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Mad Cow Outbreak Reveals Flaws in Factory Farm System Sustainably Raised Beef is Viable Solution

New York (NY) December 30, 2003 – Contrary to reassuring reports from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and large beef producers to alleviate consumers' fears about the safety of the country's beef supply, our industrialized food system – where parts of deceased animals are regularly fed to live animals to lower costs, where cattle spend their lives in over-crowded feedlots, are implanted hormones, and are routinely given antibiotics to keep them alive and promote quick growth – consistently poses risks to human health.

“Recent outbreaks of mad cow disease both here and in Canada are an obvious indication that something is wrong with our industrialized agriculture system,” says Alice Slater, president of GRACE (Global Resource Action Center for the Environment). “It is bad husbandry to feed animal products to cows that have always thrived on a vegetarian diet in their natural state. To protect human health we need to change the way animals are raised.”

When cattle are raised according to sustainable or organic principles, the pre-conditions for spread of animal disease – including mad cow disease – are virtually eliminated. Sustainable beef is raised with more wholesome methods, including without routine use of antibiotics, free of hormones, with access to pasture and proper feed, and with regard for animal welfare.

Cattle Feed

Sustainable ranchers do not feed their cattle animal parts. Instead their cows rely on a vegetarian diet that contains no animal by-products and is free of growth hormones and antibiotics.

Slaughter and “downer” cows

Sustainable farmers rarely, if ever, slaughter “downer” cows, i.e. cows that are sick or injured, and dairy cows are not normally used to produce sustainably-raised beef. Most sustainable and organic farmers use smaller or independent slaughter facilities that do not present cross-contamination risks with other factory-farmed cattle.

Traceability

Sustainable or organic cows raised in smaller farms are normally tracked throughout their entire lives, from birth to slaughter. They are not bought at auctions, but are born on the same premises where they graze on pasture until they are ready for slaughter. Each cow's history is usually known to the farmer. Factory farm cows raised for the beef market rarely grow up in the same farm where they were born. They move from farm to farm three or four times, making traceability very hard in the absence of a reliable tracking system.

Unfortunately, the U.S. currently lacks a nationwide tracking system that allows authorities to determine the place of birth and origin of any specific cow. The U.S. also lacks a Country of Origin Labeling (COOL) system, which would effectively trace the origin of foreign meat and would put an end to disputes as to whether the infected U.S. cow came from Canada or was domestic.

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For over five years, GRACE has been working to eliminate factory farming in favor of a sustainable food production system that is healthful and humane, economically viable and ecologically sound. In November 2003, GRACE launched **The Meatrix** www.themeatrix.com, a humorous 3-minute online Flash animation that highlights the problems of factory farming while spoofing the Matrix movies. At the end of the movie, viewers are directed to an “action page” where they are encouraged to eat sustainable meat and support local family farmers. They can enter their zip code and find sustainable meat near them through the **Eat Well Guide**, www.eatwellguide.org, a national online directory of stores and farms that offer sustainably-raised meat. In less than two months, the Meatrix has been seen by 3 million people worldwide.

For more information on factory farming and Mad Cow disease, visit: www.factoryfarm.org

For an introduction to the problems of factory farming, view *The Meatrix* at: www.themeatrix.com

For more information on sustainable meat, visit: www.sustainabletable.org

To speak with an expert in sustainable farming, from a sustainable farmer to ag economists and authors, please contact Laura Giannatempo at 212.726.9161.

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