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Slaughterhouse to Knife: An Analysis of the Meat Industry Using a Farm to Fork Model

Brianna Vasquez

Many Americans have the luxury of buying their food at grocery stores or fast food restaurants. While this is a luxury that many enjoy, it creates a disconnect between the food and the human. Few people understand the process food takes to get to their plates. Following programs like Farm to Fork can provide answers for the journey crops take, but meat has always been left out of the picture. This study provides an understanding of the changing agricultural policies that made corn cheap, harsh and dangerous work environments for animals and workers, and the negative effects meat has on human's health throughout its journey from the slaughterhouse to the knife. Using labor histories, agricultural histories, and the USDA, I will explain the changing agricultural policies from the 1920s to the 1970s that prompted intensive specialized agriculture and created a surplus of subsidized corn which was then given to livestock and poultry. Intensive agriculture along with cheap corn led to the rise of concentrated animal feedlot operations (CAFOs), where animals are forced to live unnaturally. This meat makes its way toward meatpacking factories where workers are treated as replaceable pawns. Finally, this meat makes it to our plates where consumers are passive towards their understanding of meat and its effects on their health and environment.