

# Editorials

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## Is There Really a Market for Milk-Fed Veal?

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In a two-part "Focus" article in this issue, we relate, first, the origins and subsequent growth of the milk-fed veal industry in Europe and the U.S. and, second, some recent research findings on several current and potential production systems for raising veal, in light of both economic and humane considerations. At the moment, it seems as if the group-pen system, clearly a far more humane method than the confinement crate, has won the day in the U.K. and may well become a major production system in the U.S. But one critical question remains: How many people really *want* milk-fed veal?

In his modern classic on the economics of consumption, *The Affluent Society*, John Kenneth Galbraith argues that, contrary to the supposition of traditional capitalism that the market functions so as to meet already established consumer demands, today's corporations must first *create* the demand for new products, through advertising and other promotional efforts. In the case of white, or milk-fed veal, the traditional capitalistic view of things seems to hold true on the Continent, where 6 to 8 million calves are raised each year to supply a population for whom this type of veal is a staple of the daily diet. But in the U.K. and U.S., the populace has had to be carefully "educated" about the virtues of pale veal.

In the U.K., Philip Paxman, head of Volac, Ltd., which was responsible for the switch to the group-pen system, commented on the market conditions relative to pale veal. He noted two important factors: (1) humane considerations—"I believe that belief in cruelty to veal is one of the few cherished institutions that has not been eroded with time," and (2) a sense among consumers that

pale meat simply isn't healthy—"in this country, there has been no tradition and no demand for anemic flesh. The British housewife is very content with healthy pink meat." Therefore, the boycott of confinement-raised veal that has been in force in England for about 20 years, and the increasing awareness within the British government that specific regulations against confinement-raised veal are necessary, have occurred within a particular kind of market, in which the small amount of veal that is consumed goes largely to the restaurant trade.

Provimi of Holland established their first U.S. beachhead in New Jersey in the early 1960's and began to sell the milk-replacer/confinement system to U.S. farmers. But, by 1978, when management took stock of just how low the U.S. demand for white veal was, they were forced to counter with an aggressive marketing campaign, including advertising, cooking classes, distribution of booklets of recipes, and financing of a cookbook by Craig Claibourne. The emphasis was not so much on creating a mass market, as on establishing white veal as a prestige item, in the same general category as imported champagne and truffles. The effort has had some success. Since 1965, sales of white veal appear to have shown slow but steady growth in the U.S. Yet, it is hard to believe that the average American really cares what color his veal is. In spite of the intensive efforts to convince consumers that the "whiteness" of veal is indicative of its superiority, several tests of blindfolded volunteers have yielded only ambiguous results: most people simply cannot distinguish white veal from other types by taste alone. Thus, the milk-fed veal producers have created

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an artificial market, based mainly on snob appeal.

It may be possible to advance arguments for the exploitation of animals in the name of long-established, basic hu-

man needs. But to exploit animals in order to produce a product for which very few people have expressed even the weakest of desires seems unambiguously wrong.