

Bedfordia, Twinwood Pig Unit



Steانبow Farm



Rerrick Park Farm



F J Bosworth & Sons



Sunny Hill Free Range Eggs, Detchant Farm

Award Winning Farmers Exposed: The Best of the Best?

The annual Farmer of the Year Awards are widely regarded as the highest accolades in British farming. Event organiser, *Farmers Weekly*, says that the awards ‘showcase the best farmers in the country by telling their stories. They aim to spread best practice, inspire others and influence the public about the role that farmers play in today’s society.’¹

Introduction

Animal Aid has exposed cruelty and malpractice on many UK farms in the past, and yet industry figures invariably dismiss our findings as relating to atypical establishments. Animal Aid has never believed that those randomly chosen farms were simply ‘rotten apples’. But to test this, we have now focused on the very best that the industry has to offer: those shortlisted by the industry itself for a Farmer of the Year Award. If the industry’s much-vaunted ‘high standards’ fall short at these acclaimed farms, it supports our view that boasting about good welfare is more important than actually providing it; and that standards on the typical British animal farm are abysmally low.

The Farms

All of the farms in which we filmed are run by people who have either been shortlisted for or won, a Farmer of the Year Award between 2010-2012. In each case we filmed covertly, and on randomly selected days.

The conditions at virtually all of the locations fell well below what would be expected of an award-winning farm and, in several cases, did not live up to the claims made by the farmers in their own promotional material. We found numerous examples of sick, dying and dead animals, as well as animals living in filthy and cramped conditions. Most of the animals had no bedding and were forced to walk and sleep on barren slatted or mesh flooring. Other animals had the barest minimum of bedding, affording little, if any, comfort. We found cases of animals forced to live in their own excrement, or in close proximity to it. Other animals were found climbing over each other, due to over-crowding.

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Bedfordia, Twinwood Pig Unit – Bedfordshire

Finalist – Pig Farmer of the Year 2010
(Richard Smith, Livestock Manager)



“We endeavour to meet or exceed all quality, health & safety and animal welfare standards...”

Bedfordia Group Ltd, www.bedfordia.co.uk/agriculture

Background

Bedfordia is a private company based in north Bedfordshire that operates in four key sectors: eco-technology, automotive, property and agriculture.² The agricultural division farms more than 2,200Ha, growing mostly wheat and oil seed rape on the arable side.³ It also keeps 1,100 breeding sows, supplying **Tesco** and **Sainsbury's** with 23,000 pigs per year through processors Tulip Ltd and Woburn Country Foods. All its finishing pigs are sold at around 22 weeks old.⁴

The company's pigs are bred, reared and marketed under the Assured British Pigs Red Tractor logo, for which they are independently audited. Its finishing unit was built in 2005 and was the first in the UK to comply with the Integrated Pollution Prevention Control standard, which requires the 'best available techniques' for welfare and the environment to be used. It claims to reduce the risk of introducing disease to the pigs by operating a closed herd, using artificial insemination to introduce new breeding stock. The pigs are fed on a liquid diet of mostly waste products from food manufacturers.

An annual 'Open Farm Sunday' is staged, during which families can come and visit the farm. The promotional photos for this event include a sow and piglets in a pen full of clean straw.⁵

Footage

Animal Aid's footage was taken in June 2012 at the Twinwood Pig Unit at Milton House Farm, the headquarters of Bedfordia's agricultural division. Despite Bedfordia's claims of reducing disease in the pigs by keeping a closed herd, we found evidence of diseases and infections in the pigs. These include lameness, anal prolapse, pneumonia, lesions, and tail infections, most of which were observed repeatedly during filming.

Many of the pigs appeared to have clipped tails, a possible cause of the numerous tail infections seen. Clipping is often performed to prevent pigs biting each other's tails, a common problem in intensive pig farms, caused by over-crowding and boredom. Some of the pens showed attempts at enrichment, such as barrels hanging from chains, but it seems these failed to keep the pigs occupied and prevent biting.

Many of the pigs observed had been removed from the main herd due to their illnesses and placed in a 'sick bay'. Whilst some of these animals were in straw-lined pens, others were still forced to walk, lay and sleep on barren, slatted floors, even though they were clearly unwell.

Two dead pigs had been dumped outside one of the sheds and covered with a plastic sheet. Another dead pig was still in a pen with four other live animals. Both pigs found outside the shed had marks and lesions on their bodies that could have been inflicted either before or after death. It is also uncertain how the dead pig found inside the pen died, as there were no obvious marks on the body.

F J Bosworth & Sons – Essex

Winner – Pig Farmer of the Year 2011 (*Stuart Bosworth*)
2nd place – Overall Farmer of the Year 2011 (*Stuart Bosworth*)



Background

F J Bosworth & Sons is a family run farm in Essex. The farm consists of 270Ha of arable land used to grow wheat, barley, peas and oilseed rape, much of which is used to feed the pigs. Slurry from the pigs is, in turn, used to fertilise the crops.⁶

The farm keeps 270 sows and has a production average of 25 pigs per sow per year. It has operated a closed herd since 2001 and claims to have a weekly all-in/all-out cleaning and disinfecting of its farrowing rooms.⁷ The company also claims that its pens are ‘sandwich clean’ before new batches of pigs are introduced, i.e. so clean you eat your sandwich off the floor.⁸

Stuart Bosworth has been described by *Farmers Weekly* as a ‘champion’ of the pig industry.⁹ He wore a pink pig costume for the ‘Pigs are still worth it’ rally in London in March 2011, calling for ‘an innovative and intensive, but sustainable pig industry’. He is also a monthly editorial columnist for *Pig World* and an advocate of the Red Tractor Farm Assurance scheme, taking part in their ‘Banners Blitz’ campaign.¹⁰ (Note: Since writing this report Stuart Bosworth of F J Bosworth & Sons claims to have voluntarily withdrawn his membership from the Red Tractor Assurance scheme).

The farm sells its finished pigs to Cheale Meats, which had two of its slaughtermen successfully prosecuted and jailed for animal cruelty in April 2012, thanks to undercover footage of them abusing pigs recorded by Animal Aid.

Footage

Animal Aid’s footage was taken in June 2012 in one of the farrowing rooms and in some of the finishing sheds on the farm.

The farrowing room had large sows in crates that severely restricted their movements to the extent that they were unable to walk or turn around and were barely able to stand. The crates also prevented them from having any meaningful contact with their piglets, except being able to suckle them. In one case, a sow appeared to have one of her front legs trapped in the bars of the farrowing crate, leaving her in an uncomfortable position and unable to move.

Most of the piglets slept together on boards, just out of reach of their mothers. Without any bedding, they huddled together for comfort. Some opted to sleep on the crates’ slatted floors, either to be closer to their mother or simply because there wasn’t room on the boards.

Some of the larger piglets had been segregated into barren ‘rescue decks’.¹¹ These are enclosed plastic boxes with harsh mesh floors, in which the piglets are completely separated from their mothers and forced on to a solid diet prematurely to allow their smaller siblings to suckle with less competition.

On a small shelf at the end of the farrowing room was a bottle of antibiotics with a used needle still stuck in the top. The syringe itself had brown patches of what appeared to be mud or excrement on it. Instructions for this brand of antibiotic call for the use of a ‘dry, sterile needle’ and to ‘avoid the introduction of contamination during use’.¹² Finally, there was also a pair of clippers, of the sort commonly used to remove the tails of young piglets, sitting in a dirty plastic container.

In the finishing sheds there was, again, no bedding. The pigs were forced to walk and lie on bare floors. In some of the pens the only diversion was a piece of plastic pipe or a crate hanging on a chain from the ceiling. The floors of many of the pens were coated in a thick layer of excrement, which led to the pigs being covered in their own filth, and being forced to eat and sleep in these conditions – certainly a far cry from the exemplary standards claimed on the farm’s website.

Steanbow Farm – Somerset

Finalist – Dairy Farmer of the Year 2012 (*Neil and Michael Christensen*)



Background

Steanbow Farm covers 607Ha in Somerset. It is owned by Finn Christensen, but now largely run by his sons Neil and Michael. They have a dairy herd of 517 Holsteins, who are confined to sheds all-year-round and milked three times a day. The bedding provided for the cows is sand and ash. The milk is sold on Dairy Crest's **Sainsbury's** contract.¹³

The farm also produces around 2,400,000 broiler chickens per year in several large sheds, and is part of the Assured Chicken Production scheme (farm number 1747). They also grow maize, winter wheat and grass for silage and generate further income by leasing 200Ha of land to nearby Worthy Farm for camping during the Glastonbury Festival.¹⁴

Finn Christensen, originally from Denmark, was president of the 2012 Mid-Somerset Show. He has also been chairman of the local branch of the National Farmers Union (NFU), of the Somerset NFU and of the NFU South West region. He was a regional representative of the Milk Marketing Board and of Milk Marque.¹⁵

Neil Christensen is currently a director of Dairy Crest Direct, representing dairy farmers in Somerset and Devon who supply milk to Dairy Crest.¹⁶

Footage

Animal Aid's footage was taken in July 2012 in one of the broiler sheds.

In the shed, conditions were extremely crowded with thousands of fully-grown or near fully-grown chickens standing wing-to-wing. There was little room for the birds to move around and some were observed running over the backs of others due to the crowding. Others had difficulty walking. Modern 'commercial' broiler chickens are selectively bred to grow at an extremely rapid rate. Their legs are often unable to bear the weight of their fast growing bodies.

Dead chickens were found during the course of filming – the first next to a feeding tray. She had been there so long, she had become partially buried, presumably by trampling. On the opposite side of the same feeding tray another chicken was lying on his back, unable to get up. His eyes were closed and he was breathing heavily.

Another dying chicken was found sitting on the floor, her eyes half closed, barely able to move her head. In total, five dead or seriously ill birds were found in the short time spent filming in one just corner of the shed.

After leaving the shed, a bin was discovered full of dead chickens.

Filming inside the cowsheds was not possible.

Sunny Hill Free Range Eggs, Detchant Farm – Northumberland

Finalist – Poultry Farmer of the Year 2011 (*Catherine Armstrong*)



“Production and bird welfare is our passion and key strength...”

*Catherine Armstrong,
Northumberland Gazette,
12th September 2012*

Background

Detchant Farm is a 165Ha family-run tenant farm in Northumberland, mostly covered by arable land. The tenant farmer is John Robert Jackson. His daughter, Catherine Armstrong, runs Sunny Hill Eggs. They began farming poultry in 2005, putting up two sheds for 16,000 birds, but now have 57,000 ‘free-range’ hens in five sheds. (‘Free range’ can still spend the majority of their lives in sheds.) The farm has Higher Level Stewardship (HLS), Freedom Food and Lion Code accreditation. They also keep llamas, have a small B&B business, and operate a farm shop with a café, delicatessen, gift hall, butchery and adventure playground.¹⁷

After initially selling only to wholesalers, they developed their own ‘Sunny Hill Eggs’ brand after hearing **ASDA** were looking for local suppliers in the North East. In 2008, they bought rival Scottish producer and packer Oxenrig, increasing production by 40 per cent and prompting investment in a packing plant at Detchant Farm. The company now sells to around 450 customers, including **Tesco**, **Morrisons** and **ASDA**, and has a contract to supply eggs to Edinburgh University, as well as several hotels, restaurants and tourist attractions.¹⁸ It recently underwent a merger with Lintz Hall Farm in County Durham, one of the North East’s biggest poultry producers.¹⁹

Footage

Animal Aid’s footage was taken in July 2012 in three of the chicken sheds and an office.

In all three sheds the chickens were tightly packed in together. In the first, there was nowhere for the chickens to perch so they were forced to do so on any

available surface, including feeding trays, water supply hoses and machinery. In many cases there were hens standing directly below where others were perched, which meant that they were vulnerable to being covered in excrement.

The second barn had a raised mesh floor with a slope running up to it. There were hens right up to the edge of the slope and several almost fell off during filming due to the crowding, causing them to flap wildly to steady themselves. Others were seen squeezing underneath their neighbours in order to move around, meaning access to food and water must be difficult.

A huge number of flies, mostly dead, were found all over the floor of the office adjoining the chicken sheds. There were also several large trays, which we believe to be flytraps, full of a black material, most likely more dead flies.

The third barn was much like the second, with a raised mesh floor and a slope leading up to it. Again, the hens were tightly packed, using feeding troughs and water dispensers as perches. Several were seen struggling to remain at the top of the slope. Some had missing feathers and, at one point, a hen was seen running over the backs of others. A dead chicken was found at the bottom of the mesh slope and, as with some of the others, feathers were missing from around her neck. Clearly visible through the mesh in this shed was a huge pile of excrement, which had been allowed to build up over a considerable period of time and could account for the large number of flies seen earlier in the office.

Rerrick Park Farm – Dumfries & Galloway

Finalist – Dairy Farmer of the Year 2011 (*Fergus McDowall*)

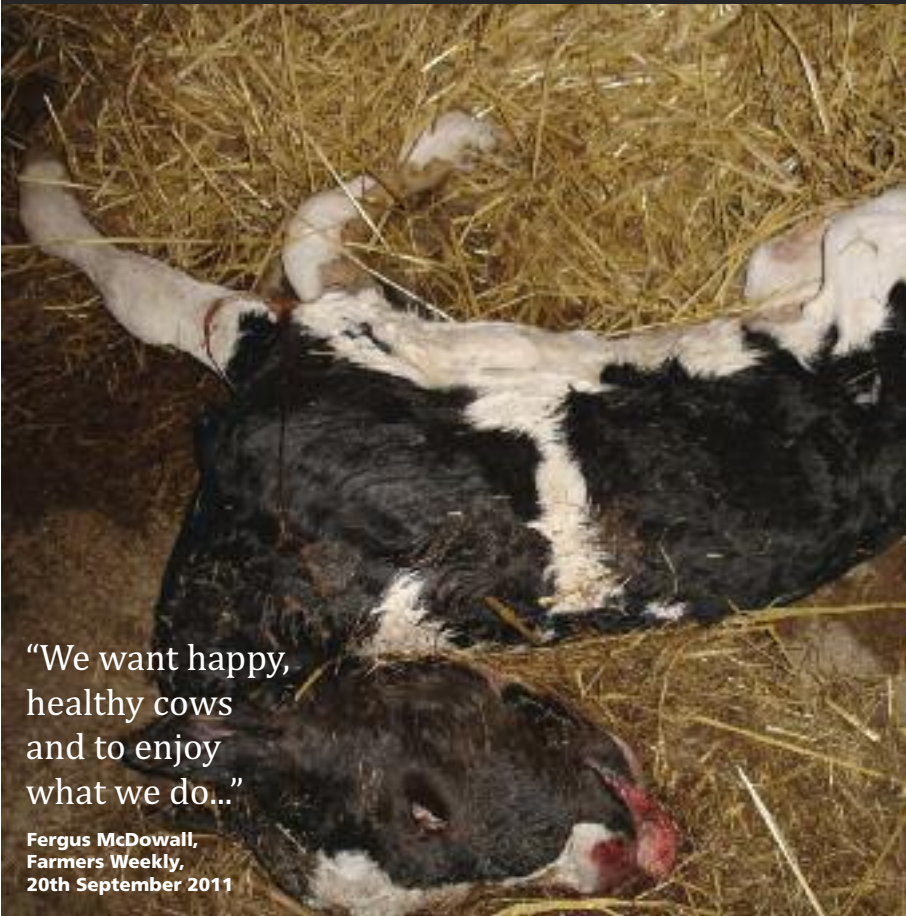
Footage

Animal Aid's footage was taken in August 2012.

What we saw was an example of the now infamous zero-grazing 'mega-dairies' where hundreds of cows are confined to barren concrete sheds, for most, if not all, of the year. The cow equivalent of battery hen production, it is widely recognised as inhumane and is another step towards the total objectification of 'dairy animals' and their offspring. Zero-grazing regimes are designed to exploit a cow's reproductive and milk-producing capacity to its extreme, while often disposing of the calf she carries for nine months as a waste by-product.²² It is extremely depressing that such an oppressive, not to say contentious, dairy cow production system should be singled out for such high praise.

During filming a dead calf was found outside a pen, his mother staring through the bars at his body. Nearby were live calves, separated from their mothers into small, black crates. Several were seen calling out repeatedly during filming.

The main area for adult cattle was very much as expected for a zero-grazing regime, consisting of a barren, featureless unit. Around the edge of this yard were cubicles divided by metal bars. With just a thin layer of sand or ash on the floor, this is where the cows must sleep. The farmer has indicated that the cows are inside most of the time, with 'a portion' going out during the summer.



"We want happy, healthy cows and to enjoy what we do..."

Fergus McDowall,
Farmers Weekly,
20th September 2011

Background

Rerrick Park Farm is a family run dairy establishment. It is a zero-grazing operation with around 600 Holstein cows kept in sheds. Housing includes an 'organic, high-welfare super unit' that houses 400 and was built with a grant from the Scotland Rural Development Programme.²¹ It is an open-sided shed and boasts extra-wide passages, tipping troughs and sandbed cubicles. The farm currently has another large shed under construction.

The company has a contract with the **Co-Op** through Wiseman Dairies, which was secured largely due to the building of the new dairy.²⁰

The farm recently received planning permission to erect a 41m wind turbine to power the dairy.²¹

Bedfordia, Twinwood Pig Unit:
Pigs with tail infections



F J Bosworth & Sons:
Piglets in barren 'rescue decks'



Steansow Farm:
Crowded chicken sheds



Sunny Hill Free Range
Eggs, Detchant Farm:
Dead chicken



Rerrick Park Farm:
Cows in sandbed cubicles

Conclusion

Animal Aid has conducted dozens of investigations inside British farms and documented appalling welfare standards and many breaches of the law. In an effort to show that these are not 'bad apples' but the norm, we filmed inside pig farms, in 2008, owned or run by directors of the British Pig Executive (BPEX). Among the scenes captured were: pregnant and nursing sows incarcerated in farrowing crates; dead, sick and dying piglets littering the pens; animals wading through filth or living in utterly barren environments; a lack of bedding; and a lack of environmental enrichment, despite the law stating that this must be provided.

Then, as now, the reality conflicted vividly with the industry's marketing hype.

What we have found during this Farmer of the Year investigation is typical of the farms in which we have filmed over the past decade. We believe the conditions are symptomatic of a 'race to the bottom' that is becoming increasingly evident in British farming; a drive to increase profits at the expense of the wellbeing of animals, who are seen as mere units of production.

While high welfare standards are often claimed when promoting British meat, dairy and eggs, just one of the 15 judges for the 2012 awards profiled on the *Farmers Weekly* website made any mention of animal welfare. Instead, the focus was on cold 'efficiency' and 'profitability'.²³

The award winning farms in our investigation show that even those establishments considered to be the farming industry's 'very best' fall well short of public expectations. Many people want to believe that as long as animals have a good life and a humane death, it is acceptable to eat their flesh, eggs and milk. But if the very 'best farmers in the country' are unable to meet this basic test, what hope is there for animals reared on the thousands of farms that don't win prizes?

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