

HAMBURGERS: A HISTORY

FEATURING THEIR:

Origin & Development

Advertising & Pop-Culture

*Health & Environmental
Impact*





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ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT

BY BRETT WEBSTER

The hamburger is a staple of the American diet. It's humble origins can be traced as far back as the Mongol times. To understand how the modern hamburger came to be, we must first examine its history to see the development of this food come to fruition.

ORIGINS

The key ingredient of the hamburger is the ground beef patty that gives it its middle. The earliest instances of ground beef come from the Mongol times in the 1100s. The Mongols formed patties of a variety of meat, placing these under their saddles when riding, and thus flattening the beef until it was time to eat.¹

They did this to create a fast and easy to eat food that could be easily transported. This is the first documented instance of ground beef being consumed. This idea was eventually brought to the Russians who created the "Steak tartare," raw beef ground and flattened into a steak.² Eventually, this food made its way to Germany, where they coined it as the "Hamburg Steak," which was the first ground beef brought to the United States via immigrants from Germany in the 1800s.³ Variations of this dish were popular across Europe in the 1800s. Beef sandwiches were a delicacy in England and

France for their taste, texture and simple easy to make nature.⁴ These early developments show that the hamburger has come a long way to what it is today. The use of ground beef is certainly not a new concept in the world. However it took over 700 years for this creation to make its way to the new world.

AMERICANIZATION

The transformation of the raw beef patty or Hamburg steak into what we now know today as the burger took a great leap in creativity and innovation. When the Hamburg steak first arrived in the United

States, it caught on for its cheap price, yet nutritional value. The first appearance of Hamburg steak on a menu was in 1836 at a restaurant in New York.⁵ The simplicity and low cost of the dish made beef accessible to many Americans. Further, in the 1880s, the new railway allowed beef from the Midwestern plains more accessible to the big cities in the east, making the Hamburg steak even more available and cheap for the immigrants who made it.⁶ Beef was a resource that the United States had a wealth of, this

☐☐ THE MOST
CONCENTRATED WAY A
PERSON CAN CHEAPLY
EAT WHAT EVERYONE
LIKES ABOUT BEEF ☐☐



combined with the simple nature of the Hamburg steak made it an attractive meal option to any American. The meal was described as "The most concentrated way a person can cheaply eat what everyone likes about beef."⁷

THE FIRST BURGER

There are several stories presented as to who actually created the first hamburger:

Version 1: Charlie Nagreen, a 15 year old sold hamburgers from a cart at the Outagamie County Fair starting

around 1885. He created the hamburger after discovering that his meatballs were not selling because they were not transportable around the fair. He thus sandwiched meatballs between two slices of bread, and marketed the product as a burger.⁸

Version 2: Frank and Charles Menches invented the hamburger at their travelling concession in 1885. They ran out of pork for their sausages, so they substituted beef instead, grinding it up and serving it up between two slices of bread. They called it the hamburger, because the fair that they were at was in Hamburg, New York.⁹

Version 3: Oscar Weber Bilby claims to have created the first hamburger on a bun, on his family farm in 1891. He made a grill for himself, and put the beef on special buns.¹⁰

Version 4: Louis' lunch in New Haven Connecticut claims to have made the first hamburger around 1900. The owner sandwiched patties of leftover beef between two slices of bread and served them to customers, becoming quite popular locally.¹¹

Version 5: Fletcher Davis created the hamburger around 1880 by putting a Hamburg steak between two pieces of Texas toast

when a customer was in a rush. He brought this invention to the St. Louis world fair in 1904, where the hamburger was popularized.¹²

In terms of their validity, all make strong claims to the creation of the burger. It is entirely possible that none of them are true and it is also possible that they are all true, that many people came up with the same idea at different times, in different places. The burgers that originated at the fair seem to be the strongest, as historically many other foods have been invented under similar circumstances. It is possible that both



Nagreen and Menches came up with the idea independently, since there is no historical evidence, this seems to be the most plausible explanation. There was not a sole creator of the hamburger, but creators of this dish in different regions of America, marketing similar products to the masses

THE MODERN BURGER

Now that the origins of the original burger have been outlined, we must get from this early model to the

hamburger that we have today. The creator of the modern day hamburger has a fair consensus amongst historians. Walter Anderson is credited with developing the hamburger bun in 1916.¹³ He also introduced the idea of having toppings and condiments on a burger at his hamburger stand. He was so successful that he was able to open several more.¹⁴ This was the first instance of a modern hamburger. Although not the creations we have today, the steady development of the burger can be seen here. The addition of the bun is what

separates the Hamburg steak from the hamburger. The modern burger America knows and loves has already taken shape. One issue with hamburgers at the time was that they were viewed as food for the poor, working class people, and not for the higher echelon of society. Anderson had the best hamburger stand ever, however many people were still skeptical of it because of this stereotype about burgers.¹⁵ Edgar "Billy" Ingram saw through this issue, viewing the hamburger as an opportunity to make a significant profit. He

was in real estate and when Anderson came to him about opening up a burger stand he jumped at the opportunity. They went into business together, creating the White Castle Brand in 1926.¹⁶ The system was highly efficient, selling 5 cent hamburgers with uniformly trained staff and an exact replica product across the United States. The introduction of the small, minimalist hamburgers with limited toppings and condiments was finally becoming relevant in America, only to further grow in the future.

THE HISTORY OF HAMBURGER ADVERTISING

BY JAKE HUMPHREY

WHAT YOU SEE AND WHAT YOU GET: A BRIEF HISTORY OF HAMBURGER ADVERTISING

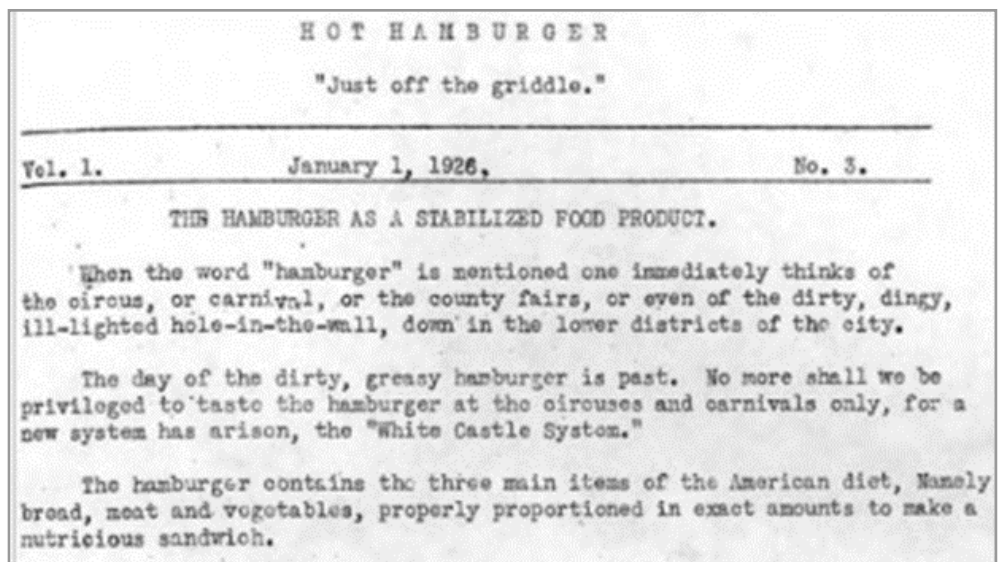
In spite of its humble composition, hamburgers holds a special place in the collective hearts of fast food lovers and has become a globally recognizable symbol of American culture. In order to understand how such a modest food has gained such an internationally substantial status, it is important to analyze the history of the hamburger in advertising. In particular, examining the changing nature of fast food marketing makes it easy to situate contemporary hamburger advertisements within a long-term historical narrative.

ORIGINS

Any history of hamburger advertisements is incomplete without examining the role of Edgar "Billy" Ingram in revolutionizing the sale of hamburgers. Prior to Ingram's innovations, the hamburger was still largely considered low quality crowd-fare at circuses, carnivals, and county fairs.¹ However, Ingram sought to challenge these assumptions through his business: White Castle. On January 1st, 1926, in

what was called the 'hot hamburger newsletter,' (Pictured below) Ingram created the 'white castle system' and forever changed how hamburgers were sold, bought, and consumed.² Although the Hot Hamburger Newsletter does not even closely resemble a hamburger ad by today's standards, it functioned as the world's first significant hamburger advertisement. This newsletter emphasized the potential dietary advantages of hamburgers, the convenience and portability of their product, as

well as the specialization and expertise that went into the burger's creation. The immediate growth and longstanding success of White Castle demonstrates how Ingram effectively reshaped popular perceptions of the hamburger through his innovative advertising strategies. Ultimately, Ingram's original hamburger advertisement effectively set the stage for burger chains such as McDonald's and Burger King to attain global dominance through competitive advertising tactics.





BURGER WARS

Beginning in the middle of the 20th century, the competitive advertising strategies employed by McDonald's and Burger King have come to be known as the 'burger wars.' Up until the 1970's, the American hamburger industry was growing exponentially and perpetual growth appeared inevitable.³ But, once the growth rate slowed, superpowers like Burger King and McDonalds sought to maintain profitability through competitive advertising. Most commonly, this advertising competition did not strive for creativity or significant innovation and instead focused on imitating the competitor's successful products.⁴ By way of example, in an attempt to recreate the mass popularity of McDonald's signature

'Big Mac,' Burger King unveiled a new advertising campaign which boasted that their 'Big King' was "like a Big Mac, except it's got 75% more beef – and its flame-broiled."⁵ Identically, McDonald's attempted to recreate Burger King's signature 'Whopper' in an advertising campaign that depicts a man attempting to pawn his Whopper for McDonald's new Big Xtra Burger.⁶ However, these attempts at imitation were just the initial aggressions in the 'Burger Wars.' As competition intensified, the advertisements diversified, and began highlighting features that had not previously been targeted. For example, McDonald's 1992 campaign featured combination meals to emphasize the cost effectiveness of their brand.⁷ These advertisements demonstrate a shift away from advertising

the hamburger itself towards an approach that placed a higher emphasis on where you were buying it. In effect, this encouraged the formation of brand loyalty. As a result, the burger wars became a competition over converting loyal customers. This rivalry took the shape of competing advertisements that aimed to compare one company's fast food with another. Notably, these advertisements typically did not aim to attack the quality of the competitors food, and instead aimed to associate one's product with the success and popularity of their rival.⁸





VISUAL APPEAL

Notably, contemporary fast food advertisements aim to represent their hamburgers in the most flattering light in a delicate balance of aesthetics and deception. Fast food companies are legally bound to use their real ingredients and hire professional food stylists and photo editing experts to represent their hamburgers in the most appealing way.⁹ On a typical advertisement production set, hamburgers are undercooked in order to maintain size, the toppings are handpicked from thousands, the burger is assembled using surgical tools (such as forceps and syringes) and the final product is photo-shopped to eliminate any remaining imperfections.¹⁰ This, entire process could

take hours or multiple days to perfect the final product. There are also legal regulations that protect fast food companies from claims that they are intentionally cheating their customers. In particular, the Federal Trade Commission has no special regulations on the photographs of food used in advertising.¹¹ In other words, companies are not liable for claims that their product does not resemble the photographs used in advertisements. In effect, hamburgers in advertisements are represented to maximize their attractiveness, while hamburgers sold in fast food restaurants are not held to any significant aesthetic standard.



BEYOND THE BURGER

Another important advertising tactic to consider is the inclusion of children's toys into fast food meals. In further attempts to distract customers from the quality of hamburgers as a legitimate meal, companies such as McDonald's and Burger King create advertisements that pay little attention to the food itself and instead emphasize the inclusions of children's toys.¹² Recently this particular advertising tactic has come under substantial scrutiny for its effectiveness in targeting children customers. In particular, research indicates that the children's chances of becoming unhealthily overweight increased with the amount of television they viewed

and also found that children who watched the most TV consumed the most fast food.¹³ This demonstrates the effectiveness of associating hamburgers with toys in reaching adolescent consumers.





HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

BY **THOMAS FLYNN**

The mass uptake of fast-food and subsequently hamburgers did not come without its obstacles and detractors. The fast-food industry has created numerous externalities, detrimentally impacting consumer, worker, and environmental health.

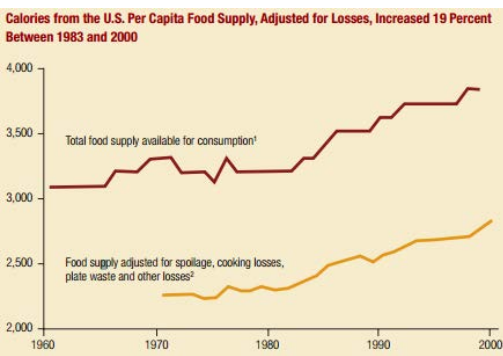


HYPER CONSUMPTION

Consumption of fast-food has rapidly increased since its inception in the early-mid 1900s, driving mass-production of its inputs, like meat. The economies of scale provided through this process made fast-food increasingly affordable and therefore accessible to the masses. The mass production and consumption of fast-food even contributed to US food oversupply, with calories per capita increasing ~20% from 1980 to 2000 in the US as seen in the chart below.¹ The fast-food industry helped create an environment in developed nations encouraging hyper consumption in the form of an “eat more” mandate, with low prices and heavy-handed

promotional activity.² The fast-food industry has also significantly impacted food consumption patterns, as the proportion of US consumers’ food budget spent away-from-home increased over 15% between 1970 and 1995; a change attributable largely to increased spending at fast-food restaurants.³ Such changes were propelled by changing social conventions as dual income homes became progressively more common and the combined weekly work hours of the average couple increased ~20% from 1969 to 2000, leaving adults with less time to prepare food and amplifying the appeal of fast-food.⁴ This, coupled with fast-food’s affordable and accessible nature, drove Americans’ spend on fast-food to rise from \$6 billion to \$110 billion over this same time horizon.⁵

obesogenic environments encouraging excessive food intake and discouraging physical activity.⁶ The fast-food industry has played a major role in creating obesogenic environments and therefore, increasing the prevalence of obesity in America and developed nations worldwide. Away-from-home food (i.e. fast food), a category that has been noted as representing an increasing proportion of Americans’ food consumption, is higher in nutrients that Americans over-consume (like saturated fat) and lower in nutrients that Americans under-consume (like calcium and iron).⁷ Furthermore, there are numerous dietic factors associated with fast-food that have made it inherently conducive to weight gain aside from its low price and high accessibility, such as its high energy, fat, sugar, and salt content, high glycemic load, and low fiber content.⁸



OBESITY EPIDEMIC

No health issue associated with the rapid increase of fast-food consumption is more topical and pronounced than obesity, with it emerging as a major health concern over the past few decades. Obesity is a “disease of consumption” that is propelled by





DECEITFUL TACTICS

It has been proven that humans are poor self-regulators of caloric intake, consuming more as portion sizes increase.⁹ Over the past 50 years the portion size of burgers, french fries, pizzas, and soft drinks at fast-food establishments have all increased by a multiple of 2-5.¹⁰ For example, the largest soda McDonald's offered in 1955 was 7-ounces, almost half the size of the 12-ounce "child size" offered at the end of the 20th century.¹¹ Appealing to the main factors that consumers cited as drivers of fast-food choice, price and convenience, fast-food chains put in place "value meals" in the 1970s, generally comprised of a hamburger, fries, and a drink.¹² Value meals were often manipulatively priced such that the "combos" were only slightly more expensive than buying a stand-alone hamburger. The economic crunch of the 1970s, driven by the 1973 oil crisis and fall of the Bretton Woods monetary system, brought about upsizing tactics, like "supersizing", which lifted customer spend and provided

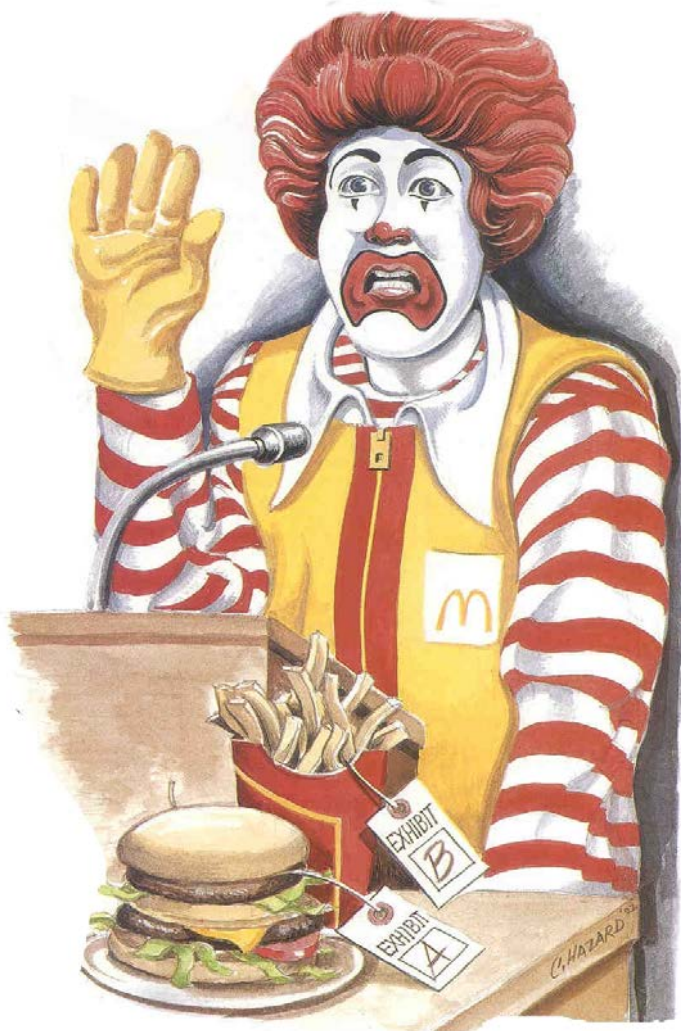
increased value to counteract the tendency of individuals to revert to home cooked meals in recessionary periods, effectively altering the consumption patterns of Americans. This tactic saw fast-food chain's charge ~12% more on average to give consumers ~25% more calories and fat.¹³ These strategies resulted in consumption above and beyond the appropriate energy requirements of a single meal, contributing to the "obesity epidemic".

SELECTIVE TARGETING

The most vulnerable segment in society, children, were particularly susceptible to fast-food's powerful influence. Fast-food chains realized the potential of targeting children in their mass-media advertising campaigns and product offerings, and McDonald's introduced the "Happy Meal", comprised of a hamburger, french fries, cookies, a soft drink, and a toy, in 1979.¹⁴ These Happy Meals combined entertainment industry icons like Transformers, Mickey Mouse, and Teletubbies, preying on children's love of toys to generate sales of the high calorie/fat meals

as many begged their parents to go to McDonald's not just for the food, but for the associated toy. Such practices went relatively unquestioned for decades (California only banned Happy Meal toys at McDonald's as of 2010), until evidence of the link between fast-food and childhood obesity became undeniable. Due to these predatory tactics, US children's fast-food consumption increased five times from 2% to 10% of caloric intake from the 1970s to the 1990s.¹⁵ Unsurprisingly, this consumption shift was also accompanied by bloating childhood obesity rates, as the proportion of children in the US who were deemed to be obese more than doubled from 6% to 14% over this period.¹⁶





THE STATS

Increased fast-food consumption, its nutritional properties, and the way that fast-food offerings were combined and sold contributed to a rise in obesity rates. In the US, obesity rates increased from approximately 10% to 30% from 1960 to the late 1990s.¹⁷ Due to the reach and penetration of fast-food giants, the obesity epidemic reared its head in more nations than just the US. In Britain, the obesity rate climbed from 7% in 1980 to 20% in 1999.¹⁸ Increased rates of obesity were inevitably coupled with a spike in obesity-related health

issues such as heart disease, high blood pressure, and diabetes over this same period.

CHANGING PERCEPTION

The perception of fast-food has altered over time. Fast-food chains' growing "junk food" image was a result of health and nutrition science breakthroughs. Such discoveries altered the way red meat and fast-food was viewed in society. In the 1950s, Ancel Keys, an American physiologist who specialized in diet and health, denounced the mass consumption of red meat due to its high content of

saturated fat.¹⁹ More evidence was stacked against the industry in the 1970s as scientists began to link red meat to cancer, and by the 1990s many experts were confident that red meat caused colorectal cancer and possibly other forms of the deadly disease.²⁰ Such discoveries caused the shift from red meat to poultry consumption. To align with consumer expectations and avoid the perception that fast-food caused both obesity and cancer as red meat became a known carcinogen, variations of the classic hamburger such as veggie, and chicken burgers emerged. Fast-food chains also began to diversify their product offerings in the 1980s, adding healthier alternatives like salads, bran muffins, and fresh fruit to their menus to improve their tarnished image.

MEATPACKING INDUSTRY

Mass consumption has increased fast-food chains' economies of scale and their buying power relative to suppliers. As such, their demands for cost minimization have drastically effected the way that cattle are raised, killed, and processed. Fast-food's influence altered the meatpacking industry between 1950 and 1980, changing it from a high-skill operation into

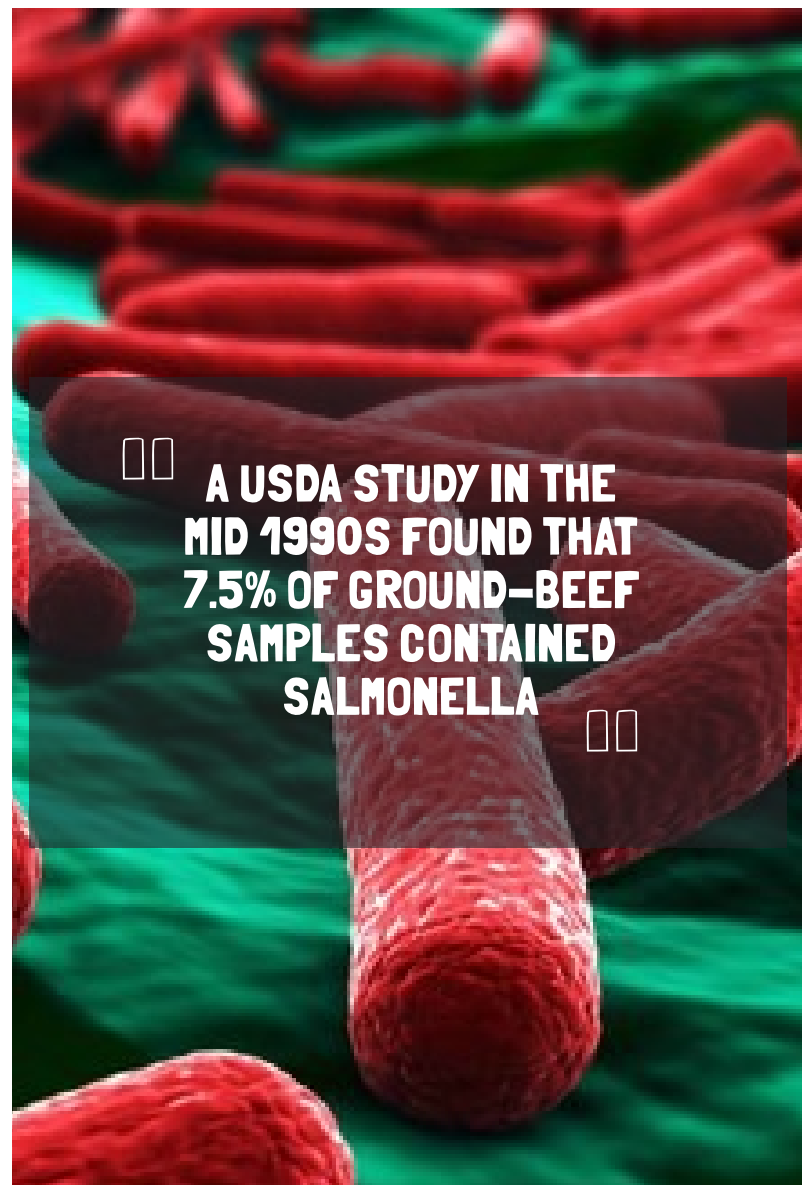
the most dangerous job in America, performed by low-skill, immigrant workers.²¹ The injury rate in a slaughterhouse was three times greater than that seen in an average factory in the US in the 1990s.²² Production line expectations have grown unrealistic too. Meatpacking facilities in Chicago in the early 1900s operated at a disassembly rate of 50 cattle per hour. Despite relying on the same hand processes, these expectations grew to 175 cattle per hour by the 1980s and 400 per hour by the 90s.²³ Injuries inevitably rose as workers hastened their efforts to almost inhuman rates, making close-quarter knife cuts every 2-3 seconds for the duration of a shift.²⁴ The increasing pressure for cost cutting from fast-food giants created a vicious and unsafe workplace environment within meatpacking suppliers. The deteriorating working conditions encouraged by the fast-food industry over the course of the twentieth century, led to 25% of the 160,000 workers in the US suffering a work-related injury or illness that required attention beyond first aid by the late 1990s.²⁵





DISEASE AND INFECTION

The meatpacking industry, molded by the needs of the fast-food industry, underwent rapid consolidation, with 13 packinghouses supplying most of the beef consumed in the US by 2000.²⁶ Food contamination outbreaks now had the potential to reach millions. Viruses that harmed few people in the mid 1900s, such as *E. coli*, became more widespread because of the fast-food industry. While sanitation practices at meatpacking facilities improved since 1906, a time when dangerous chemicals were used to conceal spoiled beef, canned meat was intentionally mislabelled, and workers urinated on the production floor, practices employed in the late 1900s still proved ineffective at eliminating the spread of harmful infections.²⁷ 75% of America's cattle were fed livestock waste, such as chicken manure and remains of dead cattle, cats, and dogs until 1997, all of which could contain harmful pathogens.²⁸ Moreover, the mixing of cattle meat in the mass production of ground beef played a critical role in spreading *E. coli*, with a single hamburger potentially containing meat from hundreds of cattle, more than ever before. In the 1990s, the tawdry reputation of the hamburger was returning. The simple explanation for why eating a hamburger could make you seriously ill: "there is shit in the meat".²⁹ Through the 1990s, more than half a million Americans, most them children, were made ill by *E. coli*, with hundreds dying.³⁰



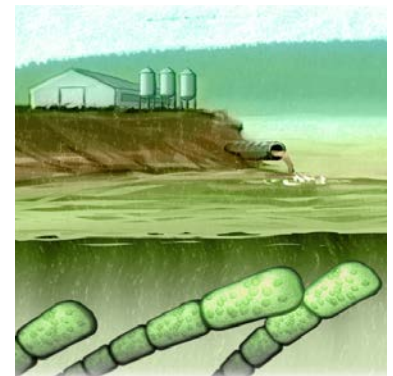


ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

The democratization of fast-food and the mass production and consumption of ground beef has had dire consequences on the environment as well. The shift from small scale traditional farming to industrial livestock production techniques that the fast-food industry encouraged enabled worldwide production to rise from 78 million tonnes in 1963 to 308 million tonnes in 2014.³¹ The new production format and massive scale of

meatpacking has generated greater nitrous oxide and greenhouse gas emissions, water consumption, and waste creation, while simultaneously detrimentally impacting river, ocean, and forest ecosystems through runoff and deforestation. For instance, 70% of ex-forests in the Amazon have been turned to pastures for grazing.³² Moreover, the livestock sector eclipsed the transport industry in greenhouse gas emissions, a major contributor to climate change, by the mid 2000s.³³ Given that meat

production is projected to double by 2050, the fast-food and meatpacking industries must rethink their historically applied procurement and production processes before the damage inflicted to the environment is irreparable.



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