

## **What is factory farming and why is it harmful to animals?**

Traditional small-scale, free-range and free-run farming methods have, with few exceptions, been replaced by intensive farming practices. Animals are raised in large-scale, mass production systems where they are crowded or severely confined. These methods are designed for cost and handling efficiency rather than the welfare of animals. Today, the vast majority of animals raised for human consumption in North America are raised in intensive farming conditions.

Although factory farming delivers cheap food, it comes at a terrible cost for the animals.

*Common features of factory farming include:*

- Large numbers of animals housed together indoors
- Intensive confinement for extended periods
- Extremes of overcrowding or isolation
- Insufficient room to turn around, lie down, groom, or express normal behaviours
- Mechanized feeding, watering, and handling
- Minimal individual contact between the animal and human caretaker
- Premature separation of parent and offspring
- Use of antibiotics and hormones as growth promotants
- Surgical practices performed without anaesthetic, pain management or proper veterinary care, such as debeaking, tail docking, tooth cutting, de-horning, and castration

Intensive confinement of animals on factory farms contributes to virulent production-related diseases, physical ailments, cannibalism, debilitating stress, and stereotypic behaviours.

*Examples of factory farming conditions include:*

- Confinement of dairy cows and their offspring
- Confinement of multiple laying hens in wire battery cages
- Confinement of sows in crates
- Confine of veal calves in pens
- Discarding of all male chicks in the course of producing laying hens
- Premature separation of piglets and calves from their mothers
- Premature separation of dairy cows and their offspring (males are used in veal production)

Please visit the pages under 'farm animals' on this site for detailed information about the farming conditions for each species.

## **Is humane slaughter possible?**

The transportation of millions of animals from farms to slaughterhouses, sometimes over great distances, followed by slaughter in quick procession, raises serious welfare issues. Many abuses that occur during transport and slaughter of animals are due to poor management, such as inappropriate handling of animals, untrained transport drivers, or lack of knowledge about handling of certain species, to name a few. Canada's inadequate regulations protecting animals in transport exacerbate the welfare issues intrinsic to the process (see transport page under "campaigns" for more detailed information).

One of the largest welfare problems is the treatment of "downers" – sick or crippled animals who cannot stand up upon arrival at the slaughterhouse. Downer animals are sometimes dragged or thrown. Although Canada recently passed regulations prohibiting the transport of downers, lack of enforcement means that this cruel practice continues.

Poorly managed dairy farms and sow operations are a major source of downed animals. Likewise, a significant percentage of poultry arrive at the slaughterhouse with broken legs and wings, often due to rough handling.

Some breeds of pigs and chickens make them genetically predisposed to excitability and death during transport.

Once inside the slaughterhouse, the movement of large masses of animals at assembly-line speed, together with the smell of blood or visibility of other animals being slaughtered, causes fear and distress in animals.

While the stated objective of modern slaughter techniques is to render animals unconscious immediately, the increasing line speeds at which slaughterhouses kill and process animals means that a certain percentage of animals are improperly stunned and are processed while conscious - a horrifying prospect.

In addition, religious slaughter – Halal or Kosher slaughter – forbids stunning that renders animals unconscious prior to slaughter. This means many animals may be hoisted while conscious, frantically writhing, if their throat is improperly cut.

The temperaments of wild animals such as farmed deer and elk may increase the distress they experience when transported and slaughtered in conventional systems.

## **What are Canada's Recommended Codes of Practice?**

Since 1984, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada has developed Recommended Codes of Practice, which contain minimum recommended standards of care, nutrition and environmental needs for each species of farm animal.

These codes are developed in consultation with the livestock industry, government, and the Canadian Federation of Humane Societies (CFHS).

The codes have done little to improve the welfare of farm animals since they are completely voluntary, and endorse many of the cruellest farming practices that have become standard, such as sow crates, veal crates, laying-hen cages and body mutilations without the use of anaesthetics.

### **What are acceptable standards of farm animal care?**

The minimum acceptable standard of care for farm animals guarantees them a decent quality of life and humane slaughter.

The Five Freedoms, developed by Great Britain's Farm Animal Welfare Council in 1992, outlines the major freedoms that should be provided to farm animals:

1. Freedom from hunger and thirst by ready access to fresh water and a diet to maintain full health and vigour;
2. Freedom from discomfort by providing an appropriate environment including shelter and a comfortable resting area;
3. Freedom from pain, injury or disease by prevention or rapid diagnosis and treatment;
4. Freedom to express normal behaviour by providing sufficient space, proper facilities and company of the animals own kind; and
5. Freedom from fear and distress by ensuring conditions and treatment that avoid mental suffering.

The Council also recommends that those who care for livestock practice the following:

1. Caring and responsible planning and management
2. Skilled, knowledgeable and conscientious management
3. Appropriate environmental design
4. Considerate handling and transportation
5. Humane slaughter

### **Is there a link between factory farming and human health?**

Consumers are questioning the safety of the food they eat with increasing frequency. Pesticides, antibiotics, and other residues accumulate in animal products. The routine use of antibiotics in farm animals leads to the development of antibiotic-resistant bacteria.

By crowding thousands of animals together, factory farms are a breeding ground for stress and infectious diseases. This is why antibiotics are sometimes administered on a

routine basis with certain species. Additionally, antibiotics are used because they act as a growth-promotant when administered in sub-therapeutic doses.

The medical community now warn that the high levels of antibiotics and other contaminants in commercially raised meat constitute a serious threat to the health of the consumer. Widespread overuse of antibiotics can result in the evolution of new strains of virulent bacteria whose resistance to antibiotics poses a great threat to human health.

Environmental health issues are also a growing concern with intensive agriculture. Factory pig and chicken farms pollute surrounding air and water and cause respiratory distress to workers and the communities within close proximity to them.