Meet What’s Living in Your Meat
Kerri Shoenberger

The Center for Disease Control estimates that every year in the United States seventy-six million people are infected with a food-borne illness. Of these, approximately five thousand result in death. Most of these illnesses are caused by eating infected meat or animal products. Some disease agents and parasites are already present in the animal before it is slaughtered and can then be transferred to the human consumer, such as the larvae of the worm that causes Trichinella from eating infected pork. However, the majority of these diseases are caused by bacteria that are acquired during the process of slaughtering and packaging. E. coli, Salmonella, and Listeria are just a few bacteria that thrive in these environments.

The filthy conditions in which food animals are raised and are slaughtered in allow for pathogens to thrive. A study done by Consumer Reports in 2006 found that 83% of chicken in grocery stores around the country were infected with either salmonella, campylobacter, or both, while a USDA inspection in 1996 deemed that 53% of beef in processing plants was infected with Clostridium perfringens. People who consume beef, pork, poultry, or seafood have a considerably higher chance of becoming infected with a food borne illness than those who do not. Because of the economic and medical impacts that these illnesses have on citizens across our country, a vegetarian diet could greatly improve the quality of life for all Americans.