

# Eating Animals

## Discussion Questions

### Personal Food Choices

1. Conversations about eating animals- and the reasons behind the decisions we make can be polarizing and often alienating. In chapter 2 of *Eating Animals*, Jonathan Safran Foer writes, “We need a better way to talk about eating animals. We need a way that brings meat to the center of our plates” (page 33). What does Foer mean by this? Do you agree with him?
2. Why do you think that something as essential as what we put in our bodies is so often disregarded or not thought through carefully? What is the potential convenience of such nonchalance and what problems can it lead to?
3. What are some of the challenges of being a vegan or a vegetarian? Does where you live matter? To what extent do you think economics play into the decision of eating responsibly or supporting local farms?
4. We have so many food choices available to us now in the United States. Is this, in your opinion, a blessing or a curse?

### The Media and Food Choices

5. We sometimes hear in the media about the inhumane treatment of animals in factory farms and about the unhealthy-and sometimes fatal- consequences that such treatment can have for us. In your opinion, how do books such as *Eating Animals*, *The Omnivore’s Dilemma* by Michael Pollan, and *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle* by Barbara Kingsolver, or documentaries like *Food, Inc.* differ from “breaking news” stories about exposes? Why are both modes of information important and how do they contribute to the conversation in different ways? Is one more lasting than the other? If so, explain why.
6. At what point do you think awareness of factory farming will be sufficiently raised in the public eye? Do you think that if people have enough information they’ll stop buying factory-farmed meat?

### Family and Food Choices

7. Foer’s relationship with eating is grounded in his memories of meals shared with his grandmother and the stories she told about food. Even when she was on the run from Nazis and starving, she would not eat pork. “If nothing matters, there’s nothing to save,” she tells Foer and his brothers (page 17). Foer concludes *Eating Animals* with the same thought, after more than twenty years of his own experiences informing his choices about food. Discuss the significance of this sentiment and how its implications can find universal resonance.
8. Have you experienced pressure from your family or friends about your food choices? How do you respond to them?
9. How do you feel about making food choices for other people? Discuss Foer’s decision to raise his children as vegetarians before they are old enough to understand the ethical reasons behind such a lifestyle. Would you ever make a similar choice?

## **Culture and Food Choices**

10. How are culture and values tied up in food choices? Why is this such an emotional subject?
11. To what extent is eating meat viewed as a status symbol by some people? Have you seen evidence of that? Why do some people consider, for example, steak or lobster to be a special occasion foods? What kind of special occasion food can you have with plant-based foods?
12. How is meat tied to race, class and gender? Can you think of any examples where meat consumption is tied to gender and/or sexuality?
13. What is the relationship between how much food costs and how much we value it? What do you think about the price of meat and quality vegetables? Do they cost too much? Not enough?
14. Meat is one of the most costly food items in a family's food budget. Should people getting food assistance be encouraged to try more vegetarian diets? Should people getting food assistance have restrictions placed on how they use their benefits? (For example, not allowing SNAP to be used on soda or desserts.)
15. According to the US Fish and Wildlife Service, nearly 40 million Americans hunt or fish each year, many of them for food. How are hunting and fishing part of the American culture? How is it different to hunt or fish for animals compared to buying them in the store?

## **The Business of Factory Farming**

16. Over the past several years we have seen companies make small changes like increasing the size of cages in which animals are raised or ending de-beaking practices with chickens. Are those changes good things, or do they just make people feel better about the situation and then stop pushing for more change?
17. What kinds of resources would we need to change the food system away from factory farming? What solutions are there in different fields such as the sciences, engineering, business, political science, and communications?
18. Livestock production (animal agriculture) can have major negative environmental impacts such as air and water pollution and soil degradation. Should farming have to follow the same environmental laws other industries do?

## **Eating Particular Animals**

19. Why do we think of some animals as pets and some as food? Some countries or cultures value eating dog and cat meat, while most Americans would not eat dogs or cats. Pigs are considered to have more cognitive abilities than dogs, so why is it considered acceptable to eat a pig but not a dog in the US?
20. Are there some animals that you won't eat? Why?

## **Specific Reactions to the Book**

21. Discuss the aspects of *Eating Animals* that you found to be controversial, if any. Were they helpful in opening a dialogue on the subject? Why or why not? Have any of your eating habits changed since reading the book?
22. Did you find any parts of the book disturbing or hard to read? Did you skip parts about how animals are farmed and slaughtered? Did anyone have feelings of guilt? If so, why?
23. Were there any facts cited in *Eating Animals* that shocked you? If so, what were they?