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ETHICS

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often bear the brunt of the social and environmental costs associated with food production.

Waterways can become contaminated by fertilizer and animal waste runoff. Even the human population itself can suffer, he said, as residents suffer from higher-than-average cancer rates connected to certain chemicals used in fertilizers.

Change slow to come

He said people started paying more attention to where their food comes from in the last few years, but he is not sure if any substantial changes in Americans' eating habits are under way.

"I'm not seeing much of that, but it might be because I'm in Omaha, Neb.," he said.

Omaha is a major center in the meatpacking industry.

Still, Stephens said the publication of such books as "The Omnivore's Dilemma," by Michael

Pollan, and "Eating Animals," by Jonathan Foer, can only continue to make people think before they eat.

The consumption of meat produced on large-scale operations, which Stephens called "factory farming," is especially problematic.

Beyond the poor living conditions the animals endure and the relative inefficiency of getting calories through animal meats as opposed to the grain fed to the animal, Stephens said the meat itself often is not very good for people either.

"It's not healthy to eat large quantities of animal fats," he said.

Nor is it necessary, he said.

"People today don't need to eat that way anymore. There are several healthy ways to get the protein we need."

Stephens himself has been a pescetarian, someone who eats only vegetables and seafood, for about 20 years.

Although this is his first lecture at UE, Stephens has been to the area several times to visit his father, a local resident.

Ethicist to chew over meal choice arguments

UE guests to examine the impact of eating

DAN LATINI

STAFF WRITER / (812) 464-7501

latinid@courierpress.com

With options ranging from the dollar menu at fast-food restaurants to pesticide-free vegetables at farmers markets, consumers have a broad array of choices.

Creighton University professor William Stephens adds another item to the choices: "Five Arguments for Vegetarianism."

Stephens will be the speaker at the University of Evansville's Ethics Lecture at 7 p.m. today in Room 100 of the Koch Center for Engineering & Science. The event is free and open to the public.

The lecture is based on an article written by Stephens and originally published in 1994.

Deciding what to eat, he said, requires considering several factors, including the dangers posed to human workers, the environmental impact of growing or raising the food, the relative healthfulness of food grown under different practices, the treatment given to animals and even the broader social impact of reliance on a few corporate food producers.

The centralized nature of the food industry makes it harder to have a true choice when deciding what to eat, he said.

"It seems to me that the corporations that nationally and globally produce our food are making a lot of our dietary decisions for us," he said.

And centralization has created another cost that cannot be ignored — the cost of the food itself, he said.

Stephens said rural communities

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