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Shocking scenes uncovered at a free-range egg farm

A leading animal rights organisation has uncovered scenes that would horrify the public at a free-range egg farm in Somerset. Animal Aid investigators headed to an egg farm in Milverton, Somerset on the 9th of June in order to highlight the conditions of a typical free range 'higher welfare' farm. The group feels that people need to see what happens in the vast dark sheds that are conveniently located largely out of sight and therefore out of mind for most people.

Investigators witnessed the following:

- A bird who could not support herself and appeared to be slowly dying.
- A dead bird.
- Cramped conditions.
- Beak-trimmed hens pecking at the backs of other hens.
- Hens who were entirely bald across large sections of their body.
- A floor caked in muck.

Upon entering the shed, investigators described being hit by the strong stench of ammonia in the heavy, dusty and stifling air. Combined with the noise of thousands of hens, investigators described the conditions as 'absolutely overwhelming'.

The raised area appeared to them to be very crowded. Birds struggled past each other to access food, reach perches or try to avoid other hens.

The investigators reported seeing masses of hens, all of whom appeared to have had part of their beak removed. This painful process is known by the industry as 'beak trimming' and is thought to prevent injurious pecking of other hens. Many other birds had such severe feather loss that they looked like the shrink wrapped carcasses found on supermarket shelves in the meat aisle. Animal Aid questions why exactly would happy hens would have to be mutilated like this, if their needs were being met and they were truly content.

For several of the birds, the keel or 'breast bone' was very sharp, indicating that they had poor body condition. Others had unpleasant red-looking pressure sores. One bird was found lying on the floor and appeared to be

slowly dying. She could not support herself on her legs and may have been in this state for some time. The investigators say it was heart-wrenching to witness, and absolutely avoidable.

Says Animal Aid Campaign Manager Tor Bailey,
“Animal Aid sought to bring to light the reality of what “free-range” farming can look like. This industry often likes to portray itself on egg box packaging with happy hens roaming freely in the sunshine, with abundant grass underfoot. But this concept is quite a jump from the reality of what our footage revealed, as readers can see for themselves from these images. Consumers often want to choose a kinder option and many are willing to pay more for better animal welfare. If they witnessed scenes such as these they may feel actively misled and horrified. We would encourage all who feel moved by this investigation to consider a vegan diet, as this is the only way they can be that sure their food is cruelty-free. Animal Aid are delighted that over 3,500 participants signed up for our current Summer Vegan Pledge”.

Editors' notes

The investigation took place at Dyers Farm, Malverton, Somerset on the 9th of June.

Please view our compilation film here: <https://youtu.be/RxGeORSwc0Y>

Pictures from the investigation are available upon request.

Animal Aid investigators observe strict biosecurity at all times. We consulted a senior Trading Standards Officer to ensure that we adopt all necessary measures and that we are always in full compliance.

<https://www.animalaid.org.uk/the-issues/our-campaigns/animal-farming/suffering-farmed-chickens/>

<https://www.animalaid.org.uk/british-egg-week-public-dark-suffering-hens/>

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