



Goat cruelty on the supermarket shelf

An undercover investigation by Animal Aid has revealed the shocking suffering of goats on farms. The campaign group visited three goat farms - in Dorset, Monmouthshire and Yorkshire - during October and November 2007 and were horrified at the scenes they witnessed. Milk and cheese from all three farms end up on the shelves of major supermarkets.



Goat Farming in Britain

An estimated 91,000 goats are kept in Britain and numbers appear to be rising rapidly. Some farms have a few hundred goats; others several thousand but almost all goat farms have one thing in common: the practice of zero grazing. Under this system, animals are kept permanently confined throughout their lives. They have little or no access to the outside world, fresh

air or sunlight. This practice is becoming increasingly popular for rearing dairy cows and is the norm in goat farming. It is simply more convenient for the farmer to keep the animals confined.

Mutilations

Goats in commercial farms are 'disbudded' as kids. This is a painful procedure acknowledged by one industry authority to be dangerous and life threatening.

A veterinarian uses a very hot iron to burn the horn buds off the heads of young kids - no more than 10 days old. One goat farmer states: 'The kid's brain can be permanently damaged by misuse of the disbudding iron. The possibility of infection is great. Tetanus and even death may occur.' Goats' horns are removed for the farmer's convenience: to make milking easier and to prevent the goats from hurting one another in the crowded and stressful conditions. Young kids at the Monmouthshire farm had been disbudded shortly before we filmed there.



Unnatural

Goats would naturally kid between January and June but farms now manipulate their reproductive cycles through the use of artificial hormones, which are implanted under the skin. These force the goats to come into season and produce kids earlier, and yield more milk.



Infection

At Britain's largest goat farm - where 3,500 goats are kept - we filmed goats with grotesquely distended udders, which left them unable to walk or stand properly. The goats' milk products from this farm are sold in **Tesco, Sainsbury's, Waitrose and Morrisons.**

These unfortunate animals are more prone to the painful udder infection, mastitis. A Dorset goat farmer admitted that overstocked udders are a problem and that such goats would be 'culled out' - a euphemism for killed. In its 'Code of recommendations for the welfare of livestock (goats)',



DEFRA states: 'If a goat has to be destroyed on the farm, this must be done humanely and, **where possible**, by a person who is experienced in both the technique and the equipment used for slaughtering goats.' It seems that competence is desirable but not essential.

Death

At one Dorset farm, a mother lay dead in the dirt with a bullet in her head. Her newborn kid – apparently abandoned to die – huddled beside her body. A second shot goat lay alongside the pair.

A second visit to this farm revealed scenes equally tragic. Pregnant goats were penned with nursing mothers. On the dirty straw at their feet, lay two dead kids, either stillborn or who perished shortly

after birth. This farm has stated that 40 per cent of its milk is sold through Tesco and that it supplies milk to Cornish Country Larder – the makers of Gevrik, Goat's Cheddar and Village Green goats' cheeses. These are sold in **Tesco, Waitrose, Sainsbury's, Asda and the Co-op.**

Goats give milk only because they are made pregnant. If the resulting kid is female, she may join the milking herd. If he is male, however, he is considered to have little commercial value and will, in all likelihood, be shot. DEFRA's guidelines state that unwanted kids should be killed 'as humanely as possible' but fail to say by whom or how the killing should be done. The Monmouthshire farm we investigated has admitted that it sends its unwanted kids to the local

hunt kennels for hound-feed. This farm's milk is on the shelves in **Asda, Marks & Spencer, Tesco, Morrisons, Sainsbury and Waitrose.**

Crowded

DEFRA's guidelines state: 'The space allowance when penned should be calculated in relation to the age, size and class of stock. This and the size of the group should be based on appropriate advice.' It does not suggest who should give that advice. The Dorset farm allows just 1.4m² per animal.

Welfare Guideines

DEFRA's welfare code is 'intended to encourage all those responsible for looking after these animals to adopt the highest standards of husbandry.' The code, however, is not enforceable by law so it's recommendation that housed goats have access to pasture or a yard remains little more than a suggestion. It is, however, a criminal offence to cause 'unnecessary pain or unnecessary distress' to any farmed animal. The problem lies with the interpretation of the word 'unnecessary' and a lack of enforcement. But however effectively commercial goat farming is managed, it remains an inherently exploitative business.

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