

Colton Hoferer
Lincoln North Star High School
Lincoln, NE
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Brazil's Diet: Needing More than just "The Beef"

Imagine that you are in a small town in Brazil for the annual Festival sponsored by the town. You are looking forward to a great meal at a good cafe in this community. You are seated at a beautiful table looking out over the plains of Brazil and the waiter comes over to your table and tells you that they are going to tell you about the daily special. You are excited to hear this and can't wait!

The waiter tells you and your guest that the special for the night is Steak Tartar, Steak Rare, and Steak Steak! You are very surprised but because you are from Nebraska you think—OK this will work as long as you can have some milk to balance out all that protein with some good vitamin D. The waiter looks shocked when you mention milk and he says something like—well for milk we'd have to get some cows and I've never even seen a dairy cow or even a goat!

Our cows here are cattle and we use them for meat—for example the steaks you are going to have for dinner tonight. Well, I guessed at that moment—we'd be having water with our Steak Steak Special!

On a more serious note—although this is just a story for my introduction, it does indicate a real problem in Brazil which is that there is a high reliance on meat and that the diet of the whole country really needs to be more balanced—especially with dairy products such as milk, cheese, and even ice cream products and yogurt. The reliance on meat as the main food in Brazil comes from a long history of successful production of meat animals and then the culture relies on this tradition. This tradition may have begun because Brazil is one of the larger countries in the world with plenty of grazing space for animals such as cattle. People who raise food in Brazil are like people in Nebraska—they consider themselves successful if they raise lots of beef because they feel their land is productive.

This problem gets even more serious when not having enough dairy products in the diet turns into serious illnesses such as rickets and/or osteoporosis. In doing research, I found out that even migraines can be caused by not drinking enough milk or consuming dairy products. The people of Brazil don't even get milk after dinner because the desserts many people in Brazil eat are corn and rice. I learned that their main beverages are coffee, rum, and beer.

My mother works as a nurse and she has observed first-hand the negative impacts that having these beverages and not enough milk, cheeses and other good nutritious foods can have. I would like to see a national effort made to bring more dairy consumption to the small towns and rural areas of Brazil.

How might this happen? The first thing that needs to happen is for people to become educated about the value of milk and dairy products. This has even had to happen here in the U.S. with a big campaign called "Got Milk?" When many famous people were shown in photos drinking milk and enjoying the health benefits of milk. The government of Brazil could start something like this. One other important idea is that a dairy cow produces milk over a period of many years and this food can nourish many people. On the other hand, with beef cattle—they are killed for their meat and then it's all done. No more people to benefit from the animal.

And of course there is the problem of affording more dairy products. Because the theme of this year's essay contest is Small Holders, I would like to suggest that small towns share the cost among their citizens of bringing in a dairy cow or maybe two and sharing the milk among many houses and families. Other animals also can be a source of milk and these could also be shared within a community. The foods that are so popular now such as beef and pork could have a small fee added to them and this money could be used to get small communities the funds they need to buy the dairy cows.

When more people begin to drink milk on a regular basis, they will start the habit of including dairy products in their diets more often. It is often a cultural habit and these are very hard to make happen.

It is my belief that it will take a combination of public education, policy, funding, and local dedication to make the diet more dairy rich in the rural areas of Brazil. The problem in large cities isn't as severe. It should be stressed that many people living in individual farms or in the country outside of the big cities of Brazil may not even be aware of this problem because a disease such as osteoporosis is a hidden problem until a bone breaks due to weakness and not enough calcium in the bones. Then, people might not even think about the fact that it is a dairy loss that caused the problem.

My own solution has to do with not only getting dairy animals into small communities but also working to open a whole number of dairy shops (like a chain of stores) in every small town in the various states and regions of Brazil. These shops would bring jobs and economic benefits to the communities where they were located and this would help with making the people used to eating a wider variety of dairy foods. Illness and absences from work might also decrease which would be a good thing too--and cause a plus factor in local economies.

All countries need to follow a wide variety of menus and the over-eating of meat also has a bad effect on the environment because meat animals consume so much before becoming food too. I'll write more about that later but the fact is that everything is connected and relying on meat so much is hard on everyone--especially the natural resources that used to be so plentiful in Brazil but are now much scarcer.

It is more efficient for a small town to have a cow, a community garden and some funds to buy a small amount of meat to balance the diet. Brazil is also a land with many natural resources but there are problems with its forests and other natural areas being destroyed so that more meat animals such as cattle can be raised.

This is a long time practice in Brazil and in fact much of the continent of South America is known for the type of activities we have here in the U.S. such as ranching, irrigation and other things like this. In addition, the natural parks and natural areas of Brazil are being threatened by logging, mining, oil and gas industries, fishing in areas where there are not enough fish, wildlife destruction, dams and covering natural areas with concrete and other big projects.

In many areas of the country, especially rural areas the natural environment is threatened by development such as the building of highways. Building these roads has opened up areas for agriculture and settlement--driving out animals and the plants that are needed for a healthy natural environment. Dams have been built to irrigate valleys and this has destroyed many wildlife home areas. These dams and the irrigation they bring are needed at least in part to irrigate food for all the meat animals. This is because of Brazil's heavy consumption of meats instead of dairy products for protein.

Dairy cattle graze and do not consume as much of the countryside's natural areas. In addition, the countryside has also become more and more polluted. Dairy stores in small communities that use the local products of the local cows could be a really good answer to many of these problems.

We know that Brazil has become a well known country for its meat products--but there has been a high cost--perhaps even costing people healthy bones--especially as they grow older.

In conclusion we have gone through the aspects of this serious situation including rickets, osteoporosis, and less variety in the diet. We also have discovered a solution to this problem which is to establish a national chain of dairy stores throughout rural areas of Brazil that would bring needed variety to Brazilian's diets. In addition, around the country of Brazil each small area might bring in a dairy cow or two supported with a meat tax. These animals would be owned by the people in the small town and community. We can only do this and stop this problem with your help.

How can you help? Support eating less meat, and support your own country if it is helping small communities become more self sufficient and preservation-minded. In this way---the people of Brazil will have a good example to follow. Some countries in the continent of South America such as Peru and Argentina have already brought the destruction of some of their natural areas under some government controls.

Please do all you can to help with this--in Brazil and in your own back yard too. Thank you for reading this essay and remember to include dairy in your own diet.

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