

Common myths about factory farming

The following are some common myths offered in defence of factory farming:

If farm animals were mistreated they would not produce, therefore, farmers' livelihood is dependent upon the animals' well being.

Productivity is a poor indicator of an animal's physical and psychological well being. Dr. John Church, a researcher at the University of Alberta, has stated that egg laying chickens have been so specifically bred for production that they would even lay an egg if they were kept in a tin can. As well, on the factory farm, profitability depends more on the productivity of the overall operation and keeping costs to a minimum than it does on the performance or welfare of individual animals. This means that the farm can afford to lose a few hens because the overall profitability remains.

Farmers love their animals and would never abuse them.

Factory farms have changed significantly from the small farms of yesteryear that employed pasture-raised systems. Instead of having five or ten animals, many farmers have thousands of animals on their farms. They simply do not have enough time to become familiar with the needs to care properly for each individual animal.

There are no laws in Canada that regulate the treatment of animals on farms, only voluntary codes. Of course most farmers do not set out to intentionally mistreat the animals under their care. However, that does not change the fact that many aspects of factory farming are inherently cruel and cause animals' great suffering. **The greatest threat to farmed animals today is not isolated incidents of wanton abuse by farmers, but intensive production methods that have become standard practice.**

Animals have a better life confined indoors in controlled environments than they would have outdoors exposed to the elements and predators.

Inside a factory farm, an animal's short life may include confinement, forced feeding, injections of growth hormones and antibiotics, mutilations and other painful treatments – in order to keep productivity high. Outside, animals are able to perform natural behaviours they would not be able to inside. For example, chickens will dust bathe or build a nest, cows will graze and pigs will nest in straw. Animals can live a long and healthy life outdoors with proper management and care.

Like many aspects of factory farming, justifying permanent life indoors for animals is a rationalization, a substitute for proper management and care. On factory farms, animals are kept in the smallest space, given the least amount of food, and kept alive for the shortest possible time to produce the maximum amount of product.

Sow crates are humane because they prevent fighting between sows and allow individual attention to the animals.

Fighting between animals in intensive confinement situations is the result of overcrowded barns, lack of environmental enrichment, disruption of stable living groups and overall poor management practices. The solution to fighting between sows is not to crate the sow for her whole life, but to provide knowledgeable, hands-on care. Better treatment for sows can be achieved in loose housing, providing sows with straw bedding and with controlled electronic feeding.

Battery cages are humane because they help keep the chickens' environment clean and allow for small group sizes.

Many scientists agree that battery cages are inhumane. Each hen has less space than the size of an 8 1/2 by 11-inch sheet of paper. They can barely move. Natural behaviours such as nesting, dust bathing, perching, or even extending their wings, are impossible. As well, hens have a portion of their beak sliced off with a hot blade to prevent them pecking at their cage mates. At the age of 18 months, their only escape from this life is slaughter.

The images of suffering animals are from the U.S., it's different here in Canada.

Unfortunately, factory farming is the same in Canada as in the U.S. Like the U.S., Canada does not have laws specifically protecting animals on the farm. Canada has Codes of Practice, but compliance is voluntary. The U.S. is a major trading partner with Canada, so to be competitive and avoid trade barriers, Canada's farms are usually consistent with American farms. The underlying motive is profits, not animal welfare.

The U.S., in fact, has recently initiated progressive policies related to farm animal welfare and now surpasses Canadian standards in some respects. California, for example, passed a ballot initiative in November 2008 that will make it illegal to confine egg-laying hens to battery cages, female pigs in cruel gestation crates, and veal calves in tiny crates, as of 2015. Arizona, Florida and Oregon have all passed legislative measures to ban gestation crates.