

# A Crazy War against Animal Production

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**I**t is high time we started debating about the intentions and consequences of the vegetarian movement which has, of late been strengthened by the Vegetarian Congresses in India and abroad. The vegetarian movement seems a crazy war against domestic animal production.

It blames the livestock for causing global pollution, ozone layer depletion, green house effect, deforestation, depletion of human food, diseases and so on. It misleads both the public and the policy makers with exaggerated facts and figures, influences policy decisions badly and thus hinders global animal production.

## The mad-cow issue:

The factor that compounded mad-cow issue was the propaganda given by the Vegetarian Congress of England and other European countries. WHO itself has categorically stated that this is no more an issue as the fear that the disease is communicable to humans is unfounded. But how long will it take to convince an awe stricken public and the governments who had imposed a ban on British beef. The former British Premier Mr. John Major and his eight year old child ate beef-burger in public, to take the challenge. Nevertheless, the state of the economy of Great Britain is very worrying. The vegetarians there, are fishing in troubled waters.

## A fanciful proposition:

Obviously, this vegetarian movement is the fancy of an elite social class who had eaten enough of hamburger, beef burger, tandoori and Kentucky chicken and now likes to have vegetarian taste for a change. It is not even religious faith the prime motive behind. I am not sure, whether this vegetarian craze spread from the West to the East or vice-versa. Nonetheless, its influence is increasingly felt globally, especially in our sub-continent.

## Grabbing the bread:

This crazy group should realize that they have begun to eat upon the bread of the poor and even that of the poorest among poor; for two-third of the World's livestock is being kept in the under developed countries. It needs no mention that animal production is the most important bread winning occupation of the poor, therefore, any movement to jeopardise animal production would only aggravate poverty, poverty-borne diseases and misery in the third world.

Livestock production is not just a child's play as the vegetarians seem to think. In India livestock contribute ten percent of the GNP-this will even be more, considering the real value of the replacement cost of dung and draft power. The output value of foodgrains is about Rs.45,000 crores which is incidentally the same as that of livestock. Livestock provide food products worth Rs.26,000 crores and indirectly contribute Rs.16,000 crores towards food production by way of draught energy and fertilizer. This shows clearly that the economic progress of our country is heavily dependent on livestock; and it will continue to be so for many years.

## Prevents pollution:

How could the prime accused for global pollution and ozone layer depletion be the livestock? On what account is the methane released by ruminant stomach the world over far more hazardous to the environment than the petroleum fumes emitted by the millions of automobiles that stream the earth? And not to speak of industrial wastes, exhausts of supersonic jets, nuclear leakages, chloro-fluro carbons and so on. It is estimated that draught animals in our country provide energy, ploughing 100 million hectares-two thirds of the area cultivated. They haul 25000 million Kilometres of freight a year. Calculations reveal work animals help avoid the use of 6 million tonnes of

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petroleum fuel worth Rs.3000 crores a year. In other words they save precious foreign exchange and more importantly they ward off the great threat to the environment that would be caused by the fumes released by burning petroleum.

### **A more disastrous ecological damage:**

The Vegetarian Congress-group seems ignorant of the ecological damage that they are master minding. This damage could be more disastrous. They need to learn the basic lesson that the flora has no existence without the fauna. How could enough of vegetables be produced without animal excreta like cow dung? Soil scientists these days have an advice to the cultivators especially to the paddy growers "Before you dream of a good harvest, dream of a cow" This advice is from their wisdom that when chemical fertilizer is applied to the soil only 30 per cent of it is absorbed by the plants and the rest becomes insoluble and permanently fixed in the soil and in the environment. Hence it is necessary to adopt an integrated nutrient supply system by judiciously combining chemical fertilizers with organic manure. Organic manure like animal excreta only could give life back to a literally "dead soil" formed by the unscrupulous use of chemical fertilizers.

### **Who is at risk:**

Vegetarians reiterate that animal products engender many diseases because they are polluted by pesticides and other toxic chemicals. Are vegetables safer? Studies by Scientists of IARI revealed that contamination by DDT and BHC at the farming level was 27 per cent and 28 per cent respectively in various samples of vegetables. BHC and DDT contamination in banana, apple and guava was almost 100 per cent. In the case of vegetable oils it was nearly 80 per cent. In cereal and cereal products contamination was very close to 50 per cent. Apart from this, the second phase of contamination sets in when vegetable and fruit farmers use toxic

chemicals to preserve their agricultural produce. A commonly used chemical is malathion-an organophosphate whose impact on health is worse than that of DDT or BHC. Both DDT and BHC tend to accumulate in the human body and they can cause kidney failure, cancer or paralysis.

BHC and DDT, known for leaving high percentage of residues, were long ago put on the list of "extinct" pesticides in developed countries. What is baffling is that India has not yet banned them. How extensively these two pesticides are used is well indicated by the fact that they constitute 50 per cent of the total production of pesticides in the country. The vegetarian revolutionaries seem to turn a blind eye to these hard realities.

### **Is livestock the scape goat:**

It is not true, at least in the case of developing countries that livestock compete for human food. For example, in India they-especially the ruminants-depend much on high cellulose plant materials and other third grade feed only. These are not fit for human consumption. Hence, the quantity of good food grains needed for livestock and poultry will not be big and it can be easily subsidised by the Government. There have been repeated requests to subsidise grains to livestock and poultry farmers, from many parts of the country. The publicity launched by the Vegetarian Congress of India projecting fabricated facts and figures aimed at preventing this benefit from being given to farmers has to be viewed seriously. Furthermore, livestock is made scape-goat for deforestation and soil erosion. Is the livestock or the human poacher the real offender? Could the vegetarian advocates explain?

### **Eco-friendly way:**

Domestic animal production, to go on unscathed must be eco-friendly. It is sure that a mismanaged livestock production system cannot be environment-friendly.

Management decisions are to be taken

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both at family level-microlevel and for a region or agro-climatic zone-macro level policies and programs should be situation specific and appropriate to the local resources or potential available for supporting animal production. It must not be a misfit production system. For instance, livestock production has to be discontinued or atleast kept bare minimally in metropolitan cities. Livestock may be kept in the rural areas, facilitating the flow of milk and other products from rural centres to cities as originally envisaged in the operation flood program. Local Governments such as Municipalities and Corporations shall impose restrictions by law, considering the environment. Livestock production in cities has to be restricted for these reasons. Firstly, it causes pollution. Secondly, the excreta loses its economic value as it is not feasible to utilise it for the production of bio-gas and farm yard manure. If the livestock production activities are located in rural areas, the unutilised dung could be better utilised and the country's growing energy demands can be partially met by exploiting the untapped potential.

### Culling is more important:

Scientific and technological interventions to transform the whole bulk of under-productive and unproductive stock

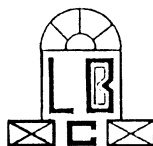
into productive one through appropriate selection, breeding and culling program should be further encouraged. Individual family decision to keep only productive stock is the most important in this regard. Unproductive stock need to be culled in right time and slaughtered. The decision to cull out is more important than the one to possess. Extension agents must adequately support the farmers in this decision making. Spending on under-productive and unproductive stock is one of the major drains in the hard earned income of our farm families. This is not realized by them. The fall out benefit of these breeding and culling program is putting the cattle population in a low figure, without any drop in production, productivity, gainful employment and income, thereby reducing the pressure on land and environment. Let the economic way of farming be wedded to the ecological way to enable livestock production to last out.

### Last word:

Let us keep the sand under our feet firm, preventing it from being washed away by undercurrents, however strong they are-Livestock cannot be the real cause of any impending ecological disaster. Nevertheless, domestic animal production must be eco-friendly.

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