

# 091316 - 5 Ways You Are Subsidizing Big Meat Without Knowing It

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Many people think of the USDA as a kind of FDA for farm products, dedicated to protecting the public's health against sloppy or even sleazy practices. But actually the USDA, created when America was agrarian, primarily serves rural America and food producers, not consumers. Its [mission](#) is "helping rural America to thrive; to promote agriculture production that better nourishes Americans while also helping feed others throughout the world; and to preserve our Nation's natural resources through conservation, restored forests, improved watersheds, and healthy private working lands." Key word *private*.

More than \$112 billion of the USDA's yearly [budget](#) of \$139.7 billion goes to Food and Nutrition Service programs like Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program or SNAP (formerly food stamps) which "support American agriculture by providing an outlet for surplus products and encouraging consumption of domestically produced foods" at schools, food banks and needy households, stabilizing prices. But more than \$20 billion of the yearly USDA budget unashamedly serves private food producers with Federal Crop Insurance, animal and crop research, wildlife and predator elimination and even aggressive food product marketing, sometimes in conjunction with unhealthy fast food operations.

Here are some of the ways you are involuntarily supporting Big Meat.

## 1. Pushing more cheese.

The USDA and its food pyramids may [caution](#) people about eating too many high-fat foods that contribute to obesity, but that did not stop it from helping Pizza Hut, Taco Bell, Burger King, Wendy's and Domino's to conspire to sell *more* high-fat foods that contribute to obesity. In fact, the USDA created an entity called Dairy Management, with 162 employees to help fast-food giants "cheesify" their menus, says the New York Times. "If every pizza included one more ounce of cheese, we would sell an additional 250 million pounds of cheese annually," rhapsodized the Dairy Management chief executive in a trade publication.

Dairy Management, while mostly funded by farmers, received [\\$5.3 million](#) of our tax dollars from the USDA during one year, observes the Times—almost equal to the \$6.5 million budget of USDA's Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion, which tells the public to avoid fatty foods...like cheese.

It is also no secret that in providing outlets for "surplus products and encouraging consumption of domestically produced foods," some of Big Ag's least healthful and most fattening foods end up in FNS programs. Who can forget that the downer cows which became the [biggest meat recall](#) in U.S. history were going to the [National School Lunch Program](#)? Who can forget that "[pink slime](#)"—ground beef treated with ammonia puffs to retard the growth of E. coli—was also a National School Lunch Program mainstay?

In fact, during the recession of 2009, when Americans were eating fewer animal products, the National Association of State Departments of Agriculture even tried to dump unwanted products on SNAP recipients by increasing their allotments *if used for animal products*. "Product purchases will quickly reduce the oversupply on the market while additional funding to SNAP for meat purchases will allow low-income families access to more nutritious meals," [said](#) the NASDA proposal. "Through no fault of their own," many dairy, pork and poultry producers were suffering from an "oversupply" of product and facing possible liquidations, said a NASDA [letter](#) to Congress proposing using [\\$2 to \\$3 billion](#) from the American Recovery and Reinvestment stimulus package for a "Meat the Need" program.

## 2. Pushing more milk.

Using our tax dollars to market food products its own pyramid says are unhealthful is not limited to cheese. The [Got Milk](#) mustache campaign, one of the most recognizable ad campaigns in history, represents the USDA's most notorious marketing efforts in conjunction with the National Dairy Promotion and Research Board and the

National Fluid Milk Processor Promotion Board. Posters of milk mustache-wearing actors, sports figures and celebrities have appeared in 60,000 U.S. public elementary schools and 45,000 middle and high schools to *help private industry*. The milk lobby held an in-school “Healthiest Student Bodies” promotion in which students could win an iPod, a Fender guitar or sports gear by visiting the website.

The government has also [allowed](#) school contests in which students invented their own Got Milk campaigns to compete to win an all-expenses-paid trip to San Francisco to present their ideas to the milk ad agency.

Like NASDA’s dumping the least healthful foods on poor people, the Fluid Milk Board in [yearly presentations](#) to Congress admits that it “continues to spotlight the high incidence of high blood pressure among African Americans and to promote milk and milk products as a dietary solution as part of the DASH [Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension] diet,” despite little to no evidence of milk’s value in combating hypertension. The Fluid Milk Board also told Congress it was trying to dispel the myth that lactose intolerance—common in African Americans and other minorities—“should not be a barrier to including milk in the diet.” It even told Congress it touts milk’s value in “breast cancer,” though [some researchers](#) claim just the opposite.

### **3. 'Building' more lucrative food animals.**

The USDA also uses our tax dollars to help Big Meat grow new and improved animals. At the 55-square-mile U.S. Meat Animal Research Center in Clay Center, Nebraska, clandestine and depraved experiments are conducted, reported the New York [Times](#) last year. Cows, at the Center, have been created to have twins and triplets which end up so weak or deformed and which die in such numbers that “even meat producers have been repulsed,” says the Times.

The Center also tries to create lambs that can survive without costly shelters or shepherds. During one weekend five newborns were killed by coyotes, six had pneumonia and five were abandoned by their mothers.

When Rep. Louise Slaughter (D-NY) heard about the depraved [government](#) deeds at the U.S. Meat Animal Research Center, she wrote a letter to Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack saying, “Such heinous examples of egregious cruelty, which would violate the minimum standards of any approved research protocol “should not “occur anywhere for any reason.” Even veterinarians and workers at the center were aghast. One scientist at the Center was reportedly entertained and amused by a pig's agony.

### **4. Combating diseases with tax dollars.**

When three “mad cows” were found in the U.S. more than 10 years ago—one imported from Canada and two born and bred in the U.S.—the USDA launched the most intensive investigations possible. The problem was, the investigations were not only flawed and misleading, they put the profits of ranchers above the health of the public.

Of the first mad cow, found in Washington state in 2003, the [government](#) said, “By December 27, 2003, FDA had located all potentially infectious product rendered from the BSE-positive cow in Washington State. This product was disposed of in a landfill in accordance with Federal, State and local regulations.” But the [Los Angeles Times](#) reported that despite “a voluntary recall aimed at recovering all 10,000 pounds of beef slaughtered at the plant the day the Washington state cow was killed, some meat, which could have contained the Washington cow, was sold to restaurants in several Northern California counties.”

“Alameda and Santa Clara counties have been informed by the state that 11 local restaurants and a market purchased soup bones from the suspect lot, but they have also declined to identify which establishments purchased them,” said the San Francisco Chronicle. USDA spokesman Matthew Baun said it was the public’s responsibility to find out if any food they ate was at risk because the recall information was a trade secret! It is [“up to consumers](#) to check with their grocers, butchers or restaurants to find out if any of the recalled meat may have landed on their tables,” said Baun. “We are prohibited from releasing information that companies would

consider proprietary. If you are concerned whether you may have purchased the product, you can call your retail store. They would know."

The USDA also shockingly put the interest of the U.S. ranches that produced the mad cows above public health. Though the source of the mad cows found in Texas and Alabama was never found, the government [protected](#) the ranches' identities and allowed them to resume operations in one month—even though if mad cow is transmitted to humans as Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease it is fatal.

More recently our tax dollars went to bailing out private industry during the 2013 Porcine Epidemic Diarrhea virus epidemic, which killed at least [one tenth](#) of all U.S. pigs (and which pork producers hope food consumers have forgotten about). The USDA forked over \$26.2 million of our [tax dollars](#) to combat PEDv including "\$11.1 million in cost-share funding for producers of infected herds to support biosecurity practices," said the Washington Pork Producers. Many food activists suggested giving pigs fresh air, more space to move and no drugs, instead of installing new "biosecurity" systems.

## **5. Eradicating 'pests' for private ranchers.**

Remember Cliven Bundy, the "[welfare](#)" [rancher](#) who provoked a showdown with the government in 2014 over his many years of grazing his cattle at taxpayer expense? (And whose [sons were jailed](#) for a similar standoff at Malheur National Wildlife Refuge near Burns, Oregon this year.) Well, free grazing on the public dime is the least of government largesse to private ranchers.

With traps, snares, poisons, gas, and aerial gunning, the USDA's Wildlife Services has killed more than [34 million animals](#) in the last decade to protect the livestock operations of private meat producers, according to official records. The take in 2015 alone included 68,905 coyotes, 731 bobcats, 480 bears, 385 wolves, and 284 mountain lions.

"Although livestock damage is a valid concern," says Predator Defense, "animals are also killed for eating flowers and pet food, digging in gardens, frightening people, and other concerns that could easily be addressed by nonviolent methods." According to the [Sacramento Bee](#), one "tool" used by the Wildlife Service is "spring-loaded metal cylinders that are baited with scent and fire sodium cyanide powder into the mouth of whatever tugs on them."

The Wildlife Services' taxpayer-financed killings for private meat producers are not even effective, says a recent article in [National Geographic](#), citing a study in the journal *Frontiers in Ecology and the Environment* that found there's little scientific evidence that killing predators actually accomplishes the goal of protecting livestock.

Birds are also being slaughtered in great numbers. In 2009 in just [five states](#), USDA says it poisoned 489,444 red-winged blackbirds in Texas, 461,669 in Louisiana, shot 4,217 blackbirds in California, 2,246 in North Dakota and 1,063 in Oregon. USDA also shot 29 great blue herons, 820 cattle egrets and 115 white-faced ibises that year and even uses caged red-winged blackbirds as decoys to attract wild ones, says Audubon magazine, "pre-baiting" an area with poisoned food to ensure the most deaths.

The Wildlife Services' bloodbath and its taxpayer costs almost completely operate below the public radar.

Despite using billions of our tax dollars to help Big Meat, Big Meat feels positively oppressed. Animal activists are "undermining production agriculture through lobbying and litigation," complained a recent [Beef Magazine](#) editorial. They "will make beef and other animal products more expensive and harder to produce with increased rules, regulations, societal demands, red tape, and government bias." Big Meat knows a little about government bias.