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Policy Paper

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Seafood Watch Program Duplicated for a Meat Production Program

The Monterey Bay Aquarium's Seafood Watch Program launched in 1999 and more than 52 million information pocket cards have been printed along with a new Seafood Watch app, which has over one million downloads (LA Times). This program has been successful in many eyes, to and for individual consumers and to businesses. The sustainability of what we are eat is the focus, so the time has come that we should translate this program to a meat-based production and consumption program to guide our choices in another trying arena. This will guide individuals to what meat and livestock producers to choose but also hold the industry to higher standards and expectations. Today, we have sustainable beef and poultry options with an unattainable price tag for the general public, there are options that attempt at sustainability or just pass the very fine lines of what's considered sustainable and have a more reachable price point, and then there are cheap and unsustainable options. This option reaches low income and impoverished families that have no choice but to look for quantity over quality. If a program, compared to the Seafood Watch Program, were to be put together for beef, pork, and poultry options we would be better able to understand the industry, it's intentions, and make the best conscience choices for ourselves and our families.

A report from One Green Planet (www.onegreenplanet.org) reports that consumers are more interested in purchasing "sustainable" meat, dairy, and eggs more than ever due to the growing concern over the negative environmental impact caused by the production in these industries. There is also growing demand for clarified food labels, as currently there is confusion and claims are extremely vague, leading to greenwashing at the grocery stores. According to Food and Water Watch (www.foodandwaterwatch.org) in 2015 the beef and pork put pressure on congress to remove "country of origin" requirements on their labels, making the U.S. one of

the few developed countries not requiring this information on beef and pork. Growing evidence that the current food labeling system is not working, and that a new system should be required, exists very easily when trying to purchase eggs. Many struggle to understand the labels on eggs, "Cage-Free," "Pasture Raised," "Grass-Fed," "No Antibiotics," "No Hormones," and "Free Range." What are the differences, who is educating the public on the differences, and who is holding the standards of these labels, are only the beginning of the questions that many have.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture, also known as the USDA, is a government agency overseeing the national farming industry. According to the USDA, "The discovery in December 2003 of bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE, or mad cow disease) in a dairy cow in Washington State led USDA to announce additional safeguards to bolster U.S. protection against BSE and further protect public health." This prime example shows the importance of meat and poultry safeguards, guidelines, and accountability to ensure the health of our public. The human body is supported by the foods we choose to consume, and it's vitally important that the cattle, pigs, and chickens that are consumed are holistically healthy themselves. While it's beneficial to have the industry keeping an eye on one another, it's just as important for each consumer to have full disclosure on the products they are eating. This would be beneficial in not holding only the meat producing industry accountable but for consumers to be accountable to themselves as well. An article on grass-fed beef by Lake Winds Co-Op (www.lakewinds.coop) reports that, "Studies are starting to show that healthy soils produce healthier vegetables and that sustainably raised animals produce meat higher in the nutrients we need." Having the proper information on how our cows, pigs, and poultry are raised would give us insight into the nutrients that can be expected from what one eats. Additionally, the health of the environment can either be impacted, or gain, from the choices that meat-consumers make. Sustainably raised meat is not only nutrient rich but can help improve and sustain the land it's on and around. Raising cattle for consumption puts stress on natural resources such as land, water, and crops. It also shows to be statistically unhealthy for the surrounding communities if the agricultural practice is unsustainable.

According to the USDA, "Federal programs also pay participating livestock producers for adopting conservation and environmental measures aimed at protecting natural resources. The

programs primarily are intended to enhance or conserve soil and water resources." This is a positive step in the right direction though no new policies are in place to require sustainable meat production. There are a few recommended ideas from Might Earth, whom deem themselves "a global campaign organization that works to protect the environment." (www.mightyearth.org) They request sustainable feed sourcing, responsible manure management, and greenhouse gas emissions reduction. These three practices could result in increased meat production sustainability.

There are groups that look to educate communities with public and environmental health awareness such as FoodPrint and Civil Eats. These two groups bring attention through education and media reports. There are also groups like Greenhorn and National Young Farmers Coalition that search and support young farmers approaching a modern agricultural era while directing and gearing them for sustainability in their practices. This helps to support a needed industry and give guidance for a sustainable and profitable future. Might Earth also has taken time to create a American Food Scoring on Sustainable Meat card in 2018 that could serve as a guideline if put out and updated annually.

Desired outcomes from a Meat and Poultry Watch Consumption program would be an informative pamphlet, and app, that helps consumer make more sustainable and conscience decisions. The initiative would collect information from meat-production companies and give wide, public knowledge regarding living quarters, diets, and general well-being of the animals. This information will help to grade and rate companies with the additional information of cost, that way families can make the best purchase for their income level in hopes of creating nutrient rich meals. Businesses would also have access to this information, and more, and be able to advertise their choices to their customers, the same way a meat-free restaurant markets that information to their target market. This program would lead to healthier individuals in our communities, healthier environments and ecosystems, and possible the reduction of meat consumption, which is more sustainable than reducing your carbon footprint, and in return actually reduces one's carbon footprint. Everlane is a clothing company that has had a similar approach to their garment production, and approach that should be across many industries and markets, that they have termed "Radically Transparency." From their website,

“We believe our customers have a right to know how much their clothes cost to make. We reveal the true costs behind all of our products—from materials to labor to transportation—then offer them to you, minus the traditional retail markup.” This helps the consumer to understand where the product is coming from, the cost of production, and the cost to the customer. With all of our nutrients coming from what we choose to consume, it’s most important that we have this “radical transparency” for the foods we are choosing.

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