



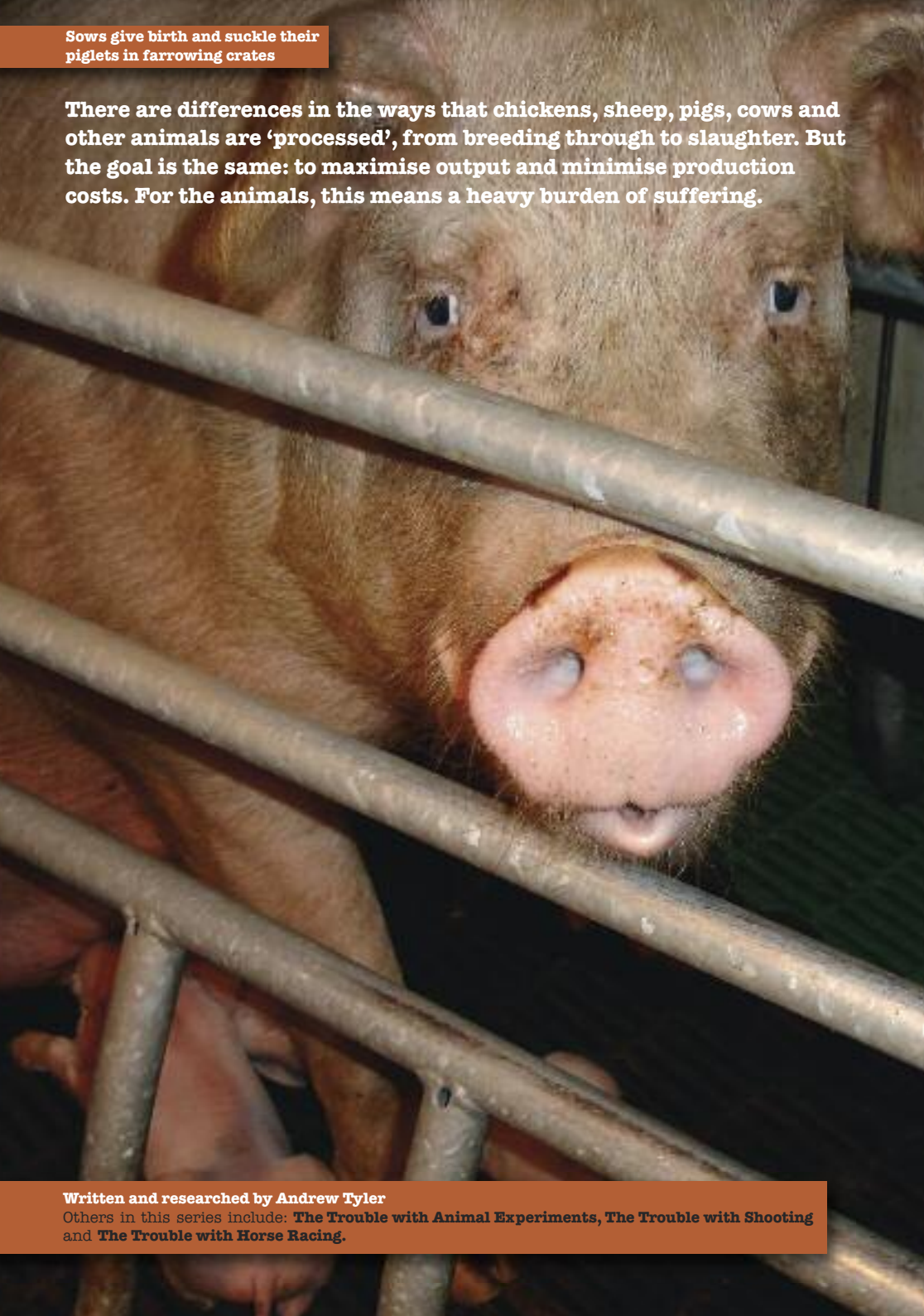
# The trouble with Animal Farming

The days are long gone when the animal farming industry could count on the public to consume meat, egg and milk products without questioning how they were produced. Recent years have seen a series of often devastating farming-related disease outbreaks as well as revelations about the extreme suffering endured by farmed animals. But the industry still guards its darker secrets.

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Sows give birth and suckle their piglets in farrowing crates

There are differences in the ways that chickens, sheep, pigs, cows and other animals are 'processed', from breeding through to slaughter. But the goal is the same: to maximise output and minimise production costs. For the animals, this means a heavy burden of suffering.

Written and researched by Andrew Tyler

Others in this series include: **The Trouble with Animal Experiments**, **The Trouble with Shooting** and **The Trouble with Horse Racing**.

# Breeding

**There is nothing natural about modern breeding methods.**

Farmers endlessly intervene to 'select' for commercially profitable animals and also to control the reproductive process itself. Artificial insemination is common across the species. For cows, this means a highly invasive procedure that includes the 'operator' manipulating the cervix via a hand thrust into the rectum. For sheep, being smaller, the procedure is still more intrusive and can involve forceps and even surgery.



Cows are subjected to invasive procedures

# Mutilations

**To control unwanted breeding and the aggression that results from stressful on-farm conditions, some animals have parts of their body removed.**

Chickens are 'debeaked', piglets have their canine teeth snapped off and the ends of their tails snipped, goats are dehorned, and lambs and calves have their testicles removed by surgery or by the application of a tight rubber ring to the scrotum, which stops the blood supply. Often such mutilations are conducted without anaesthetic.

# Destruction of the newborn

**Vast numbers of animals are systematically killed as soon as they are born because there is not enough profit in keeping them.**

The victims include 30 million male chicks produced each year by the egg industry. They are gassed or tossed alive into giant shredders. Similarly, around 100,000 male calves born annually into dairy herds are shot or slaughtered because they can neither give milk nor sufficient quantities of meat.<sup>1</sup> The same fate awaits male kid goats born to dairy herds.

A 'surplus' newborn calf is shot



Thousands of chickens are confined in windowless sheds



## Confinement

**The trend is towards bigger units that can hold, in the case of chickens bred for meat ('broilers'), tens of thousands of birds.**

They are confined in huge windowless sheds that become increasingly tightly packed over the course of the birds' six or seven week life.

Pigs often spend their whole lives in large stone and metal sheds. When breeding sows are close to giving birth, they are forced into farrowing crates. These are metal 'straightjackets', in which they have so little space they cannot even turn around during their confinement – usually around four weeks. They must suckle their young through the bars.



And while the dairy industry still seeks to promote an image of contented cows out amongst the buttercups, increasing numbers never get to feel the earth under their feet. They are 'zero grazed' in giant 'mega dairy' sheds. In fact, almost all dairy cows are confined in sheds for around half the year, during the colder months.

The permanent confinement regime has even hit that traditional outdoors animal: sheep. Some lambs go from lambing sheds to on-farm fattening units and then straight to slaughter, without ever seeing a field or hillside.

Not that life outdoors is trouble-free. Unlike wild animals who take shelter from fierce weather, sheep must face the driving snows and rains of winter unprotected. Free-range pigs also do badly in harsh weather. Many suffer heat blisters and mud-induced foot problems. And the mortality rate for chickens who have outside access is reported to be higher than for permanently incarcerated birds.<sup>2</sup> This is probably because, being the same weakened, highly bred strain of chickens as those in mainstream factory farms, they struggle to cope with adverse weather conditions and with common pathogens found in the soil.

Sheep face harsh winter conditions unprotected



Piglets suckle their incarcerated mothers







# Feeding

**A high-protein diet is now the norm. The goal is to get animals fattened and off to slaughter or producing milk or eggs as quickly as possible.**

But for grazing animals, such as cattle and sheep, a rapid-growth diet can cause digestive problems and a dangerous build-up of toxins in the bloodstream.<sup>3,4,5</sup>

While the use of such diets might suit farmers and feed suppliers, they are bad news from a global perspective. The land, water and other agricultural resources needed to produce the feed are wastefully deployed. It would be far more efficient to grow food for direct human consumption – a critical consideration in a world where so many people go hungry.

# Disease

**When animals are subjected to such remorseless production methods, severe mental and physical stresses result.**

This translates into high levels of disease and early mortality. Around 12 per cent of pigs<sup>6</sup> and 6 per cent of chickens<sup>7</sup> die before they can be slaughtered – an attrition rate amounting to millions of animals' lives every year. They succumb to a range of viral, bacterial and parasitic diseases, some of which (BSE, salmonella, bird flu, campylobacter, swine flu) can infect consumers, with potentially fatal consequences.



High protein feed can cause health problems



These pigs died before they could be slaughtered

# ‘Higher welfare’ animal products

**Meat, milk and eggs produced under ‘higher welfare’ schemes are increasingly popular with consumers. While standards vary greatly, some elements of these systems do represent improvements over conventional factory farming units, by way of space allowances and less oppressive confinement. However, there are many ‘higher welfare’ features that are straightforwardly cruel and oppressive.**

## **Free-range**

The guiding principle governing free-range farming is that animals are able to roam freely. However, some certified free-range systems allow farmers to confine pregnant sows in metal farrowing crates, in which their piglets are born and suckled; around 90 per cent of free-range piglets are actually ‘finished’ inside crowded, barren sheds, with slatted floors<sup>8</sup>; and chickens, too, can be kept indoors for up to a third of their lives.

**The slaughterhouse awaits all farmed animals, whatever the ‘production’ system**



A 'Freedom Food' chicken farm



### **Organic**

Organic farming is principally concerned with consumer satisfaction. It is about the (chemical-free) food fed to the animals and their medication regime. While improved animal welfare is also a core goal, this is far from always evident in practice. Beak-trimming of chickens has been found to be widespread. Nineteen out of 20 organic farms visited for a survey had laying flocks that had undergone this mutilation.<sup>9</sup>

Most organically raised piglets stay with their mother and siblings outside until they are sent to slaughter. But the final fattening phase of organic pigs (and cows and sheep) can take place indoors, as long as this period of confinement does not exceed one-fifth of their lifetime.

### **Freedom Food**

This is the RSPCA's farm assurance and labelling scheme, under which animals are said to be provided with a 'stimulating environment that enables [them] to exhibit their natural behaviour'. A 2008 Animal Aid investigation into a Freedom Food (FF) farm uncovered a large number of lame, starving, dead and dying 'broiler' chickens inside a vast windowless unit that held 30,000 birds.

And just as FF welfare rules for broiler chickens do not require that they have outside access, so not all pigs on Freedom Food farms are permitted to leave their sheds.

# Slaughter

**Millions of animals every year must spend a gruelling day in a livestock market before being despatched for slaughter.**

While the majority are sent straight from farms to be killed, their journey can take them from one end of the country to the other. Others face an even more punishing experience, by being sent overseas on journeys that can last several days.

A photograph showing a pig being held by a person wearing a blue cap and a dark jacket. The pig is being held by its front legs, and its mouth is open. The background is a dark, industrial setting, likely a slaughterhouse.

A typical poultry 'processing plant' will cut the throats of thousands of birds an hour.<sup>10,11,12</sup> Animal Aid has recently filmed undercover in nine slaughterhouses that killed pigs, sheep, goats and cows. Some were Soil Association or RSPCA Freedom Food approved. In eight, we found clear evidence of gratuitous aggression and criminal incompetence, including cigarettes being stubbed out on the faces of pigs, and animals being kicked and punched. Before being elevated upside down by a shackled back leg and then having their throats cut, animals are supposed to be rendered unconscious by use of electronic stunning tongs.

These should be applied either side of the skull, so that the current passes through the brain. We filmed routinely incompetent head stunning and even deliberately sadistic use of the tongs across the ribs, buttocks, ears and inside the mouth. The animals would have experienced agonising electric shocks.

In fact, some argue that, even when properly applied, stunning tongs merely freeze animals' movements rather than leaving them 'insensible'. A large number of animals killed under the halal and kosher methods are not stunned at all.

# Your choice

**Whether free-range, organic, RSPCA 'Freedom Food' or factory-reared, the economics of the meat industry dictate that animals are treated as mere units of production.**

Not for nothing do 'producers' refer to their animals as 'stock' – as though they are inanimate objects. A growing number of people believe that it is simply wrong to mass-produce, kill and eat animals – wrong and unnecessary. That millions of people thrive on an animal-free diet is proof that we don't have to inflict pain on animals and then kill them in order to feed ourselves.

**The choice is yours.**



**You can contact Animal Aid for a FREE veggie/vegan recipe and information pack. Email: [info@animalaid.org.uk](mailto:info@animalaid.org.uk).**

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