

Questioning Our Actions Towards Animals:
Animal-Related Ethical Dilemmas for Young People



Lunch Time! : Being Mindful of the Origins of Our Food

It was Emilio's first day at camp, and, though he got lost finding his way to the basketball court earlier in the day, he managed to find the cafeteria by following the massive crowd at noontime. As he made his way into the lunch room, the crowd parted, revealing a room filled with noisy campers sitting at long tables unlike any he had ever seen.

Emilio had been home-schooled his whole life, so he had always eaten with his parents and siblings in the kitchen when they had a break from their studies. Emilio's family had always lived by their belief in showing compassion towards animals, and they chose only to eat humanely-raised meat. His dad had grown up on a farm, where he gained a respect for where food comes from, and his oldest brother, a vegetarian, was now in college studying to become an ecologist.

So, when the hungry Emilio finally made his way to the front of the lunch line with his tray, he was taken aback by the sight before him. While at home, he usually had some sort of humanely-raised meat with the option of more vegetables than anyone could imagine, camp seemed to be much different. The campers had two choices: a chicken patty on a bun along with a handful of French fries and cooked carrots or a pulled-pork sandwich with gravy, mashed potatoes, and peas.

As the person in front of him received his meal and headed to a table, Emilio didn't budge. From behind, he heard students grumbling as the line stopped moving. In a family of animal-lovers, Emilio knew all about the cruelty of factory farming, in which animals are raised under inhumane conditions only to be killed for meat. He guessed that this meat came from chickens or pigs who had probably never seen sunlight, had never had enough room to lie down or move, and had been slaughtered using inhumane methods. As he finally made a move toward the server, Emilio's brain was overflowing with uncertainty. Is there anything he can do to stay true to his family's beliefs while still leaving the cafeteria with a full stomach?



Emilio has to think quickly if he is going to have anything to eat today at camp. Skipping lunch doesn't seem wise, as he has a full day of activities. For the moment he should act wisely and choose what foods he thinks he can live comfortably with, but he will have to put a plan into action that will surely change his daily options and perhaps the options of the other campers. Most people do not understand where their meat, eggs, and dairy products come from, but Emilio does. The majority of these foods are produced on factory farms, a method of farming where large numbers of animals are raised in small, confined areas, to maximize productivity. Animals living on factory farms have an unnatural and poor quality of life, with much stress, and limited fresh air, space, and socialization.

The MSPCA believes that the billions of animals raised each year in the United States for food, clothing, and other products are entitled to live their lives free of unnecessary pain, suffering, and stress. Additionally, all animals should have the right to a humane death.

Not wishing to create a scene, Emilio can simply ask the lunch servers for a couple helpings of vegetables with a plain bun, explaining that he and his family observe special dietary restrictions. It would be unlikely that anyone would give him a hard time for this, as other campers are likely to ask for similar consideration every now and then, especially during religious holidays or if they have food allergies. However, it would be a meal with little protein. If he prefers to simply eat the meal being served, he can do so with the understanding that he really had little choice and didn't want to go hungry until suppertime.

Going forward, Emilio has several options. Because it's a day camp, the easiest solution would be to bring his lunch from home each day. Then he would know more about his food and where it originated, perhaps giving him more peace of mind. Humanely-raised meat is produced by animals who live more "normal" lives, with time outdoors or in larger cages, receive better quality food, have more social interaction between animals, and have a less stressful end to life.

However, if Emilio wants to make a bigger change for animals, he might set up a meeting with or write a letter to the camp's director, requesting better options at meal time. Emilio believes that healthier, more humane options are necessary. A smart and simple idea is to suggest offering at least one vegetarian option each day—something that makes good health sense. While Emilio's ultimate wish might be to have humanely-raised meats served at camp, humanely-raised meat is more expensive than factory farmed meat. Maybe a reasonable goal would be for the camp to serve meat half as often but only serve humanely-raised meat.

Emilio could also find other campers with similar values who can help promote their beliefs. If all else fails or if Emilio feels too alone in this issue, his parents can schedule a meeting with the camp director explaining their dietary choices.