

## Daniel Imhoff (Ed): *The CAFO reader: the tragedy of industrial animal factories*

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Daniel Imhoff's edited volume *The CAFO Reader: The Tragedy of Industrial Animal Factories*, is a powerful documentation of the horrors beheld in animal and aquaculture factories, the factors that lead to their proliferation, and their devastating effects on the social and ecological environments that house them. The book is compiled of 32 short articles authored by 37 authors, and separate introductions with factual sections making up some of the best material of the book. The authors range from well-known journalists such as Michael Pollan, to famous environmental advocates like Robert Kennedy Jr., and to scholars, including anthropologist Wendell Thu. The book is primarily a battle cry to combat what the editor calls one of the greatest humanitarian crises of modern times. The book aims to help activists "...become articulate on this issue so they can forge arguments, alliances, and strategies to campaign for a change in social norms that ultimately eliminates these food animal factories" (p. xi).

The book largely lives up to its goal. It is a path-breaking compilation of the primary problems with and the resolutions for Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations. These include chronologically: The Pathological Mindset of the CAFO; Myths of the CAFO; Inside the CAFO; The Loss of Diversity; Hidden Costs of CAFOs; The Technological Takeover; and Putting the CAFO out to Pasture. These sections and their chapters smoothly evolve into a clearly organized guide to understanding CAFOs, and provide suggestions for resolving the problems of factory farming.

Much of the book is a detailed review of animal factory conditions, often in horrific detail. These scenes serve to shock and jolt the reader into the inhumane world of factory farming, yet are sometimes repetitive, with authors reviewing the same inhumane practice, for example gestation crates for sows. Although many of the chapters refer to credible sources, we rarely directly hear the voices of farmers, consumers, rural community members, factory workers and regulators, or see new analysis of data. The book serves as an accessible, engaging introduction for undergraduates, but would need to be coupled with more detailed, empirical studies in a course.

Although the book is a general appeal to activism, it constructs a specific type of activist. Marcus in the final section talks about how there are three main movements against CAFOs—vegetarian, animal rights, and animal welfare. With the addition of environmentalists and health advocates, these groups constitute the primary activists targeted in the book. The book excludes rural dwellers, a central group in the CAFO struggle, that along with some farmers have fought and continue to fight these factories. An exception to this is Thu's chapter, which hones in on how local communities are politically stripped of their rights to refuse CAFOs. He provocatively suggests that industrial animal factories are a larger assault on democracy. The questions the book asks and the activism strategies that it suggests overall exclude the rural as a site of activism, and rather favor a general call to the public for awareness.

This is exemplified by the story-telling tendency of the book. Some authors target corporations at the expense of a detailed documentation of contract factory farms that would be helpful to activists trying to stop the building of CAFOs. The reader learns much about Smithfield Foods, Tyson and IBP, which to the book's credit leaves the reader

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with an understanding of vertical integration. The book describes how these corporations contract with producers, yet it does not detail the recent cooperative financial structure of limited liability corporations utilized by some farmers who build these facilities on their land. Connecting CAFOs to exploitative corporations is important, but it does not detail the bare roots financial structures, often diffused among a group of investors, that makes building these CAFOs feasible by limiting liability. Without knowing who the owner(s) is/are, it is difficult to stop construction. Activists need a map to understand the way animal factories are contracted.

As a result of the way the book approaches CAFO activists, it does not explore why some farmers and rural dwellers believe CAFOs are the only viable option for farmer survival, and the only sound method to keep abreast with global food demands. It is one thing to term it a myth, which Imhoff does in painstaking detail. It is another to get at the underpinnings of how some farmers and rural dwellers reconstitute their own domination by supporting CAFOs to their own detriment. Other rural community members and farmers fight back, and the book could have further explored this conflict to aid activists on the ground. Although the book details the toxicity of these facilities for rural communities, it mentions only in passing the division they foster.

Bixby and others review the risks that CAFOs pose to genetic diversity in livestock breeds, issues often overlooked in mainstream discussions of factory farming. This is an important step forward in bringing home diversity into “everyday” animals, rather than confining genetic diversity to exotic species and places. It is encouraging that

everyday consumer meat-eating choices can drastically conserve and save genetic diversity.

The book challenges the critical claim that industrialized agriculture is cheaper by calling it a long-term fallacy. Noble, and Tomasellia and Niles carefully detail how CAFOs externalize their costs to animals, local dwellers, and taxpayers through subsidies and loose regulations. Imhoff concludes this section by suggesting a transition to subsidies that support local food sovereignty, a method to reconstitute the food regime while keeping food affordable for the poor and easing the evolution for Americans dependent on cheap meat. Yet overall poverty is overlooked, particularly when authors connect successful grass-fed farming operations to high-end restaurant marketing. Issues of access to currently unsubsidized, and largely more expensive, grass-fed meats in poor rural and urban areas could be further explored.

Overall, the book is a mainstay for those grappling with the expansive issues associated with CAFOs, whether in the classroom or on the front lines of activism. It serves as a good general introduction that can be followed by more extensive empirical studies specific to the interdisciplinary nature of the CAFO and its problems.

#### Author Biography

**Loka Ashwood** is a doctoral candidate in the Department of Community and Environmental Sociology at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Her research interests include participatory action research on agricultural non-point water pollution, rural social movements in the Irish and American contexts, the politics of nuclear plant siting, and the maintenance of expert and local knowledge boundaries.