Editorial

Last year, Whole Foods Market made waves by establishing the Animal Compassion Foundation. A handful of animal activists were invited to join meat producers, animal welfare experts and executives to devise the best living conditions possible for farmed animals raised and slaughtered for the display cases of Whole Foods. This move was embraced by many animal rights and protection organizations.

On January 25, 2005, Whole Foods donated five percent of their total sales to jump-start the foundation. In the PR section of their website, Whole Foods has a letter dated January 24, 2005, from Peter Singer on Animal Rights International letterhead signed by 17 different animal rights, animal protection and vegan advocacy groups who “express their appreciation and support for the pioneering initiative being taken by Whole Foods Market in setting Farm Animal Compassionate Standards.” [See facing page]

When we at Satya discovered this letter it gave us pause. And made us ask questions and investigate.

Eventually we will see animal products sold in Whole Foods with the Animal Compassion logo on them. What does it mean when body parts of dead animals are emblazoned with some of the words most precious to the animal rights movement: Humane. Compassion. Free.

What does it mean when animal protection organizations publicly endorse and direct resources into supporting such programs?

What does it mean when a major corporation like Whole Foods uses this endorsement and involvement to promote their efforts?

Unintended Consequences?

Walk into any meat or dairy section of your local grocery or natural foods store and you’ll notice the labels: “Certified Humane,” “Free-Range,” “Cage-Free,” “Organic,” “Naturally Raised,” “Cage-Free” and so on. These give the vague impression that the animals used or killed are given a certain level of consideration, allowed a somewhat natural life. While a handful of these labels adhere to solid guidelines, many of them are simply marketing ploys designed to help consumers feel good about the products they are buying—animal exploitation with a smily face.

If the label says it’s okay, is that when the critical thinking stops?

More and more we’re hearing “What about ‘humanely raised’ meat?” or “I used to be a vegetarian...” or “It’s okay, I only buy free-range...” And over the past few months there has been a flurry of books and articles exploring similar sentiments. Part of this indicates our success: people are talking about and examining their food choices. But it’s the solutions they seem to be grabbing on to, their conscientious carnivorism, that makes us take notice.

Are we somehow sending mixed messages to the general public, perhaps even giving them excuses to keep eating meat?

James LaVeck, co-founder of Tribe of Heart, observes, “To make good for the long haul, each of us must consider the possibility that our choices, however well motivated, may have unintended consequences none of us desire. Success in the monumental work we have taken on will only come when our vision of a transformed world is brought into harmony with the means we use to make that vision come to life.”

No one is disputing whether animal activists care. Anyone working to reduce the suffering cares. It’s the question of strategy and direction that is in debate.

The Debate

This is not about Whole Foods. It’s not the over-simplified animal welfare vs. abolition argument. This is about the consistency of our messages and actions and their consequences. It’s about the 10 billion animals killed for meat each year in this country—humanely raised or not—and what we’re doing to stop that.

In this issue and the next, Satya explores what has until now been quiet rumblings. Readers will be exposed to many sides of the debate. We encourage readers to continue the dialogue beyond our pages and invite you to participate in our online discussion forum at www.satyamag.com. The more we discuss the issues, the more likely we are to discover common ground and develop solutions. The animals are counting on us.

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When we at Satya discovered this letter it gave us pause. And made us ask questions and investigate.

It’s about the 10 billion animals killed for meat each year in this country—humanely raised and slaughtered. It’s about ‘humanely raised,’ ‘free-range’ and so on. These give the vague impression that the animals used or killed are given a certain level of consideration, allowed a somewhat natural life. While a handful of these labels adhere to solid guidelines, many of them are simply marketing ploys designed to help consumers feel good about the products they are buying—animal exploitation with a smiley face.

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The Editors
Compassion for Sale?

Doublethink as Happy Meat Comes of Age

By James LaVeck

L
ast fall, an intelligent, socially con-
scious, and compassionate person
told me that after seeing a Tribe of
Heart documentary at a local film
festival, she had made a commitment not
to participate in animal cruelty anymore.
From now on she would only purchase
“happy meat” at Whole Foods Market.

Something about these words, offered
with sincere appreciation for the work I
do as an activist filmmaker, was deeply
troubling. I knew they were part of a trend
I’d been seeing build amongst audiences
over the last few months. The same films
that had once inspired large numbers of
people to completely reconsider their
participation in the exploitation of animals
were now triggering something new, an
enthusiasm for the moral advantages of
participation in the exploitation of animals
that had once inspired large numbers
of people. Then, countless scientists,
educators and activists worked for decades
to imbue them with meaning and moral
value. Wrapped up in these words were
hard-won principles of ecological reality,
concern for the common good, respect
for our planet, and the timeless wisdom
of indigenous peoples.

However, as the years passed, the
core language of a social movement to
be distorted as a means of accruing short-term
gain. Consider, for example, words such
as “environmental” and “organic.” As I
began to think about how this had come to be, and why
the implications seemed to loom so large.

In the midst of this disquieting interlude, I
was lucky enough to share a meal with John
Stauber, co-author of Toxic Sludge is Good
for You: Lies, Damn Lies, and the Public
Relations Industry. “This has all happened
before,” said John, after patiently listening
to my tale of woe. “Read Losing Ground:
American Environmentalism at the Close
of the 20th Century by Mark Dowie.”

I did, and the plot thickened. What
was bothering me, I realized, was the
devastating consequences of allowing the
core language of a social movement to
be distorted as a means of accruing short-term
gain. Consider, for example, words such
as “environmental” and “organic.” In the
beginning, these concepts meant little to
most people. Then, countless scientists,
educators and activists worked for decades
to imbue them with meaning and moral
value. Wrapped up in these words were
founded principles of ecological reality,
concern for the common good, respect
for our planet, and the timeless wisdom
of indigenous peoples.

Enter Mark Dowie and the sad story
he tells in Losing Ground. Some of the very
people who had labored to give the concept
of environmentalism so much power,
unwittingly played a part in its dilution
during what has been called the environ-
mental movement’s “third wave.” Massive
corporate donations, prestigious seats on
interstate boards, lunch with powerful
legislators, highly publicized “win-win”
collaborations with industry—watch as
the budgets and membership rolls of
environmental organizations skyrocket.
It all feels so good and so right.

But over time, says Dowie, something
subtle starts to shift. Non-profit environ-
mental groups begin to compete more vigor-
ously against each other for press coverage,
money and members. Cynicism creeps in.
Program priorities inexplicably drift toward
those activities which will bring in the greatest
financial return. Large organizations
start taking credit for the work of smaller
ones. At the same time, interest in educa-
tion and grassroots empowerment falls by
the wayside, displaced by a fascination with
congressional lobbying and partnerships
with industry. Reliable access to national
publicity and the corridors of power becomes
an end in itself. A grassroots movement
morphs into something more businesslike
and professionalized, and what were once
vibrant gatherings characterized by diversity
and passionate dialogue come to resemble
vibrant gatherings characterized by uniformity
and professionalization. What was once a
noble effort to bring those same people
together, to educate and empower, to
build a better world, to protect the planet,
has become indistinguishable from
the center of the environmental move-
ment—run by environmentalists.

Meanwhile, as some of the people at
the center of the environmental move-
ment become indistinguishable from
their former adversaries, others walk away
utterly demoralized. Many more just have
a feeling of confusion and loss. And the
challenges multiply as industry comes up
with more and more clever ways to blur
the distinction between those who serve
the common good and those who serve
their own self-interests.

Introducing Happy Meat: 1984 Meets
Animal Farm

As I finished reading Dowie’s book, I realized
that there is nothing new about all of this. It is
a story as old as the hills. Any time we want,
we can convert things of transcendent moral
value into money and the things money buys.

Now, this topsy-turvy scenario, even Monsanto
claims to be a green company, presumably
raises questions about environmentalists.

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that there is nothing new about all of this. It is
a story as old as the hills. Any time we want,
we can convert things of transcendent moral
value into money and the things money buys.

With one whack of the gavel, they’ll turn her
right into a cash cow. But the coins weigh
heavily in our pockets, and long after they are
spent, we’re haunted by the last look in our
cow’s eyes as she was led away by uncaring
strangers into the darkness.

So how does this ancient parable apply
to the present day? It’s all about how the
farmed animal issue is being reframed: the
only real problem with eating animals,
we will tell the public, is the abuse inherent
in factory farming. Therefore, the argument
runs, the solution is production, distribu-
tion and consumption of “happy meat.”
In this brave new world, a mechanized

continued next page
Compassion for Sale?
Doublethink Meets DoubleFeel as Happy Meat Comes of Age
By James LaVeck

Enter Mark Dowie and the sad story he tells in Losing Ground. Some of the very people who had labored to give the concept of environmentalism so much power, unwittingly played a part in its dilution during what has been called the environmental movement’s “third wave.” Massive corporate donations, prestigious seats on corporate boards, lunch with powerful legislators, highly publicized “win-win” collaborations with industry—watch as the budgets and membership rolls of environmental organizations skyrocket. It all feels so good and so right.

But over time, says Dowie, something subtle starts to shift. Non-profit environmental groups begin to compete more vigorously against each other for press coverage, money and members. Cynicism creeps in. Program priorities inexplicably drift toward those activities which will bring in the greatest financial return. Large organizations start taking credit for the work of smaller ones. At the same time, interest in education and grassroots empowerment falls by the wayside, displaced by a fascination with congressional lobbying and partnerships with industry. Reliable access to national publicity and the corridors of power becomes an end in itself. A grassroots movement morphs into something more businesslike and professionalized, and what were once vibrant gatherings characterized by diversity and passionate dialogue come to resemble the meetings of a trade association or cartel. Every organization must learn how to make more money, how to recruit and retain more members, how to build its advocacy brand, and how to dominate the marketplace of meaning. The idealism of millions of caring citizens is shoved like coal into the furnaces of never ending corporate growth.

Soon enough, a schism opens up between those who enthusiastically collaborate with industry and those who think this way of operating represents an inherit- ent conflict of interest. By and by, a kind of auto-immune disorder sets in, turning people of good will against each other. One camp, filled with righteous indignation, holds faithfully to the “old ways,” and battles daily with disempowerment and isolation. Another camp resolutely does what it must to gain a place at the table where the big decisions of society get made, and does their best to resist the creeping temptations of complicity.

Before too long, the word “environmental” comes to be applied to the policies of some of the worst polluters, and to a president who has done more to damage the earth than any other in history. In this topsy-turvy scenario, even Monsanto claims to be a green company, presumably run by environmentalists.

Meanwhile, as some of the people at the center of the environmental movement become indistinguishable from their former adversaries, others walk away utterly demoralized. Many more just have a feeling of confusion and loss. And the challenges multiply as industry comes up with more and more clever ways to blur the distinction between those who serve the common good and those who serve their own self-interests.

Introducing Happy Meat: 184 Meets Animal Farm
As I finished reading Dowie’s book, I realized that there is nothing new about all of this. It’s a story as old as the hills. Any time we want, we humans can sell what is sacred to us, we can convert things of transcendent moral value into money and the things money buys. Lead our sacred cow to the auction ring, and right into a cash cow. But the coins weigh heavily in our pockets, and long after they are spent, we’re haunted by the last look in our cow’s eyes as she was led away by uncaring strangers into the darkness.

So how does this ancient parable apply to the present day? It’s all about how the farmed animal issue is being reframed: the only real problem with eating animals, we are now told, is the way they are currently farmed. Therefore, the argument runs, the solution is production, distribution and consumption of “happy meat.”

In this brave new world, a mechanized continued next page
Compassion for Sale?
(Continued from page 9)

From this pageantry, they will affix new labels emblazoned with terms such as “Certified Humane,” “Animal Compassionate,” “Freedom Food,” “Animal Friendly,” or “Cruelly-Free.” By extracting from the public a modest conscience tax in the form of higher prices for goods bearing the requisite label, those who have the empathy to act in their best interests.” (Emphasis added.)

But the Orwellian underbelly of Mr. Mackey’s world was revealed when an audience member asked him why his company still sells veal, presumably wondering how taking a calf from his mother and butchering him to be packaged and sold in a Whole Foods market could, under any system of rational thought, be fairly characterized as helping that animal achieve an “optimum state of physical and ecological health” or as acting in that individual’s “best interests.” If it’s a crime to kill an adult cow, then what about veal calves?

So let us call things by their true names. If Mr. Mackey and his Animal Compassion Foundation are going to march under the banner of compassion, let us be clear that it is, as someone wryly noted, a “cutthroat compassion.”

Double Trouble—Hogwash Cruelty and Cutthroat Compassion
Case in point: John Mackey, CEO of Whole Foods, and founder of the Whole Foods-sponsored Animal Compassion Foundation, developer and purveyor of new “compassionate standards” for the exploitation of animals. In a 2005 conference speech, Mr. Mackey declared that “our mission and responsibility is to help the whole planet—including people, animals, and the environment—to flourish and reach their optimum state of physical and ecological health.” Moments later, he said, “We also now recognize that farm animals are environmental stakeholders... just like those of us in the human community. As a whole, we cannot anymore free the animals from exploitation. And, finally, on the fleshy products that result from this pagentry, they will affix new labels emblazoned with terms such as “Certified Humane,” “Animal Compassionate,” “Freedom Food,” “Animal Friendly,” or “Cruelly-Free.”

By extracting from the public a modest conscience tax in the form of higher prices for goods bearing the requisite label, those from this pageantry, they will affix new labels emblazoned with terms such as “Certified Humane,” “Animal Compassionate,” “Freedom Food,” “Animal Friendly,” or “Cruelly-Free.” By extracting from the public a modest conscience tax in the form of higher prices for goods bearing the requisite label, those

...and efficiently, to take their lives, to drain the environment as a whole cannot speak of generating a crime to kill a baby calf. I mean, the same argument could be made for lamb or anything else. I mean, Whole Foods is a grocery store, and our customers want to—they want to buy dead animals.

Precisely.

Let us see what changes by their true names. If Mr. Mackey and his Animal Compassion Foundation are going to march under the banner of compassion, let us be clear that it is, as someone wryly noted, a “cutthroat compassion.”

Given Mr. Mackey’s supposed education in the field of philosophy, it is hard to believe that the logical absurdities he asks us to accept are the naive errors of an untrained mind. Rather, as a relatively successful businessman, he seems to have found a new and creative way to sharpen his competitive edge. “Cause-based marketing” is the method he plays in, and in this case success is achieved by not actually practicing compassion toward animals, not by acting in their best interests, but by methodically generating the appear-...
Compassion for Sale?  
(Continued from page 9)

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The Witness
OLL FREE
VEGAN SHOPPE

Mr. Mackey offers up as a response, “it’s a crime to keep a baby calf. I mean, the same argument could be made for lamb or anything else. I mean, Whole Foods is a grocery store, and our customers want to— they want to buy dead animals.”

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We might as well say that all sounds so good right to the point...But the Orwellian underbelly of Mr. Mackey’s world was revealed when an audience member asked him why his company still sells road, presumably wondering how taking a calf from his mother and butchering him to be packaged and sold in a Whole Foods market could, under any system of rational thought, be fairly characterized as helping that animal achieve an “optimum state of physical and ecological health” or as acting in that individual’s “best interests.”

If it’s a crime to kill an adult cow, what that we have the empathy to act in their best interests. (Emphasis added.)

System designed to move animals quickly and efficiently, to take their lives, to drain their blood, and to cut them into pieces on a scale never before imagined, is proudly described as a “stairway to heaven” by a slaughterhouse designer well on the way to attaining celebrity status. And no one blinks, not even those who hold in their hearts a dream of a world without violence.

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