

FARM ANIMALS



ANIMAL WELFARE INSTITUTE

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ANIMAL FARMING: PAST AND PRESENT

Nine billion animals are raised and slaughtered for food annually in the United States. Each is a living, feeling individual capable of experiencing pleasure and pain.

Half a century ago, family farms were prevalent. Animals grazed on pasture, breathing fresh air and feeling the sunshine on their backs. During inclement weather, they were sheltered in straw-bedded barns. In contrast, the rearing of farm animals today is dominated by industrialized facilities that maximize profits by treating animals not as sentient creatures, but as production units. Raised by the thousands at a single site, animals are confined in such tight quarters that they can scarcely move, let alone behave normally.



LAWS

Currently in the United States, there are only two federal laws designed to protect farm animals. They are the Twenty-Eight Hour Law, intended to protect farm animals during transport, and the Humane Methods of Slaughter Act, drafted to regulate the slaughter process.

During transport, lack of protection from extreme weather, overcrowding, poor driving, and long periods without food or water cause suffering, injuries, and sometimes the deaths of farm animals. The Twenty-Eight Hour Law states that animals traveling 28 hours or more must have time to rest and access to food and water. However, the law is virtually never enforced.

The Humane Methods of Slaughter Act directs the US Department of Agriculture to ensure that pigs, cows, sheep, goats, and horses are rendered insensible to pain before being killed. However, the law excludes certain animals such as poultry, fish, and rabbits, as well as animals killed for ritual slaughter. Even for protected species, the law is disregarded at some slaughterhouses, and inconsistently enforced by the USDA. The drive for higher profits has led some plants to increase production to the point that animal welfare is severely compromised. In the accelerated pace, animals are sometimes scalded, skinned, and dismembered without having been properly stunned and rendered unconscious.

EGG-LAYING HENS AND MEAT CHICKENS

Chickens have an innate desire to stretch their wings, perch, dust-bathe, forage for food, and run. Hens instinctively want to build nests in which to lay their eggs. In the conventional egg industry, however, a hen's basic needs are denied. Four or more birds are typically packed into a battery cage, a wire enclosure so small that none can spread her wings. The cages are stacked side by side, row upon row, in long windowless sheds. Even hens in some "cage-free" environments are



The majority of egg-laying hens are densely confined to battery cages where they are unable to stretch their wings or walk around.



Broiler chickens are most often crowded together in massive warehouses.



confined so densely in sheds that it is almost impossible for them to move around and perform natural behaviors.

Housing hens densely in cages or without access to the outdoors is contrary to their biological and social natures and commonly leads them to peck at each other in frustration. Rather than give each bird sufficient space, the industry seeks to prevent pecking injuries by removing a portion of each hen's beak via hot blade or laser. This makes it difficult for her to eat and can cause lifelong pain.

When production of eggs drops off, the hens are killed. In the process of hatching and raising chicks to replace them, just as many males as females are born. The unwanted male chicks are callously ground up alive or thrown into trashcans, where they suffocate when other chicks are piled on top of them.

“Broilers,” as the industry refers to chickens raised for meat, spend relatively short lives in warehouses containing thousands of birds. Bred for rapid growth and large breast size, they are predisposed to disease and crippling physical abnormalities. Many birds die of heart attacks. Others eventually die from dehydration or starvation because they cannot stand or walk to feeders.

When, conversely, egg-laying hens and chickens bred for meat are raised on pasture—such as in the picture below—they are able to forage, socialize, dust-bathe, and engage in several other natural behaviors that contribute to higher welfare.



PIGS

Pigs are intelligent and highly social. They keep clean in the wild and maintain separate areas for defecating, resting, and eating. Pregnant sows instinctively gather materials to build nests in which to give birth. Yet, in industrialized facilities, many sows spend each of their nearly four-month pregnancies confined to a gestation crate—a stark metal enclosure that is scarcely wider and longer than the sow herself. The sow is so restricted that she is unable to walk or turn around, much less socialize. She develops abnormal behaviors and suffers from leg problems and skin lesions due to relentless confinement on concrete floors. Over time, her muscles deteriorate and she may develop osteoporosis.

The sow is also usually crated during delivery and for the short period in which her piglets are allowed to nurse. She is deprived of bedding for building a nest and foraging. Male pigs kept for breeding purposes are also often housed individually in crates or barren pens. Growing pigs are confined to slatted, bare concrete floors. Stressed by crowding and boredom, the pigs behave aggressively and seek stimulation. They frequently turn to biting the tails of nearby pigs. Consequently, their tails are routinely cut off soon after birth without pain relief.



AGNORMARK

Most female pigs are housed in crates so small they can't even turn around.



Dairy cows typically spend their entire lives confined. Overgrown hooves—such as those of the cow in the foreground—are common under wet, muddy conditions.

DAIRY COWS AND VEAL CALVES

Milk production is increasingly industrialized. In factory dairies, cows may have their tails cut off and are almost always denied pasture, instead spending their entire lives confined on concrete. Some lactating cows are injected with the synthetic growth hormone rBGH to boost milk production. The hormone causes tremendous stress on their bodies, and if the diet is not adequate, calcium is leached from the cows' bones, predisposing them to lameness. Cows injected with rBGH have a higher incidence of mastitis—a painful infection of the udder—compared to cows not injected with rBGH.

Female calves born to these cows will also be used for milking, but male calves have no value to a specialized dairy factory. They are either sent to slaughter within 48 hours after birth, or they are sold and raised for beef or veal. In veal factories, calves were traditionally isolated from others for four months in tiny, barren crates before slaughter. Though those crates have been largely phased out by the industry, veal calves are still often confined to indoor warehouses and denied the opportunity to roam on pasture. Additionally, many calves are fed a liquid diet, intentionally deficient in iron, to create “milk-fed” veal.

BEEF CATTLE

Cattle raised for meat often graze on range for their first seven months of life. This initial ability to walk around, socialize, and eat the food most readily digestible for cows means that these animals start off with better lives than other animals on industrial farms such as pigs, chickens, and dairy cows.

However, conventional beef cattle systems incorporate painful mutilations such as castration, dehorning and disbudding, and branding, all without any medical relief for the pain. Even tail docking, typically associated primarily with dairy farms, may be performed when cattle raised for meat spend their early months not on the range but in cramped indoor barns.

Whether cattle raised for meat start their lives on the range or inside a barn, however, most end up on a feedlot for their last six months before being sent to slaughter. At the feedlot, cattle are confined together in dirty conditions, standing on unnatural slatted concrete floors or in muddy “dry lots” free of vegetation and often covered in manure. They are fed grain, which causes internal stress and disease because cattle stomachs are adapted to digest grasses instead.



Confined to a barren feedlot, most beef cattle are denied the chance to graze on pasture.

PAINFUL PRACTICES ALLOWED ON FACTORY FARMS WITHOUT ANESTHESIA OR PAIN RELIEF

tail docking



dehorning



hot-iron branding



castration



debeaking



ENVIRONMENTAL AND HUMAN HEALTH EFFECTS

Industrial agriculture is inherently inhumane, but cruelty to animals is not the only consequence of treating animals as machines. Factory-raised animals are routinely administered nontherapeutic levels of antibiotics to promote growth and control health problems that develop under hostile factory conditions. Residues of these drugs sometimes end up in the

meat. Further, the profligate use of antibiotics accelerates the development of “superbugs”—dangerous bacteria that have developed a resistance to available antibiotics. The World Health Organization calls antibiotic resistance “one of the biggest threats to global health, food security, and development today.”

Factory production also concentrates tremendous amounts of manure in small areas. Unlike with human waste, there is no requirement to treat waste from farm animals. Their manure is collected and stored in vast quantities, creating environmental and health hazards. Liquid manure cesspools have overflowed and their earthen liners often leak into groundwater.

HIGHER WELFARE FARMING

High welfare farming addresses the needs of animals first, ensuring that every animal has access to clean water, fresh air, appropriate feed, and a lower-stress environment. The opportunity to exhibit natural behaviors such as ranging, foraging, rooting, and grooming is also a requisite.

Access to pasture or foraging areas is critical in meeting the animals’ innate behavioral needs, and is fundamental to this kind of farming approach. As all commonly farmed animals are social creatures, high welfare farms are designed to allow them to form natural family groups and hierarchies while offering protection from extremes of temperature, thirst, hunger, and fear.

In a high welfare system, farmers focus on promoting health rather than simply treating disease. Farmers use antibiotics solely to treat sick animals, not to reinforce poorly designed, disease-prone systems or promote unnatural growth.

Because the farming system is designed to suit the needs of the animal—rather than maximizing productivity at all costs—high welfare farmers don’t rely on painful mutilations (such as tail docking piglets to prevent biting) that are deemed “necessary” when large numbers of animals are confined in small spaces.

YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

- To give all farm animals a life worth living, everyone needs to eat fewer of their products—that means less meat, dairy, and eggs.
- If you do consume animal products, ensure your food choices do not perpetuate suffering. Buy only from farms where animals are not confined to cages or crates, and where they can roam freely and behave naturally.
- Request that your local grocery stores and restaurants provide products from animals raised to a high welfare standard that is verified by an independent third party.
- Use customer comment cards to show that you care about farm animal welfare and to educate others. Factory farms cannot exist if consumers demand that animals raised for food are treated as sentient beings, with dignity and respect.
- Contact your members of Congress and request strong enforcement of the Humane Methods of Slaughter Act and the Twenty-Eight Hour Law. Also request that Congress pass a law requiring humane slaughter of birds killed for food. (Visit www.awionline.org/compassion-index to find contact information for your elected officials.)





Animal Welfare Institute

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