

[Can Cattle Threaten Our Life?](#)

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BOOK REVIEW: HEALTH, ENVIRONMENT

Can Cattle Threaten Our Life?

Howard Lyman's book *Mad Cowboy* details a startling litany of abuses in the cattle industry that endanger humankind and our planet

Howard Lyman, once a "factory " cattle farmer, now vegan, is the founder and president of Voice for a Viable Future and past president of both Earthsave International and the International Vegetarian Union. Today, he spends "300 days a year traveling over 100,000 miles talking to people about making better choices."

Mad Cowboy hits you so hard in the stomach, you're still catching your breath at the end. Its power lies in its first-person style, brevity and breadth. In just 190 pages, with the skilled help of TV writer and playwright, Glen Merzer, Mr. Lyman shares his fascinating evolution from Montana chemical feedlot cattle rancher to government lobbyist, to world-traveling speaker and vegan. The prime cut of his evangelistic message is a no-holds-barred revelation of the horrific facts behind the cattle industry. It's a tough read, especially for Hindus who have a spiritual romance with cows. But it's long past time to face the tragedy mankind has wrought, says Lyman.

There are many books on the subject, and Lyman uses the best as resources: Rachel Carson's classic *Silent Spring*, Jeremy Rifkin's famous *Beyond Beef*, *The Rise and Fall of Cattle Culture*, Rodney Barker's *And the Rivers Turned to Blood*, Lynn Jacob's *Waste of the West: Public Lands Ranching*, John Robbin's *Food Revolution* and a million pages on the web. All are recommended reading, but if you have just time for one book, this is it.

Lyman sets aside the moral issue of whether humans have a right to feed on animals. Instead, he focuses on the consequences of cattle culture for man and planet, with a stream of sometimes lurid facts and four key revelations: the truth behind the sources of diseases in meat, the challenges of bureaucratic cover-up and change, corporate collusion and the devastating impact of bovine culture on planet Earth.

Mad Cowboy is a compelling tool for vegan, vegetarian and conservation advocacy. Here are a few excerpts and Lyman's summary of the Russian roulette mankind is playing with mad cow disease and Alzheimers' in humans (see below).

The truth about meat: "I am a fourth-generation dairy farmer and cattle rancher. I grew up on a dairy farm in Montana, and I ran a feedlot operation there for twenty years. I know firsthand how cattle are raised and how meat is produced. When a cow is slaughtered, about half of it is not eaten by humans: the intestines and their contents, the head, hooves and bones are rendered, along with other farm animals, euthanized cats and dogs and sold for animal feed. Regulations now ban feeding ruminant protein to other ruminants, but they still munch on the ground-up dead horses, dogs, cats, pigs, chickens and turkeys, as well as blood and fecal material of their own species and that of chickens. Eighty percent of food poisonings can be traced to tainted meat. About 80 percent of pesticides used in America is targeted on four specific crops--corn, soybeans, cotton and wheat--the major constituents of livestock feed. Animals store pesticides in their fat. They get their most concentrated doses of these carcinogens when they eat other animals. And we, in turn, get even more concentrated doses of carcinogens when we eat them. The evidence that an animal-based diet is implicated in our soaring cancer rates--our number-two killer--rivals the evidence of its contribution to our number-one killer, coronary heart disease."

From farmer to lobbyist to vegan: "My wife, Willow Jeane, would comment about my farm: 'Are you sure we're going in the right direction?' She would note that the trees were starting to die and that in spite of the herbicides, the weed problem seemed to be getting worse. The challenge for the fifteen feedlot operators in our area had been to defeat nature. And we found that we could do it, but only by destroying the land, and with it, ourselves.

"Before my back operation, faced with the possibility I would never walk again, I thought about the soil on my farm. Nothing else mattered, and I vowed, whatever

the outcome, I would dedicate the rest of my life to restoring the land.

"As a lobbyist for the National Farmer's Union in Washington, D. C., I went to work on the National Organic Production Act of 1990, to create a system of standards for organic food labels. Petrochemical interests were against it. But President Bush reluctantly signed it into law on November 28th, 1990. & One hot day, I started thinking about all the issues, personal and political, feeling cynical about my work. Most of the bureaucratic subsidies I was fighting for went to the raising of feed crops, not human food. Suddenly the circle came together for me. We were, as a civilization, making one big mistake. It was killing us as individuals, just as it was destroying our land and our forests and our rivers. We were eating dead animals, and it wasn't working."

All milk is milk? "The insanity of the agrochemical system of food production has come crashing down on the heads of both dairy farmers and consumers in the bizarre case of recombinant bovine growth hormone (rBGH produced by Monsanto), intended to increase milk production in cows. Besides leading to increased use of antibiotics in cows, milk from cows injected with rBGH has been definitively demonstrated to possess an elevated level of Insulin Growth Factor 1 (IGF-1). IGF-1 has been implicated in colorectal, thyroid, bone and breast cancers."

Our dying planet: "There is a moral basis for the vegetarian diet for which the indeterminate value of an animal's life takes on irrelevance. And that is the environment, a value as absolute as the value we all place on human life, since humanity will not long survive on a planet poisoned by the meat industry. We tend to respond to predictions of looming environmental disaster by putting the matter out of our minds. We may label "alarmist " someone who contends that our global pattern of environmental abuse will threaten civilization as we know it within, say, thirty years. But does the time frame make a difference? Would we be satisfied if only our children or grandchildren live normal lives before the planet becomes unbearable?"

"When we dare to think of the threats facing our planet, we must consider a complex web of interrelated problems: air pollution, water pollution, land contamination, soil erosion, wildlife loss, turning verdant lands into deserts, rainforest destruction and global warming. Mankind's profligate consumption of animal products has made a significant contribution to all of these ills, and it stands as a leading cause of many of them, e.g., methane emitted by cows is the second

leading cause of global warming. Certainly these problems wouldn't disappear overnight if the world became vegetarian, but no other lifestyle change could produce as positive an impact on these profound threats to our collective survival as the adoption of a plant-based diet."

Madcow Disease in Humans--Are We at Risk?

Howard Lyman's Summary: "Consider these facts. It has been proven that spongyform disease crosses species. In England, variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease (CJD) in humans has been traced to beef consumption. The final-stage symptoms of Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE) in cows are often seen in the final stages of human death from Alzheimers, typically registered on coronors' reports as death by "dementia." But there are virtually no autopsies of these deaths. Doctors' offices, pathology labs and hospitals are afraid to touch those brains. If CJD is found, they themselves may get infected, and their facilities are contaminated. Sterilization is extremely difficult. The prion proteins thought to cause CJD are impervious to chlorine and remain viable even after exposure to 1,000 degrees of heat. But in autopsies by Yale University and Pittsburgh Veterans Hospital researchers, five to thirteen percent of Alzheimers' deaths were found to be caused by CJD. But CJD is said to occur spontaneously in only one in a million humans. It should be very rare. So, if just five percent of Alzheimers' deaths in the US, now up to an alarming 500,000 annually, are caused by some form of spongyform, that would be 25,000 cases each year. Where did all that disease come from?

"A cow with BSE finally just falls down and dies, like the Canadian dairy cow found in Washington state in December, 2003. But of the 400 million slaughtered cows recorded over the past 13 years, only 57,000 have been examined. How many of the remaining had BSE? We don't know. But BSE is transmissible from mother to daughter. So, even though we no longer render the meat of downer cows and feed it to humans or other cows, the calves of downer cows still end up on our children's plates."

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