Intro to module (3.3) Chickens raised for meat

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|  | Taking points in italics |
| You have probably noticed by now that this course does not shy away from controversial issues. In our discussion of dairy production we took on the rBST issue, and in the module on Places We Shop we challenged many commonly-held notions about local foods. After a virtual tour of a swine farm we considered the well-being of the animals, and after a tour of the beef farm we investigated beef’s role in climate change. |  |
| Next we are going on a virtual tour of farms that raise chickens for meat. I will not be leading this tour, as we do not have chicken farms on the OSU campus, so instead we will view a video produced by the poultry industry. Then, we will follow that video with a discussion of water pollution stemming from the production of chicken meat. |  |
| I don’t want you to think that such pollution stems solely from chicken production. The production of virtually any food results in pollution of various kinds, including air and water pollution. The controversies concern not whether we pollute, but whether we are polluting too much, and if so, what is the least costly way of reducing pollution. |  |
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| Before discussing water pollution stemming from poultry manure, I want to give you reasons for being optimistic about our ability to reduce such pollution, while still providing affordable food. |  |
| I am able to write an article about the relationship between poultry manure applications and water pollution because we live in a society where free speech is respected, where environmental groups and universities are allowed to criticize farm practices, where regulations are passed to protect the environment and the food supply, and where the private sector is allowed to make their arguments and offer their own solutions to environmental problems. |  |
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| Contrast this with China, whose water pollution is much worse. Chinese factories have been allowed to freely dispose of its waste into waters, and some of these waters irrigate rice patties. Such pollution is so prevalent that one study found that sixty percent of rice in three Chinese provinces had dangerous levels of cadmium, a heavy metal that damages bones and kidneys. |  |
| So both the U.S. and China have to confront water pollution problems related to food—but here is the important distinction. In the U.S. researchers can conduct scientific studies of the pollution and discuss it openly. In China, they also conduct studies, but they often consider the results to be “state secrets.” So their citizens are kept misinformed about the true danger residing in the food they eat. And when they do reveal some of these secrets, the information they provide answers few questions. |  |
| More importantly, the Chinese cannot sue polluters, nor can they vote politicians who are protecting the polluters out of office. |  |
| So, as you read the article, don’t let the discussion of water pollution in the U.S. depress you. Yes, we do have problems in the production of our food, but we know what those problems are, we are allowed to debate about the extent of those problems, and pressure politicians and regulatory agencies to act in society’s best interest. |  |
| This class does confront controversial issues, but I discuss them not because I want this class to be controversial, but because I want this class to be part of the solution.  |  |
| A science has even been developed to tackle problems of pollution. Today, there is a class of engineers called “environmental engineers”, and a field of economics called “environmental economics.” Both of them have established scientific methods for reducing pollution at a low cost. To understand these methods it is imperative to understand the economic term “externality” as well as the “cap-and-trade” solution economists favor. Consequently, after reading the article about pollution from poultry manure, you will read an article about externalities in agriculture, containing a discussion of the cap-and-trade system. | *To confront pollution problems, we must understand the term “externality”, and the “cap-and-trade” policies economists favor for reducing pollution.* |
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