

FACTS ABOUT OUR FOOD ~BROILER CHICKENS~

“Broilers” are specially bred for efficient production of meat. The goal is to grow the biggest bird in the shortest time for the lowest cost.

❑ OVERVIEW

The average “broiler” chicken is raised inside a large industrial barn in groups of 5,000 to 50,000 birds. Chickens are mass-housed on the floor in crowded, barren buildings with automatic feeders and waterers. Birds are genetically selected and drugged for fast growth, causing crippling disorders. There is near-continuous lighting in the barns: *23 hours on, one hour off*. The birds’ natural life span is 15 years, but in factory farm production they are slaughtered at 42 days of age or less. In 2003, approximately **600 million chickens** were slaughtered in Canada.

❑ LIFE SENTENCE ON THE FACTORY FARM

➤ GENETIC SELECTION

In 1950 in Canada it took 84 days for a broiler chicken to reach the market weight of 1.36 kg, but by 1988, it took only 42 days to produce a 2 kg bird. The time to reach market weight for broilers decreases about one day each year and the trend is expected to continue. Currently, the production time is around 40 days. The spectacular growth rate of broiler chickens has been achieved mainly through breeding for growth in muscle, plus routine use of growth promoting drugs. This fast growth has resulted in side effects, which cause intense animal suffering.

➤ PHYSICAL AILMENTS

Broiler chickens suffer from many different leg and skeletal deformities. The birds have been genetically selected to produce muscle faster than regular birds. The result is that their legs cannot support their weight. Because proper bone mineralization sometimes does not occur, there can be a crippling and painful bending of the birds’ bones. Chickens may become lame, virtually unable to move. The result is severe **skeletal problems** for the birds. Growing too heavy for their limbs, they become distorted in shape with unnatural stresses on their joints. Chickens spend more and more time just sitting as they approach slaughter weight. This inactivity is linked to chronic joint pain.



Crippled Broiler Chicken

Heart attacks are another common problem among broiler chickens. The fast growth of muscle causes a problem for the bird’s heart and lungs, which have difficulty moving oxygenated blood to the tissues, resulting in a disorder known as **ascites**. Ascites can lead to a slow and miserable death. Young, rapidly growing broiler chickens die from a number of causes, including **Acute Death Syndrome**, or Flip-over Syndrome, which is a heart attack. The bird squawks, falls over and dies.

➤ LIFE IN THE BARN

Crowding - Broiler chickens live in extremely crowded, barren environments. By slaughter, each bird has only a half-square foot (465 sq cm) of space. That’s less than the size of a computer mouse pad. These barren and confining conditions deny animals opportunity to express natural behaviours, and lead to physical and behavioural problems. There is social chaos as thousands of chickens mill about, with too many birds for a well-defined pecking order to develop. Normal behaviour patterns are impossible. Individuals become stressed and aggressive to neighbours.

Litter Burn & Foul Air - Massive amounts of manure accumulate in the floor litter from the thousands of birds during their six-week life. The birds suffer **litter burn** from the high moisture and ammonia content of the manure on the floor. Litter quality deteriorates, as does air quality, which becomes polluted with ammonia, dust and micro-organisms, causing respiratory infections and sores.

Lighting Abuse – Broiler house lighting is constantly manipulated to stimulate higher food consumption and faster weight gain, with lights kept on up to 23 hours straight. Upset circadian cycles cause distress, which humans know as jet lag.

➤ BREEDING

“Broiler breeders”, the parent birds kept to give birth to broiler chickens, suffer a deprived life. The breeders are selected to produce fast-growing offspring. To keep the parent birds’ weight manageable, they are food-deprived, and constantly hungry. The birds have their beaks seared off with a hot blade to prevent them pecking each other from the stress of hunger and overcrowding.

The males have their toes, spurs and combs cut off and implants in their nasal cavities to prevent them from eating the females' food.

➤ **TRANSPORTATION**

When broilers reach 34 - 42 days of age, they are grabbed by their feet, several at a time, held upside-down and loaded into crates by "chicken catchers", who work so quickly they cannot treat each bird with care. Many chickens, which are already lame, suffer broken legs or wings or bruising during this stressful procedure. Automated catching methods would be more humane.

In Canada, an estimated 1% of broiler chickens die in transit to the slaughterhouse, exposed for many hours to variations of weather, from winter blizzards to summer heat waves. In hot weather, crowded birds in the inside cages suffocate, and in winter birds freeze to death. Pain in already-damaged limbs is an added stress. The **length of journey** contributes to the stress and lethality of transport. Chickens may be legally transported up to 36 hours without being fed or watered according to regulations under the Health of Animals Act.

➤ **SLAUGHTER**

Upside-down Shackle - The slaughter procedure for nearly all chickens is to suspend the birds upside-down by their feet, snapped in metal shackles. The procedure must induce fear, as well as seriously aggravate the pain of lameness and injuries from catching.

Improper Stunning - After being shackled upside-down, chickens are supposed to be rendered unconscious by immersion in an electrified water stun bath prior to having their throats cut. Stunning is followed by a mechanical neck cutting machine and ends with immersion in scalding water to loosen their feathers. However, not all birds are properly stunned. Birds not stunned in the water bath feel their throats being slit, and some get to the scalding water bath while fully conscious. A more stress-free killing method is administering a lethal dose of gas, which would eliminate removing live birds from crates.

The "final product" - Parts of the carcass, including the head, feet, entrails, blood and feathers, are dried, ground up, and sold as poultry by-products for pet food and other animal feeds. Even cancerous chickens are not thrown away: their carcasses are cut up, and the bad parts removed. The good parts are collected and sold as "chicken pieces" and "chicken wings" for human consumption.

❑ **INDUSTRY TRENDS**

➤ **Larger Flock Sizes**

More birds are being produced in ever-smaller spaces. In the future, larger flock sizes per grower are anticipated, as are adoption of mechanization and electronic technology for feeding, handling and housing. Animal science research typically focuses on production improvements, not on improving living conditions for farmed animals.

➤ **Shorter Production Time**

The time for chickens to reach market weight has decreased by one day per year for the past ten years, and the trend is expected to continue.



Crowded Broiler Shed

❑ **WHAT YOU CAN DO.**

There is clear evidence factory-farmed broiler chickens suffer. The **Canadian Coalition for Farm Animals** is working to end this cruelty. You can help make a difference.

- Don't buy factory-farmed chickens. Choose free-range chickens that are *Certified Organic* or have a label like BCSPCA Certified. These chickens are produced in higher-welfare systems where they can behave more naturally.
- Eliminate or reduce the amount of chicken you eat, and replace with other protein-rich foods, such as tofu and beans.
- Ask your local grocery store to stock alternatives to factory-farmed meat, eggs and dairy, and to ensure that these alternatives are clearly labelled (contact information, guidelines and suggestions on our website).

For more information, please contact us.

Phone: 1-866-303-CCFA (2232) or Local/Fax: (604) 266-9749

Mail: 213-33 Hazelton Avenue, Toronto, Ontario, Canada, M5R 2E3

Email: info@humanefood.ca Or visit our website at www.humanefood.ca