reducing phosphorus levels in feed and adding the
enzyme phytase, which breaks down the phosphorus-rich phytic acid in
feed and enables animals to absorb more phosphorus. Adding phytase
to swine and poultry feed reduces the phosphorus content of manure
by as much as 25 to 50 percent. Dairy farmers, who commonly add too
much phosphorus (and nitrogen) to feed, could reduce costs and runoff
substantially if they cut back.

● Government agencies generally give broad discretion to producers
to create and implement nutrient management plans, though some
states might impose more stringent requirements. Only Wisconsin has
allowed nutrient feed-management changes to qualify for funding from
the USDA’s EQIP. Other states should do the same.

● Hormones—including natural ones and the growth hormones implanted
in beef cattle—have been found in waterways downstream from feed-
lots. Initial studies show that the minuscule amounts of hormones cause
malformations in fish. Greatly decreasing the number and density of cat-
tle in CAFOs would solve the environmental problem.

3. Reduce Water Use

The enormous amounts of (mostly irrigation) water that are used to pro-
duce feed grains erode soil, pollute water, deplete groundwater reservoirs,
and poison fish. Ultimately, over-irrigation can deplete water of oxygen and
harm wildlife in and around ponds and lakes.
- Irrigation subsidies encourage farmers to waste water and cultivate poor-quality land where irrigation contributes to water-quality problems. From 1902 to 1986, irrigation subsidies cost taxpayers as much as $70 billion. The subsidies just to farmers in California’s Central Valley Project now amount to $400 million a year, mostly going to large farmers, according to the Environmental Working Group. Those subsidies should be reduced or eliminated. Currently, many water rate structures charge farmers on a per-acre basis regardless of water use. Water deliveries to farms should be measured and farmers charged according to how much water they use.

- Federal loans or grants should be available to encourage farmers to use more efficient irrigation systems. A portion of farm subsidies could be withheld from farmers who waste water.

4. Reduce Pesticide and Fertilizer Use

Gargantuan quantities of fertilizer and smaller quantities of pesticides help maximize yields of feed grains and other crops but exact a cost from the environment and health. The mining of minerals and manufacture of fertilizer require huge amounts of energy and nonrenewable resources and pollute the air and water. Using the fertilizer generates more air and water pollution. Pesticides may harm workers and nearby residents, as well as non-target animals and plants. And consumers, of course, would prefer not to have pesticide residues in their food. Eating fewer animal products would reduce the harm from pesticides and fertilizer (though the benefits would be slightly reduced because more food crops would have to be produced). Government actions to lessen the problems include the following.

- The USDA and state departments of agriculture should mount intensive programs to encourage feed-grain producers (and other farmers) to slash their use of pesticides and chemical fertilizer by using techniques ranging from integrated pest management to organic farming to biotechnol-
ogy. Though agriculture departments have long belittled organic agriculture, they are beginning to see that thousands of small farmers are thriving by growing fruits, vegetables, grains, and livestock for that exploding niche market. Just as the European Union provides about $500 million a year in subsidies to organize farmers, states could provide loans, grants, or tax breaks (see next item) to help farmers get off the chemical treadmill.¹⁴

- Taxing fertilizers and pesticides would internalize some of their environmental costs and reduce their use. Even a small tax, which would not affect food prices, would raise significant revenues to fund research projects and support improved farming practices. But currently, many farm states actually exempt pesticides and fertilizers from sales taxes, at a cost to the states of hundreds of millions of dollars each year.¹⁵

The Soil and Water Conservation Society estimates that a 5 percent federal tax on agricultural fertilizers and chemicals could raise $1 billion annually.¹⁶ The key is to earmark tax revenues for environmental and health programs. Nebraska uses pesticide registration fees ($1.3 million in 2003) to fund conservation programs, including installation of conservation buffers, weed control, and water quality improvements. Iowa’s Groundwater Protection Act taxes nitrogen fertilizer (75 cents per ton) and imposes pesticide registration fees to support conservation activities. In 2001, the state’s fertilizer tax raised $913,000, and its pesticide fees raised $2.7 million, with 35 percent of the revenue allocated to the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture and the remainder to solid waste and agricultural health programs.¹⁷

- Even though the 2002 Farm Bill requires producers to reduce soil erosion (through the USDA’s Conserva-
tion Compliance provisions) and protect wetlands (under the Swamp-buster provisions) in order to receive subsidies, no such requirement directly protects water quality. Subsidies could be made contingent upon farmers’ reducing fertilizer and pesticide inputs to appropriate levels.

- The Netherlands, in response to a European Union directive aimed at protecting the environment, has tested several approaches to limiting nitrogen and phosphorus from fertilizer and manure. It recently implemented a complex system of application limits. The USDA could follow that example and seek congressional authority to sponsor pilot projects that would limit fertilizer and manure use.18

5. Reduce Feed Grain Usage

America’s livestock industry relies heavily on feeding practices designed to bring meat and dairy products to market as quickly and cheaply as possible. The effects of those feeding practices on the environment, the animals, and the nutrient content of foods have received scant attention. Reducing the amount of grain in cattle feed (and allowing chickens and pigs to obtain at least some of their food from barnyards and pastures) would deliver healthier products to consumers, protect the environment, and protect the animals’ welfare. Consumers could help move the country in that direction by eating fewer animal products or, at the very least, choosing grass-fed beef.

- Congress should provide greater funding for programs that pay feed-grain farmers to remove large areas of land, especially environmentally sensitive land, from production. Slightly higher grain prices might slightly reduce the amount of grain fed to cattle.
- The high-grain diets fed to cattle at feedlots makes the cattle sick; increases the fat content of the beef; and necessitates the use of fertilizer, water, pesticides, and land to produce the grain. To protect people, cattle, and the environment, the USDA or FDA should set standards that would limit the grain content of the feed and the length of time cattle eat it.
- The USDA should develop a labeling system that would identify meat, poultry, and milk produced in an environmentally friendly and humane
Cheap Corn: Indirect Subsidy to Livestock Producers

Since the Depression, the federal government has maintained farm programs to keep farmers afloat and supplies and prices stable. The traditional policies were changed radically in 1996, when Congress passed the Freedom to Farm legislation. This simplified description of farm programs highlights some key points.19

Before 1996, corn and several other major crops had price floors. The government used a combination of crop-storage programs and acreage limitations to support the prices for those crops. Grain merchants such as Cargill and food processors such as General Mills, as well as foreign buyers, had to pay at least the floor prices for grains. The 1996 law ended most planting restrictions and replaced price supports with government payments.

One subsidy consists of direct payments to farmers regardless of the amount of crops produced. The original goal was to phase out those payments over several years.

A second subsidy, using so-called loan deficiency payments (the loans actually are not intended to be repaid), pays farmers the difference between the market price and the “support price” for corn, wheat, cotton, and other “program crops.” Before 1996, if the support price, also called the loan rate, was $2.00 per bushel, farmers were essentially assured that they would receive at least $2.00 per bushel for their grain. Now, with the use of loan deficiency payments, the farmer receives
the market price, for example $1.50 per bushel, plus the 50-cent difference from the government. Those purchasing grain pay $1.50 per bushel (not $2.00), which is well below the cost of producing the grain. That is, the purchasers of the grain buy the grain at a subsidized price.

That system worked well while market prices were high, but when prices dipped a couple of years after the 1996 farm bill was passed, Congress began providing farmers with emergency subsidies—billions and billions of dollars’ worth of subsidies. Without a program to reduce production, such as acreage set-asides, the government did not possess any policy tools to boost crop prices. The 2002 farm legislation replaced ad hoc emergency payments with a third subsidy that kicks in when prices are low.

That set of three subsidies helps farmers when harvests are large and prices are low. Between 1995 and 2004, according to the Environmental Working Group, corn growers “farmed the government” for $42 billion; subsidies for all crops totaled $144 billion. In 2005 alone, farm subsidies totaled $23 billion. Importantly, those subsidies constitute a multibillion-dollar-a-year boon not just to farmers, but also to livestock growers, food processors, and exporters.

One solution to costly subsidies would be to return to price floors. That would ensure that buyers paid a price that reflected the actual direct costs of growing corn (though not the costs of pollution). The higher price of animal feed would encourage the cattle industry to reduce the time cattle spent at feedlots and might increase slightly the cost of beef and, somewhat more so, the cost of pork and chicken.

To keep the price of corn up near the target price, production might have to be kept down by limiting the acreage planted in corn, expanding programs that protected environmentally sensitive land, and designating acreage that had to be planted in crops, such as switchgrass, that could be burned or converted to ethanol for cost-efficient energy. In addition, the government should, as it used to do, ensure reserves of enough wheat, corn, and other crops to protect against droughts or other calamities here or abroad.

Some of the billions of dollars saved by changing farm subsidy programs (including limiting payments to large farmers) should be reinvested in the farming community and food policies. Programs should help farmers reduce their use of fertilizer and pesticides, transition to organic methods, and raise pasture-fed cattle. Smaller farmers, especially ones within driving distance of major cities, should be helped to sell produce directly to supermarkets, schools, and consumers at farmers’ markets. The tiny Fruit and Vegetable Snack Program that provides free daily snacks to children in a couple of hundred schools should be greatly expanded.
manner. (In 2006, the USDA took a step in that direction by proposing a
definition for “grass-fed” cattle and sheep.)

6. Prevent Overgrazing on Public Lands

Overgrazing of cattle on public lands contributes to riparian damage (that
is, damage to surrounding waterways), erosion and water pollution, and
harm to endangered species. Ranchers who use public lands in the West
save as much as $500 million a year because the federal government absorbs
most of the costs of managing the land. Grazing fees should be increased
to reflect the true cost to the government.

Another approach would be to buy out ranchers’ grazing rights through
a voluntary program. A 2003 federal buy-out bill—the Voluntary Grazing
Buyout Act—had strong support from environmental, conservation, and
animal welfare organizations, and some ranchers, but died because of
opposition from the National Cattlemen’s Beef Association.

Improving Animal Welfare

How a nation treats farm animals is a good gauge of that nation’s com-
passion. Most animals raised on contemporary factory farms live in tiny
spaces; breathe foul air; wallow in their own manure; eat unnatural diets;
Changing Government Policies

The welfare of an animal includes its physical and mental state and we consider that good animal welfare implies both fitness and a sense of well-being. Any animal kept by man must, at least, be protected from unnecessary suffering....

1. **Freedom from Hunger and Thirst**—by ready access to fresh water and a diet to maintain full health and vigour.

2. **Freedom from Discomfort**—by providing an appropriate environment including shelter and a comfortable resting area.

3. **Freedom from Pain, Injury or Disease**—by prevention or rapid diagnosis and treatment.

4. **Freedom to Express Normal Behaviour**—by providing sufficient space, proper facilities and company of the animal’s own kind.

5. **Freedom from Fear and Distress**—by ensuring conditions and treatment which avoid mental suffering.

or endure branding, castration, debeaking, or de-tailing. In some cases, animals are intentionally harmed—or even tortured—by workers.

New laws must be adopted and vigorously enforced to ensure that all animals are raised and handled humanely, from birth to slaughter (see “U.K. Farm Animal Welfare Council’s 5 Freedoms,” above). Recent laws in California, to prohibit the force-feeding of ducks and geese for foie gras, and in Florida, banning the housing of pregnant sows in cramped crates, demonstrate broad public support for protecting farm animals. Overseas, sow gestation crates have been banned in the United Kingdom and are being phased out in the European Union and New Zealand. Similarly, layer hen battery cages were banned in Switzerland 10 years ago and are being phased out in the European Union.²¹

Reforms aimed at farm practices and to encourage consumer purchase of foods made from humanely raised animals certainly would improve animal welfare. Matthew Scully, author of *Dominion: The Power of Man, the Suffering of Animals, and the Call to Mercy*, a book pleading for more humane treatment of animals, proposed a federal Humane Farming Act that “would explicitly recognize animals as sentient beings and not as mere commodities or merchandise.”²² The problems discussed in Argument #6 (“Less Animal Suffering”) suggest that such a law should:

- Impose ample space requirements to prevent crowding of farm animals and eliminate restrictive caging of hogs, layer hens, and veal calves.
Regulate conditions such as temperature, water, and space per animal on the trucks and railroad cars that transport animals from farm to farm or to feedlots and the slaughterhouse.

Slow slaughterhouse lines to help ensure that the animals are stunned properly.

Ensure that slaughterhouse operators and workers abide by the federal Humane Methods of Slaughter Act, provide for improved enforcement of that law by the USDA, and extend the law to include poultry.

Establish a reliable labeling scheme to encourage consumers to buy meat, dairy products, and eggs from more-humanely raised animals and to inform consumers when animals are raised on factory farms.

Limit the amount of grain in feed and the duration of grain feeding at cattle feedlots. Doing that also would lessen the need for grain and antibiotics, reduce pollution from feedlots, and probably lead to lower-fat beef.

Require cattle to be identified with ear tags or other devices. That would mitigate the need for hot-iron branding and also help health officials identify animals infected with dangerous bacteria or the prions that cause mad cow disease.

Require husbandry and cleanliness standards to reduce use of antibiotics.

States, too, should enforce their animal cruelty laws as they apply to farm animals or amend laws that exempt farm animals from protection. In the absence of federal action, states should prohibit practices such as debeaking and forced molting of chickens, hot-iron branding of cattle, and de-tailing of hogs.

Such measures would modestly raise the price of animal products, but any society that considers itself civilized should ensure that farm animals are treated humanely.