

Comment

An abattoir for dodgy arguments

- 1 This will not be an easy column to write. I am about to put down some ninehundred words in support of a book that starts by attacking me and often returns to this sport. But it has persuaded me that I was wrong. More to the point, it has opened my eyes to some fascinating intricacies in what seemed to be a black and white case.
- 2 In *The Guardian* in 2002 I discussed the sharp rise in the number of the world's livestock, and the connection between their consumption of grain and human malnutrition. After reviewing the figures, I concluded that veganism "is the only ethical response to what is arguably the world's most urgent social justice issue". I still believe that the diversion of ever wider tracts of arable land from feeding people to feeding livestock is iniquitous and grotesque. So does the book I'm about to discuss. I no longer believe that the only ethical response is to stop eating meat.
- 3 In *Meat: A Benign Extravagance*, Simon Fairlie pays handsome tribute to vegans for opening up the debate. He then subjects their case to the first treatment I've read that is both objective and forensic. His book is an abattoir for misleading claims and dodgy figures, on both sides of the argument.
- 4 There's no doubt that the livestock system has gone horribly wrong. It pumps grain and forage from irrigated pastures into the farm animal species least able to process them efficiently, to produce beef fatty enough for hamburger production. Cattle are excellent converters of grass but terrible converters of concentrated feed. The feed would have been much better used to make pork.
- 5 Pigs, in the meantime, have been forbidden in many parts of the rich world from doing what they do best: converting waste into meat. Until the early 1990s, only 33% of compound pig feed in the UK consisted of grains fit for human consumption: the rest was made up of crop residues and food waste. Since then the proportion of sound grain in pig feed has doubled. There are several reasons: the rules set by supermarkets; the domination of the feed industry by large corporations, which can't handle waste from many different sources; but most important the panicked over-reaction to the BSE and foot-and-mouth crises.
- 6 Feeding meat and bone meal to cows was insane. Feeding it to pigs, whose natural diet incorporates a fair bit of meat, makes sense, as long as it is rendered properly.
- 7 But these idiocies, Fairlie shows, are not arguments against all meat eating, but arguments against the current farming model. He demonstrates that we've been using the wrong comparison to judge the 34 of meat production. Instead of citing a simple conversion rate of feed into meat, we should be comparing the amount of land required to produce meat with the land needed to grow plant products of the same nutritional value to humans. The results are radically different.

- 8 If pigs are fed on residues and waste, and cattle on straw, stovers and grass from fallows and rangelands – food for which humans don't compete – meat becomes a very efficient means of food production. If we stopped feeding edible grain to animals, we could still produce around half the current global meat supply with no loss 35: in fact, cut this portion out and you would create an increase in available food which could support 1.3 billion people.
- 9 Fairlie goes on to butcher a herd of sacred cows. Like many greens I have thoughtlessly repeated the claim that it requires 100,000 litres of water to produce every kilogram of beef. Fairlie shows that this figure is wrong by around three orders of magnitude. It arose from the absurd assumption that every drop of water that falls on a pasture disappears into the animals that graze it, never to re-emerge. A ridiculous amount of fossil water is used to feed cattle on irrigated crops in California, but this is a stark exception.
- 10 Similarly daft assumptions underlie the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation's famous claim that livestock are responsible for 18% of the world's greenhouse gas emissions. Fairlie shows that it made a number of basic mistakes. It attributes all deforestation that culminates in cattle ranching in the Amazon to cattle: in reality it is mostly driven by land speculation and logging. It muddles up one-off emissions from deforestation with ongoing pollution.
- 11 Overall, Fairlie estimates that farmed animals produce about 10% of the world's emissions: still too much, but a good deal less than transport. He also shows that many vegetable oils have a bigger footprint than animal fats, and reminds us that even vegan farming necessitates the large-scale killing or ecological exclusion of animals: in this case pests.
- 12 The meat-producing system Fairlie advocates differs sharply from the one now practised in the rich world: low energy, low waste, just, diverse, small-scale. But if we were to adopt it, we could eat meat, milk and eggs (albeit much less) with a clean conscience. By keeping out of the debate over how livestock should be kept, those of us who have advocated veganism have allowed the champions of cruel, destructive, famine-inducing meat farming to prevail. It's time we got stuck in.

Adapted from an article by George Monbiot in *The Guardian*, 2010

Tekst 8 An abattoir for dodgy arguments

- 1p 30 Which of the following describes the writer's attitude in paragraph 1 towards the book under review?
- A The writer has been made to reconsider his stands by reading the book.
 - B The writer is embarrassed about having deceived his audience in a previous column.
 - C The writer is reluctant to write a review about a book of inferior quality.
 - D The writer is skeptic towards the key findings presented in the book.
- 1p 31 Which of the following is in line with the writer's opinion as expressed in paragraph 2?
- A A proper ethical solution to the problem of world hunger does not exist.
 - B Disproportionate grain distribution was the main cause of starvation in 2002.
 - C Humans, not animals, should benefit directly from the cultivation of land.
 - D Veganism would have been the sole solution to the 2002 food crisis.
- 1p 32 How is *Meat: A Benign Extravagance* characterised in paragraph 3?
- A It initially favours a vegan lifestyle but ultimately rejects it.
 - B It is the first study to discuss both the vegan and non-vegetarian principles.
 - C It presents a thorough and well-balanced analysis of the vegan ideal.
 - D It severely criticises the vegan answer to slaughtering animals for food.

- 3p **33** Geef van elk van de volgende beweringen aan of deze wel of niet overeenkomt met de inhoud van de alinea's 4, 5 en 6.
- 1 Feeding cows grain instead of grass is a sensible idea.
 - 2 It is impossible to produce decent meat from animals fed by grain.
 - 3 Currently animal feed consists largely of ingredients suitable for humans.
 - 4 Animal disease was the initial reason to start feeding grain to pigs.
 - 5 There is no harm in feeding meat to a pig.
- Noteer het nummer van elke bewering, gevolgd door "wel" of "niet".
- 1p **34** Which of the following fits the gap in paragraph 7?
- A efficiency
 - B extent
 - C profits
- 1p **35** Which of the following fits the gap in paragraph 8?
- A of essential farmland quality
 - B of significant profit
 - C to human nutrition
 - D to the environment
- 1p **36** Which of the following is in line with the contents of paragraphs 9, 10 and 11?
- A All alternative farming methods are concerned with animal welfare.
 - B Economic miscalculations may cause dramatic damage to the environment.
 - C Meat producers twist factual information to advance their case.
 - D The livestock industry is held partly responsible for the greenhouse effect.
- 1p **37** What does the writer argue in paragraph 12?
- A Sticking to vegan principles is ultimately pointless.
 - B Supporters of veganism are partly responsible for bad farming.
 - C The farming industry is developing new ways of producing meat.
 - D Vegans should have pleaded their case more aggressively.

Bronvermelding

Een opsomming van de in dit examen gebruikte bronnen, zoals teksten en afbeeldingen, is te vinden in het bij dit examen behorende correctievoorschrift, dat na afloop van het examen wordt gepubliceerd.