

**Food Studies
Teach Yourself Series**

Topic 12: Ethical decisions in food choice (Unit 4)

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Ethical decisions in food choice

Consumers have many decisions to make with regard to purchasing food products. In making food choices ethical issues arise such as treatment of animals, use of chemicals and herbicides. Consumers need to make food choices that they feel are appropriate for their beliefs and values.

What are ethical issues in food production?

As it appears in Unit 4

Australians are becoming more and more concerned about how their food is being produced and if it is being produced in an ethical way. Ethics can be defined as “moral principles that govern a person's behaviour or the conducting of an activity” www.oxforddictionaries.com. These principles are learned or developed over time as the person matures emotionally. With regard to the raising and slaughtering of animals, consumers are now more concerned about an appropriate way to do this humanely and while respecting the animal.

Ethical issues in food production include three main areas, animal welfare, sustainable food production systems and fair trade.

- ☐ Animal welfare includes looking at the way the animal housed and sheltered, if it has room to move around easily, if it has access to the natural environment, and if it is fed a balanced diet.
- ☐ Sustainable food production systems look at if the production system can be used by generations in the future, or if the food supply will be diminished in the short term. Sustainable food supply is very important to consumers as they want to purchase products which will be beneficial in the future.
- ☐ Fair trade means purchasing products which farmers in developing countries receive a fair wage for their produce and working conditions are humane. It also prevents child labour and encourages sustainability. Examples of fair trade products include chocolate, coffee, spices and tea. Consumers need to think carefully before purchasing food products.

Review Questions:

1.

a. Define ethics.

b. Name the three areas linked with ethical food choices.

a. Describe some of the issues related to animal welfare.

b. Explain what it means for a product to be produced sustainably.

c. Describe the benefits to consumers of purchasing Fairtrade products.

What are ethical issues in poultry production?

As it appears in Unit 4

There is a large consumption of chicken (poultry) and egg products by Australians, as they are very versatile and economical. Australians are becoming more concerned about the way chickens are being kept for slaughtering and for the production of eggs.

For meat and egg farming there are three ways of keeping chickens.

- ❑ **Intensive animal farming**, this involves having a large number of birds housed in small cages in large sheds. There is little room for the bird to move around and the lighting is regulated to control egg production i.e. The chickens never know that it is day or night. The birds are fed with automatic feeders. When the hens are grown for meat, the hens grow very quickly due to a special type of feed that may contain hormones. As they grow, the sheds become more crowded and some hens do not survive due to heat stress.
- ❑ **Barn laid eggs** are when hens are free to roam around in a shed as well as able to spread their wings. They also have nesting boxes and perches, so these hens have a lot more freedom than the birds farmed intensively. The best way to raise hens is free range. This means the hens are free to roam inside and outside during daylight hours. The hens can look for grubs and scratch in the grass and they have natural food supplies.
- ❑ **Free range chickens** are the most ethical way to choose chicken meat or eggs, as the animal is comfortable in their natural environment.

Some chicken available in supermarkets is organic. This means it has been fed with organic food, free from antibiotics, hormones, and extra vitamins and minerals. Free range and organic chicken and eggs tend to more expensive for consumers due to the increased cost of production. However, consumer demand for these products have caused the prices to drop in recent time, particularly for barn laid eggs sold in Coles supermarkets. Lilydale Chicken is a very popular organic chicken brand and has a wide variety of ethically produced chicken products.

Review Question:

2.

- a. Describe the conditions for hens in an intensive farming environment.

Solutions to Review Questions

1.

- a. Ethics can be defined as the right or wrong way to do something based on moral principles.
- b. Ethical issues in food production include three main areas, animal welfare, sustainable food production systems and fair trade.
- c. Animal welfare includes looking at the way the animal housed and sheltered, if it has room to move around easily, if it has access to the natural environment, and if it is fed a balanced diet.
- d. Sustainable food production systems look at if the production system can be used by generations in the future, or if the food supply will be diminished in the short term.
- e. Fair trade means purchasing products which farmers in developing countries receive a fair wage for their produce. It also prevents child labour and encourages sustainability.

2.

- a. Intensive animal farming, this involves having a large number of birds housed in small cages in large sheds. There is little room for the bird to move around and the lighting is regulated to control egg production. The birds are fed with automatic feeders.
- b. Barn laid eggs are when hens are free to roam around in a shed as well as able to spread their wings. They also have nesting boxes and perches, so these hens have a lot more freedom than the birds farmed intensively.
- c. Hens are free to roam inside and outside during daylight hours. This means the hens can look for grubs and scratch in the grass and they have natural food supplies.
- d. Some chicken available in supermarkets is organic, this means it has been fed with organic feed, free from antibiotics, and added vitamins and minerals.
- e. Free range and organic chicken and eggs tend to be more expensive for consumers.

3.

- a. Pork can be produced in three ways, by indoor or intensive farming, animals that are bred outdoors but raised indoors and free range pork production.
- b. When female pigs are pregnant, some pigs are kept in small pens called sow stalls, which make pregnancy and giving birth very difficult. Confinement to pigs can cause stress and affect their health.
- c. Australian beef is produced either by the cattle being pasture fed or by feedlots.
- d. Pasture feed cattle are only fed on pasture, or cereal grain crops for their entire lives. No growth hormones or antibiotics can be used on the animals. A wide variety of pasture feed beef products are available at supermarkets such as steaks, roasts, schnitzels and mince.
- e. Students will discuss their own experiences of purchasing meat.

4.

- a. They use methods such as bycatch, in which a large net can catch species that are not targeted. Purse-seine nets, which involves using a large around a whole school of fish. Fish aggregating devices, which are a float or buoy used to attract the fish. Trawling, in which a large net collects all the fish on the bottom of the ocean, or longline fishing, in which line are set up to 150 kilometers long and many endangered species can be caught.
- b. These methods cause decline in species of fish, damage to the environment by harming vegetation and diminish supplies of fish for the future.
- c. More sustainable methods of fish production are now being used. Sustainable seafood is fish or shellfish that reaches our plates with minimal impact upon fish populations or the wider marine environment as defined by the Australian Marine Conservation Society. This includes the running of fish farms where, fish and seafood are grown in sea cages and harvested once they reach optimal size.
- d. Labelling issues include not all seafood sources need to state the country it is from.
- e. Students will give their own view on eating sustainably source seafood.

5.

- a. Organic food is food that is produced without the use of artificial chemicals and fertilisers, as well as food that has not been genetically modified or irradiation methods used.
- b. There is now a large range of organic food products available and some of these include vegetables, fruit, dairy products, eggs, baby food, breakfast cereals, baked goods and canned products.
- c. Organic foods are widely available in supermarkets, local farmers' markets, health food shops and green grocers. Many Australians are growing their own organic fruit and vegetables at home.
- d. Benefits of organic food include, good sources of vitamins and minerals, only natural ingredients and the products are free from pesticides and herbicides.
- e. Organic foods may to be more expensive due to the higher costs to produce these products by farmers.

6.

- a. Fair trade products mean that the products been produced by the workers being treated fairly.
- b. Fair trade products have been produced so that farmers will receive a good price for their produce, child labour is prohibited, farmers can access low interest or no interest, there are good working conditions which promote sustainability to the environment and communities will have better access to education and health care.
- c. Food products which now have fair trade practices include quinoa, honey, chocolate, coffee, spices and tea.
- d. Major supermarkets, health food stores and farmer's markets support the sale of Fair trade products.
- e. Students will discuss their personal experience with free trade products.