

ANIMAL FARMING



Every year in the UK, nearly 1,000 million animals are mass-produced and killed for food. Most are reared in intensive factory farms.

Factory farms are designed to produce meat and dairy products as quickly and cheaply as possible.

To keep costs down, the animals are given the bare minimum needed to survive. The happy farmyard scenes on egg boxes or in TV ads for meat and dairy products are quite different from the reality of modern farms. Huge, dark, stinking sheds are crammed full of miserable animals, who will hardly ever breathe fresh air or see natural daylight other than during transport to a market or slaughterhouse.

The animals can barely stretch their wings or legs and will never be able to move about freely. They are treated as though they are stupid and unfeeling, but they experience pain, discomfort, fear, loneliness and frustration in the same way as other animals including people.

Poultry

In the wild, chickens like to dust-bathe, turkeys fly considerable distances, and ducks spend most of their lives on water. But in poultry farms, thousands are crammed together in dark sheds, unable to express their natural instincts. They are forced to stand and lie down in their own waste, as the litter on the barn floor is never changed. The ammonia that builds up in such environments often burns away their breast feathers and causes ulcers on their legs. The birds are fattened up so quickly that their legs may not be able to carry the weight of their ballooning bodies. Each year, millions die from thirst and hunger because they collapse under the strain and are unable to drag themselves to the food and water units.

Eggs

Egg-laying hens are a different strain from the chickens kept for meat production (known as 'broilers'). Most eggs today come from battery farms where four or five hens are packed into tiny cages, barely bigger than a microwave oven. The EU has banned battery cages from 2012 but the containers they propose to replace them with, called 'enriched cages', are not much better. Some hens are kept in barns and, although uncaged, the conditions are still filthy and overcrowded. Each year, millions of 'useless' day-old male chicks are gassed or shredded alive by egg farmers. They consider them useless because male chicks obviously can't lay eggs and, being a different type of chicken from those bred for their meat, they won't grow meaty enough, fast enough, in order to be considered profitable.



Most farmed animals are slaughtered at just a few months old – a fraction of their natural lifespan.

Animals	Natural lifespan	Age at which typically killed*
Cattle	25-30 years	1-2 years
Sheep	15 years	4 months
Pigs	15 years	3-6 months
Chickens	10 years	6 weeks
Egg-laying hens	10 years	18 months
Turkeys	10 years	12-26 weeks
Rabbits	6-8 years	6-8 weeks

*Female and male breeding animals are kept alive longer, until they are worn out and their productivity drops.

Pigs

Female pigs (sows) are subjected to an endless cycle of pregnancies in order to produce as many piglets as possible. The majority are forced to give birth and feed their young in cages known as farrowing crates, which prevent them from moving freely. This is supposedly to stop them crushing their babies. In fact, research has shown that crushing rates are no higher for piglets born outside the crates. Being confined to a cage causes the sows immense psychological distress and frustration. After three or four weeks, the piglets are taken away from their mothers and transferred to barren, concrete pens where they live until, at around six months of age, they are taken to the slaughterhouse and killed by having their throats cut. Pigs in factory farms suffer from many health problems, such as lameness and viral infections. Contrary to popular belief, they like to keep themselves clean, which is impossible in the conditions imposed upon them.



Sheep and lambs

Sheep and lambs may spend most of their lives outside in the fields but they face adverse weather conditions and neglect. Many have insufficient access to drinking water. Each year, around 1 in 20 adult sheep die of cold, starvation, sickness, pregnancy complications or injury. Ewes (female sheep) are forced to have more and more lambs, often giving birth in the middle of winter. This results in about 15 per cent of lambs dying within days of being born – mostly from exposure, disease or hunger. The lambs who survive are killed for meat at around four months old.



Cows

Dairy cows produce milk only after giving birth. To keep up the supply, they are repeatedly made pregnant and then have their babies taken away, so that the milk meant for their calves can be bottled up for humans. Separation is extremely distressing for both mother and baby. Dairy cows are so over-milked that most suffer painful infection of the udders, which causes traces of pus and blood to leak into the milk. Even though you see them in the fields, you may not be aware that they are forced to spend four or five months of each year cooped up in winter sheds. By five years old, they will be too worn out to produce the quantities of milk required, and they are killed.

Fish

So many fish are killed each year that it is impossible to put a figure on it. Fish can be dragged along the ocean bed for hours in giant drift nets. When hauled up from the deep, they undergo agonising decompression. Frequently, the internal pressure ruptures their swim bladders, pops out their eyes, and pushes their gullets and stomachs out through their mouths. On board some ships, fish will be gutted alive on the decks. On the larger, modern, industrial ships, the process of catching, killing and refrigerating the fish is fully automated so that the fishermen don't come into contact with the fish at all. Commercial fish farms breed fish in huge pens with hardly any room to move. Disease runs rife in the crowded, dirty water. Sea lice pose a particular problem, eating the fish alive.

FISH SUFFOCATING AFTER BEING CAUGHT IN A NET



ALASKA FISHERIES PROGRAM

Free-range doesn't mean 'cruelty-free'

The term free-range suggests a farmyard full of animals wandering around contentedly. But 'free-range' animals are often still kept in crowded conditions with restricted access to the outdoors. They are also slaughtered at an early age, in the same way as other intensively farmed animals. 'Free-range' chickens, for example, are often kept in crowded barns. There can be as many as 12 per square metre. There might only be openings on one side of the barn, so it is almost impossible for those furthest away to get out.

The metal arks in fields that free-range pigs are given for shelter offer little protection from extreme weather conditions. In addition, they are often located on land prone to getting boggy, which gives rise to a high level of foot and leg problems.

Organic

Organic farming is primarily to benefit people who do not want to consume pesticides and chemicals when they eat animal flesh. The rules for organic farms include some welfare standards which means that the animals are kept in better conditions. But organically reared animals, as with all other farmed animals, are still mass-produced, have their babies taken away from them to be killed for meat, and die an early, terrifying death at the slaughterhouse.

SHEEP BEING TRANSPORTED BY LORRY TO SLAUGHTER





CHICKENS ON A SLAUGHTERHOUSE
PRODUCTION LINE AWAITING DEATH

Disease

The more we stress and exploit animals under modern systems of intensive rearing, the weaker they will become and the more prone to illness. Diseases continue to occur despite the fact that the animals are fed a cocktail of drugs and antibiotics in an attempt to keep them 'healthy'. In recent years, epidemics such as BSE have threatened people as well as animals. There are many theories as to how and why BSE (which transfers to people in the lethal form of vCJD), developed. A government-commissioned inquiry decided that it was caused by feeding infected cow and sheep remains to cows, who are natural herbivores.

In 2001, millions of farmed animals were killed and burned to stop the spread of foot and mouth disease. It was reported to have originated in a filthy, ramshackle pig farm and spread as animals were transported to markets and slaughterhouses around the country.

More, more, more!

Animals are already selectively bred and now experiments are taking place to push this trend to the limit by genetically engineering animals to produce more milk, more meat and more babies. Battery hens already lay 20 times more eggs than they would naturally. Dairy cows produce ten times more milk than their calves would ever require.

Never-ending suffering

The suffering goes on even after animals have left the farm. Some will be trucked straight to the slaughterhouse, and others to market where they are poked and prodded in order to move them around enclosures for dealers to bid for them. In addition, hundreds of thousands are exported abroad. The journeys can last for hours with no rest, food or water. Heavily pregnant animals may be forced to endure these torments. Some animals arrive with wounds and injuries. The weaker ones may die on the way.

The lives of nearly all farmed animals come to a brutal, early end at the slaughterhouse. The last few moments are filled with terror as they smell death and hear other animals being killed. Although they are supposed to be stunned first to prevent them feeling pain, many animals are not stunned correctly and are still alive when they are hung upside down to have their throats cut. There is also concern that, even when properly used, the stunning devices do not eliminate the animals' pain.

Suggestions for action

- Go veggie (request a Go Veggie Pack)
- Contact us for more info. See our website www.animalaid.org.uk/youth
- Join the Animal Aid youth group and help us campaign against farm animal cruelty