**Modern Farms vs. Traditional Farms**

Today’s farms are not like the old-fashioned red barns in green fields. Instead, many animals live in crowded, uncomfortable spaces. Big companies now control most food production, focusing more on profit than on animal care, the environment, or people’s health.

**What Is Industrial Livestock Production?**

In the past, animals were raised on small farms, where they helped grow crops and provided food. Now, most animals are raised in large buildings or lots, where they don’t graze naturally. Their waste is stored in pits and sprayed on fields, often causing pollution. This system breaks the natural cycle of farming.

**Animal Feeding Operations (AFOs)**

Today, these farms are called **Animal Feeding Operations (AFOs)**. They keep animals in one place for long periods. If they are large enough or pollute water directly, they are called **CAFOs** (Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations). Most meat in the U.S. comes from CAFOs.

**Why Is Industrial Meat So Cheap?**

Meat is cheap because big farms raise many animals quickly. They save money using large-scale production and government support. But these farms don’t pay for the damage they cause—like water pollution or health problems. Taxpayers end up paying for it.

**The Power of the Meat Industry**

The meat industry is very powerful. It avoids strict rules and shapes laws in its favor. It uses farmer-paid taxes (called **checkoff**) to advertise meat and support big companies, not small farmers.

**Corporate Control of the Market**

A few big companies now control most of the meat market. They own every part of the process—except the farms. This makes it hard for small farms to compete because raising animals naturally costs more.

**Contract Farming**

Big companies pay farmers to raise their animals. Farmers often borrow a lot of money to build animal houses, but later find the contracts are unfair. Many end up in debt or lose their farms.

**The Problems of Industrial Farming**

This system produces lots of meat but causes big problems:

* **Environment:** Huge amounts of animal waste pollute water and land.
* **Animal Welfare:** Animals live in bad conditions, often sick or stressed.
* **Antibiotics and Food Safety:** Animals are given many antibiotics, which can create bacteria that don’t respond to medicine. This is dangerous for humans. Dirty conditions can also lead to food contamination.

**What You Can Do**

* **Buy local and sustainable meat** from small farmers.
* **Eat less meat**, for example by doing Meatless Mondays.
* **Ask questions** when you buy meat to understand how animals were raised.
* **Read labels** to find better animal products.