

# Modern food production

A modern method of providing food for human consumption is the factory farm. Factory farms provide quality, cheaper meat but doubts have been raised about their operations and ethics.

Factory farms—also known as feedlots which house thousands of cows, chickens or pigs—produce surprising amounts of animal wastes. The way these wastes are stored and used has significant effects on human health and the environment. Housing animals on factory farms is not like the northern European practice of housing stock undercover for a cold winter.



On factory farms, animals are crowded cruelly into rows of small pens. Manure and urine are flushed into huge waste lagoons. On factory farms, 'lagoon' means an open-air pit filled with animal wastes. These often break, leak or overflow, sending harmful microbes, nitrate pollution and drug-resistant bacteria into natural watercourses. Factory-farm lagoons also emit toxic gases.

Farms often spray the manure onto land as fertiliser—these 'sprayfields' bring still more of these harmful substances into our air and water.

People who live near or work on factory farms breathe in hundreds of gases, which are formed as manure decomposes. The stench can be unbearable but, worse still, the gases contain many harmful chemicals. Health problems associated with the gases from factory farms include gasping for breath, headaches, wheezing and excessive coughing.

Drinking-water supplies can be contaminated by animal waste. Pollutants often seep from lagoons and sprayfields into groundwater. Contaminated drinking water that caused disease outbreaks has been traced to bacteria and viruses from waste.

The widespread use of antibiotics also poses long-term dangers. Factory farms often give animals antibiotics to promote growth, or to compensate for illness resulting from crowded conditions. These antibiotics then enter the environment and the food chain, contributing to the rise of antibiotic-resistant bacteria and making it harder to treat human diseases.

Source: <http://www.nrdc.org/water/pollution/nspills.asp>