

## 4. Farm Animals

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### Introduction

In terms of numbers of animals affected, factory farming is the largest animal welfare concern in the world. FAO statistics show the global production of meat has risen from 136,219,000 tonnes for 1979-81 to 260,098,000 tonnes for 2004.

The following statistics give an indication of the numbers of different species involved and the numbers exported.

<b><i>Farmed animal numbers</i></b> (FAO 2003):	
Pigs	956 million
Chickens	16,605 million
Cattle	1,371 million
Sheep	1,024
<b><i>Numbers of farm animals exported alive</i></b> (FAO 2002):	
Pigs	18 million
Chickens	837 million
Cattle	8 million
Sheep	19 million

Billions of farm animals throughout the world are reared behind the closed doors of the factory farm. Many farm animals suffer greatly in transport slaughter and in factory farms: where they are caged, crammed and confined, forced to grow super-fast, and pushed to their physical limits in the quest for ever-more meat, milk or eggs. However, animal protection activity often neglects farm animals, because their suffering is hidden.

The rapid rise of factory farming systems in the USA and Europe took place in the latter half of the last century. Factory farming systems are characterised by large numbers of farm animals being caged or crated, and crammed into (typically) windowless sheds.

Three classic factory farm methods were clear examples of the suffering caused by such methods: veal crates for calves, stall and tether-cages for pregnant pigs, and battery cages for laying hens. These systems remain in widespread use in the USA and many other countries. All three of these classic systems of the 1960's are subject to far reaching reform in Europe. However, although reform is reaching Europe, these systems are now being spread rapidly throughout the world, even to 'developing' countries.

Factory farming is not only bad for animal welfare, it has also been proven to have detrimental impacts in a number of other areas: -

- The environment (pollution, wastes and greenhouse gases)
- Genetic diversity (selective breeding for productive breeds)
- Human health (disease risks and antibiotic resistance)
- Poverty alleviation (factory farms put small farmers out of business)
- Food security (technology and input dependence, and disease spread through large 'colonies')

### **Intensive Farming**

As was seen in the introduction, an enormous number of farm animals are kept in the world. Many of these animals are kept in intensive systems that can cause animal welfare problems and mortalities. A brief introduction to these intensive systems follows below.

#### ***Battery hens***

Most egg-laying hens are kept intensively in battery cages throughout their productive lives (when they are slaughtered). Up to 90,000 birds (or more) are kept in one shed, and the cages are stacked 4-9 high. A number of hens will be kept together in these small wire cages, with each hen having less space than a sheet of (A4) typing paper. In these cramped conditions, the birds cannot fulfil normal social needs or behavioural patterns. They can also suffer from severe feather loss, and bruises and abrasions, from rubbing against the wire cages.

The welfare of the egg-laying hen is directly linked to her ability to act out natural behaviours. A happy hen is a bird free to forage, take exercise, preen, dust-bathe, take refuge on a perch whenever she feels vulnerable and build a nest in which to lay her eggs. These natural behaviours are denied to hens kept in the battery cage system.

In order to reduce injuries resulting from excessive pecking - a behaviour that occurs when confined hens are bored and frustrated - practically all laying hens are de-beaked. De-beaking is a painful procedure that involves cutting part of the beak off, cutting through bone, cartilage, and soft tissue.

Also, male chicks are killed at the hatchery – as they cannot be used in the egg industry.

Another serious welfare problem is forced moulting, whereby in certain places (such as the USA and Asia, for example) hens are shocked into another lay cycle (for a second year) by starving them for up to 18 days and sometimes keeping them in the dark.

#### ***Broilers***

Broilers are the chickens reared for their meat. In intensive systems, they are crowded together in barren sheds. They have been selectively bred to grow fast, and reach

slaughter weight at just 6-7 weeks old. This growth rate is so extreme that many suffer leg weakness and crippling (because their bodies grow too fast for their legs to be able to sustain them), and heart and lung failure (for similar reasons, as their organs cannot keep pace with their bodily growth).

As they grow, the birds carpet the whole of the shed. The crowding gives the birds no opportunity to exercise. Leg weaknesses mean that birds are often unable to reach food and water supplies and die. Others suffer breast blisters; hock burns and skin diseases, as they sit on faeces-drenched litter.

Broilers have been selected to eat tremendous amounts of food, but this causes them to suffer from obesity, skeletal problems and heart failure at a few weeks of age. This presents a problem for the companies that produce the breeding birds (as they have to be kept longer than usual slaughter weight until they reach sexual maturity and can breed). To combat this, the industry feeds these broilers a much-reduced diet (sometimes  $\frac{1}{4}$ - $\frac{1}{2}$  of what they would naturally eat). This makes them chronically hungry, frustrated and stressed.

### ***Pigs***

Pigs are extremely intelligent animals. In intensive farming systems, pregnant sows are caged in rows of narrow stalls throughout their 16 week pregnancies. On some farms, they are tethered using heavy chains. This frustrates their natural behaviour leading to repetitive unnatural behaviours, such as bar biting. Prolonged confinement can affect health as well as welfare, including causing lameness, urinary tract problems, foot injuries and bone weakness.

Before giving birth, the pregnant sow is moved to a 'farrowing crate'. The sow's strong instinct to build a nest for her piglets is denied. A common error by animal protectionists is to confuse the sow stall with the farrowing crate. These are very different: sow stalls confine the sow individually, whereas farrowing crates confine the sow, but give the piglets free access for feeding in an attempt to prevent piglets from being crushed by the sow. The problem with sows crushing their piglets is made worse by selective breeding, which causes large, clumsy sows. Some breeds do not have this problem; so selective breeding for good mothering traits would be a solution. However, even with current heavy breeds, alternative systems exist. Many sows farrow out of doors in 'arc' housing systems, for example.

Taken from their mothers after around one month, the piglets are often reared in barren pens with concrete or slatted floors. The absence of bedding is a serious welfare issue because bedding, such as straw, provides pigs with: physical and thermal comfort; an outlet for chewing, rooting and exploring; and dietary fibre, so barren enclosures.

### ***Veal***

Most veal comes from calves that are forced to live in tiny, barren crates, void of any interaction with other calves. These crates allow little movement, only a few steps forward or backward. The calves are forced to either lie down or stand up. White veal is produced by keeping the calves anaemic, by feeding on a liquid only diet.

## ***Dairy***

Dairy cows are pushed to the limits to produce ever-increasing amounts of milk. Cows are forced to breed at an early age, calves removed as soon as one day after birth. The dairy cow suffers the trauma of having her calf taken away, and often bellows for days. After this, the cow is milked to capacity for about 10 months, after which she is impregnated again.

The cow is pregnant and lactating for at least seven months. A few weeks before she gives birth, the milking is stopped. The cycle is usually repeated two or three times, before the cow becomes unhealthy or 'uneconomic' and is slaughtered. The cows' natural life span is over 20 years.

Other causes for poor welfare in dairy cows include: -

- Selective breeding for excessively large udders (associated with hind foot lameness)
- Overfeeding of starchy, high-protein foods, which can cause digestive problems and lead to lameness
- Poor housing in cubicle sheds
- Unacceptable levels of mastitis
- High rates of lameness

BST (A genetically engineered version of the cow's growth hormone) is injected into some cows to increase milk yield in some countries, although it has been banned in the EU.

## ***Cattle***

Many countries (including the USA) use feedlots for 'finishing' prior to slaughter. These cluster animals together, with no grass (they are fed concentrates). Welfare problems arise from mixing of animals, and the change of diet, as well as the crowded and unsanitary conditions.

## ***Turkeys***

Many turkeys are factory farmed. They are selectively bred for fast weight gain (causing health problems and disorders, and inability to mate naturally so artificial insemination is routinely used). Also, the heavy live turkeys are shackled upside down at slaughter - causing great pain and stress.

## ***Ducks and geese***

Ducks and geese can also be factory farmed. They are also selectively bred for fast weight gain (causing health problems and disorders), and systems can be used that prohibit natural behaviours (such as lack of water for ducks, needed for swimming, diving and cleaning).

Some ducks are plucked alive, which cause suffering to the animals.

## ***Fish farming***

Intensive fish farming, whereby large numbers of fish are confined in a small area, causes

serious welfare problems. Practices in the industry that can cause suffering include: stocking density, water quality and direction of flow, starvation before slaughter, movement and transport of fish, treatment with harmful chemicals, genetic engineering and biotechnology techniques involving chromosome manipulation.

Inhumane and unacceptable slaughter methods are still permitted for fish (such as suffocation, bleeding without stunning and stunning using carbon dioxide gas). As with other farmed animals, only slaughter methods that cause instant death or render the animal instantly insensible to pain until death should be permitted.

### **Fur and Skin Farming**

Fur farmed animals are kept in long rows of cages under an open shed. Each farm has several of those sheds. Small farms will have a maximum of 100 animals, while the largest in Scandinavia has over 100,000 animals. The cages, flooring included, are made of wire mesh, which makes it difficult for the animals to stand on them. Many fur bearing animals are essentially wild, and do not fare well in captivity.

Mink are very agile creatures, very much like ferrets, but also very undomesticated. They love running, swimming, playing, climbing and they are very inquisitive. In captivity their options to exercise natural behaviour are totally frustrated, resulting in abnormal physical and psychological conditions.

There are severe welfare problems associated with such farming and killing. These include: -

- Crowding and confinement in small cages – causing frustration leading to self-mutilation and stereotypical behaviour
- Increase in disease susceptibility and parasites – due to possible malnutrition from an inadequate unbalanced diet, crowded conditions and increased stress leading to a lowering of resistance
- Barren environment – no enrichment, little shelter, and no protection from the weather
- Inhumane killing methods – as the fur farmer wants to preserve the quality of the fur. Other factors include ease of administration and cost. The inhumane methods used include electrocution, poisoning, decompression chambers and neck-snapping.

When considering the suffering of animals for the production of fur and skin products, it is important to bear in mind that these are non-essential, luxury goods.

### **Exotic/Cruel Foods**

*Foie gras*: Pâté de foie gras is liver pâté produced from force fed geese and ducks. The force-feeding procedure causes severe distress and birds can be left barely able to walk and with laboured breathing.

*Ostrich meat*: Ostriches are essentially wild animals (and can be very flighty birds), and there are welfare issues connected to handling, transport and slaughter.

### **Markets**

There can be serious welfare problems in animal markets. They can be stressful and

frightening places for animals – strange animals, people, smells and sounds. The sorts of problems that exist include: overcrowding, lack of water, poor standards of stockmanship, aggressive treatment of animals, and lack of veterinary care.

### **Live Transport**

Each year all over the world millions of farm animals – particularly cattle, pigs, sheep, goats and horses – are transported huge distances to slaughter or for further fattening. The animals are transported in various ways: by road, sea, rail, air, or on foot. Animals often suffer greatly during the long distance transport, which also adds to risk of disease transmission.

Welfare problems occur for many reasons, including: -

- Animals are crammed into overcrowded vehicles and often receive no proper food, water or rest during their long journeys.
- Animals become increasingly exhausted, dehydrated and stressed.
- Some animals are injured.
- Some collapse on the floor and are trampled to death by their companions.

### **Slaughter**

Slaughter is generally a two-stage process. The animals are first stunned (with a captive bolt, by electrical stunning, or by gas). The stunning is intended to render the animals unconscious so they can no longer feel pain. Their throats are then cut and they die from loss of blood.

In ‘religious slaughter’ animals are not stunned before throat cutting. Scientific research shows that there can be a long time gap between throat cutting and loss of brain responsiveness, especially for larger mammals such as cattle. During this period animals experience great pain and distress.

Casualty animals (known as ‘downed animals’ or ‘downers’ in North America) suffer particularly at slaughter. They are often kicked, beaten, shocked, trampled, dragged with ropes or chains, and left without food, water, shelter, or veterinary care until they die or are trucked to slaughter. They are often not euthanised immediately because they are worth more money if they reach slaughter alive.

### **Genetic Engineering**

Genetic engineering of farmed animals can be considered a violation of the biological integrity of species and, therefore, intrinsically wrong. It is fundamentally different from selective breeding, as it does not allow gradual adaptation. However, selective breeding has, of course, itself already resulted in serious health and welfare problems for farmed animals such as broiler chickens, pigs and dairy cows. Genetic engineering can also allow the movement of genes between species (e.g., human to cow, chicken to pig). Genetic engineering for greater productivity is indefensible, as most farmed animals are already stretched to their metabolic limits.

Genetic engineering is still in the experimental stage. Many experiments have resulted in the birth of transgenic animals, which suffer severe health problems and often have to be destroyed on humane grounds. Genetic engineering experiments have already imposed great suffering on animals.

### ***Cloning***

As with genetic engineering, a host of female animals are subjected to surgical operations to remove/implant egg cells/embryos for the cloning procedure and many are killed after having served their purpose. Many cloned animals are born with deformities and many develop fatal conditions (from those that survive to be born). Cloning can also reproduce disease potential, and is a threat to biodiversity.

### ***Patenting***

Companies and academic institutions working in the field of biotechnology are eager to obtain patents on the genetically engineered animals that they produce. A patent allows the holder to profit from her/his invention as it means that, for a certain number of years, no one else can produce the invention without the patent-holder's permission.

The wider availability of patents is giving a major commercial boost to the genetic engineering of animals, a process which, all too often, leads to great animal suffering. Furthermore, patenting, because it views animals as inventions or things, is ethically out of step with the growing recognition that animals should be treated as sentient beings.

### **Mutilations**

'Mutilations' is the technical term used by vets and scientists to describe a variety of operations. Each year millions of farm animals are mutilated. Most of these painful operations are performed without any anaesthetic. They are an attempt to fit an animal into an unsuitable system, rather than changing the system to suit the animals' needs.

Mutilations include: -

- Lamb and calf castration
- Tail docking of piglets and cows
- De-beaking and toe removal of hens
- Dubbing of poultry (removing the comb)
- Teeth clipping of piglets

### **Legislative Bans**

There have been legislative bans on certain intensive systems in some countries and in the EU (see legislation module). Other countries still permit their use, either because they are not aware of the cruelties involved, or because they do not care sufficiently to stop them. Some countries simply feel that the need to produce cheap food is the priority, as animal suffering is inconsequential to them at this stage.

### **Alternatives**

There are 'tried and tested' humane alternatives for these products. For example, free range and organic systems already exist without these close confinement systems. Also, Compassion in World Farming (CIWF) has introduced an educational programme for agricultural universities explaining 'Animal Welfare Aspects of Good Agricultural Practice' in considerable detail.

## Science

Objections to factory farming are not simply based on emotions: there is also a vast body of scientific evidence supporting the movement's concern about welfare problems in these systems. The scientific quotations in the Annex are just an introduction to these.

## Feeding the World

Despite industry contentions to the contrary, for future generations to survive there is no choice but to move towards humane and sustainable farming methods. People will doubtless also have to eat less meat, but this will benefit both the planet and their own health. See CIWF's 'Eat Less Meat' report. Current systems and consumption patterns are simply not sustainable.

## Annex 1

### Scientific Quotations

The following quotations are from the European Union (EU)'s Scientific Committee on Animal Health and Welfare (SCAHAW) (and its predecessor the Scientific and Veterinary Committee or SVC). They highlight the welfare problems involved in various farm animal issues. Scientific support for the welfare case is always invaluable (although it often merely confirms what common sense has indicated for many years).

#### *Gestation Crates (Sow Stalls)*

*"No individual pen should be used which does not allow the sow to turn around easily."*

*"Sows should preferably be kept in groups" because "overall welfare appears to be better when sows are not confined throughout gestation."*

*"The sows may well be depressed in the clinical sense."*

*Sow stalls have "major disadvantages" for welfare; "The major disadvantages for sow welfare of housing them in stalls are indicated by high levels of stereotypies, of unresolved aggression and of inactivity associated with unresponsiveness, weaker bones and muscles and the clinical conditions mentioned above."*

#### *Battery Cages*

*"Battery cage systems provide a barren environment for the birds ... It is clear that because of its small size and its barrenness, the battery cage as used at present has inherent [my underlining] severe disadvantages for the welfare of hens "*

*"Hens have a strong preference for laying their eggs in a nest and are highly motivated to perform nesting behaviour."*

*"Hens have a strong preference for a littered floor for pecking, scratching and dust-bathing."*

*"Hens have a preference to perch, especially at night."*

### **Broilers**

*“Most welfare problems imposed on broilers result from the industry’s determination to push birds – mainly through selective breeding – to ever faster growth rates.”*

*As well as condemning severe overcrowding in broiler sheds, SCAHAW points to: -*

*The rapid growth rates which lead to painful leg disorders and heart failure. Quoting:  
“are a major cause of poor welfare in broilers.”*

*The chronic hunger inflicted on broiler breeders. Saying these birds are “very hungry” and that “the severe feed restriction .... results in unacceptable welfare problems.”*

*“Fast growth rates also lead to:*

- *Ascites (a form of heart failure), which “has a serious negative effect on broiler welfare” and “has increased in recent years.*
- *Sudden Death Syndrome – “an acute heart failure condition” which may “have an important impact on bird welfare.”*

### **Veal Crates**

*“The best conditions for rearing young calves involve leaving the calf with the mother in a circumstance where the calf can suckle and can subsequently graze and interact with other calves.”*

*“The welfare of calves is very poor when they are kept in small individual pens with insufficient room for comfortable lying, no direct social contact and no bedding or other material to manipulate.”*

*Good husbandry “is needed to minimise disease in group housing conditions but results that are as good as those from individual housing can be obtained.”*

*“In order to provide an environment which is adequate for exercise, exploration and free social interaction, calves should be kept in groups.”*

*Calves given an all liquid, iron deficient diet “can have serious health problems, can show serious abnormalities of behaviour, and can have substantial abnormalities in gut development.”*

### **Cattle**

*“Cattle have well developed senses and learning abilities. Although signs of pain may be less obvious in cattle than in other species, cattle have the ability to feel pain and neural mechanisms of pain reception seem to be similar in cattle and other animals, and humans.”*

*“Beef breeds have been selected for a high meat production. These breeds are often associated with a hyper muscularity, which can cause leg disorders, increase calving difficulties and decrease longevity.”*

*“Castration causes severe pain and distress.”*

*“Cattle form lasting bonds with their calves when allowed to do so. During natural conditions, weaning is a slow and gradual process stretching over several months.”*

### **Transport**

*“Some pathogens which do not result in a disease condition in farm animals kept in good conditions, become activated during transport, often because of some degree of immunosuppression resulting from stress during transport.”*

*“Some people who load or unload animals, or drive vehicles, do not treat the animals as sentient beings whose welfare should be safeguarded... Hence the welfare of animals is often very poor during loading, transport, especially on winding roads, and unloading.”*

*“For most livestock transport, loading, with associated handling and driving, is the most stressful part. The disturbing parts may be fear, pain caused by humans, forced physical exercise especially on steep ramps, and the stress caused by the unfamiliar loading procedure, vehicle conditions and social contact.”*

*“High temperatures in transport vehicles often cause poor welfare and mortality.”*

### **Further Resources**

#### **🔗 Web Sites**

##### ***Compassion in World Farming***

[www.ciwf.org](http://www.ciwf.org)

Includes a large publications section

##### ***WSPA***

<http://www.wspa.org.uk/wspaswork/factoryfarming/default.aspx>

##### ***Farm Sanctuary***

<http://www.farmsanctuary.org/>

##### ***Farm Animal Welfare Council (FAWC)***

<http://www.fawc.org.uk/>

Includes reports into farm animal welfare issues

##### ***Animal Welfare Institute***

<http://www.awionline.org/farm/>

##### ***Humane Society of the United States***

<http://www.hsus.org/ace/11513>

##### ***Farmed Animal Net***

<http://www.farmedanimal.net/>

##### ***Food Animal Initiative***

<http://www.fai farms.co.uk/>

***Farm Animal Reform Movement***

<http://www.farmusa.org/>

***Humane Slaughter Association***

<http://www.hsa.org.uk/>

***Humane Farming Association***

<http://www.hfa.org>

***Pighealth.com***

<http://www.pighealth.com/welfare.htm>

Farm animal welfare – the power struggle

***Organic Research***

<http://www.organic-research.com/>

***Dr. Temple Grandin's Web Site***

<http://www.grandin.com/>

***Race to the Top***

<http://www.racetothetop.org/>

***Soil Association***

<http://www.soilassociation.org/>

***Books***

***Farm Animal Behaviour and Welfare (Third Edition)***

By: Fraser and Broom

Publisher: CABI Publishing

ISBN: 0851991602

***Management and Welfare of Farm Animals: The UFAW Farm Handbook***

Edited By: P. Ray, Frances Kim-Madslien, Barrie Hart and Roger Ewbank

Publisher: Universities Federation for Animal Welfare (UFAW)

ISBN: 1900630001

***Livestock, Handling and Transport***

By: T. Grandin

Publisher: CAB International

ISBN: 0851994091

***Animal Welfare and Meat Science***

By: N.G. Gregory, T. Grandin

Publisher: CAB International

ISBN: 0851993974

***Social Behaviour in Farm Animals***

By: L. J. Keeling, H. W. Gonyou

Publisher: CABI Publishing

ISBN: 0851993974

***Livestock Health and Welfare***

By: R. Moss  
Publisher: Blackwell Science  
ISBN: 0582060842

***Farm Animal Welfare: School, Bioethical and Research Issues***

By: Bernard Rollin  
Publisher: Iowa State University Press  
ISBN: 0813825636

***Livestock Housing***

By: C. M. Wathes, D. R. Charles  
Publisher: CAB International  
ISBN: 0851987745

***Farm Animals***

By: Michael Fox  
Publisher: Lippincott Williams and Wilkins  
ISBN: 0839117698

***Animal Machines***

By: Ruth Harrison  
Publisher: Stuart & W  
ISBN: 0722400365

***Farm Animal Welfare: What If Any Progress?***

By: Ruth Harrison  
Publisher: Universities Federation for Animal Welfare (UFAW)  
ISBN: 0900767456

***Assault and Battery: What Factory Farming Means for Humans and Animals***

By: Mark Gold  
Publisher: Pluto P  
ISBN: 0861047273

***Factory Farming***

By: Andrew Johnson  
Publisher: Blackwell Publishers  
ISBN: 0631178430

***In too deep: The welfare of intensively farmed fish***

By: Philip Lymbery  
Publisher: CIWF Trust  
ISBN: B0000CP095

***Animal Factories***

By: Jim Mason, Peter Singer  
Publisher: Random House Inc  
ISBN: 0517577518