

Animal farming

Every year in the UK approximately one billion farmed animals are killed for food. Most are slaughtered when they are less than a year old.¹

Each farmed animal is an individual with their own personality, just like the companion animals with whom we share our lives. They are all capable of feeling fear, pain and distress.

Some animals are kept outside on free-range farms. However, the vast majority are reared inside intensive factory farming units, which exist so that farmers can increase productivity and produce meat, eggs and dairy products quickly and cheaply. This means that the food products in the shops are cheaper for the consumer - but what does it mean for the animals?

On a factory farm, to keep production costs down, the animals are given the bare minimum needed to survive. Huge, barren sheds are crammed full of animals who will never breathe fresh air, experience the sun on their backs or feel grass beneath their feet.

These intelligent, sensitive animals are unable to behave naturally – chickens can't scratch in the earth or stretch their wings, and pigs can't root in the soil, as they love to do.

Intensive animal farming means:

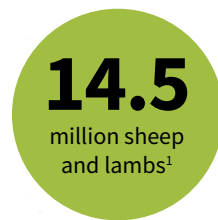
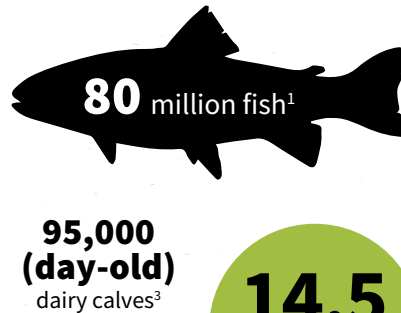
- Keeping animals in pens and cages within large sheds to restrict their movement.
- Selectively breeding animals to make them more 'productive' (e.g. grow faster, put on more weight, lay more eggs, etc.).
- Feeding animals a high protein diet to increase their growth rate.



Free-range farming means:

- Keeping animals outdoors, or giving them an opportunity to roam outside, for at least part of the day, rather than being confined inside.
- See *Does free-range mean cruelty-free?* section on back page for more info.

How many farmed animals are killed each year in the UK?





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Pigs

The majority of pigs spend their entire lives inside barren, filthy sheds on intensive factory farms where they are denied everything that makes their lives worth living.⁷

Most mother pigs are put into a metal cage known as a farrowing crate to give birth and rear their young.⁸ The cage is so small that it prevents her from moving freely – she can't make a nest and often she can't even turn around. Mother and babies will be kept in these cages for around five weeks usually twice a year.

At just three or four weeks old the piglets are taken away from their mother and transferred to concrete pens. With nothing to do and bored out of their minds, they often fight. To try to stop tail-biting, piglets have their tails docked shortly after birth. Many also have their teeth clipped or ground to prevent biting. Both of these practices can be very painful.

Around 42% of breeding sows in the UK are now kept outside under free-range conditions. However, most piglets born on free-range farms are only kept outside until they are weaned – at three or four weeks of age – when they are moved indoors to be fattened up for slaughter. In the UK, more than 90 per cent of all piglets are 'finished' (fattened up) in intensive indoor fattening units. Only 4 per cent of growing pigs will spend their entire lives outdoors.⁹

At around six months of age, the young piglets are taken away to be slaughtered.



'Broiler' chickens

Over 90% of chickens farmed for meat (called 'broiler' chickens) are reared on factory farms. They are housed inside large 'broiler sheds' that can hold around 50,000 birds.¹⁰

To maximize productivity broiler chickens have been selectively bred to grow unnaturally quickly. They gain weight so rapidly that their legs may not be able to carry the weight of their bodies. Many die from thirst and hunger because they collapse under the strain and are unable to lift themselves to the food and water units.

Most chickens reared for meat will be slaughtered at just six weeks old.



Egg-laying chickens

Around half of the egg-laying hens in the UK are reared inside factory farms where they spend their entire lives confined in small cages inside huge windowless sheds.¹¹

Beak trimming is commonly practised on intensive farms (as well as on many free-range farms) to prevent hens from injuring each other in the stressful environment. This painful procedure involves slicing off the tip of the bird's beak with an infra-red laser.¹²

Millions of male chicks are killed every year when they are only a day old because they are useless to the egg farmer – they can't lay eggs and are the 'wrong' breed for meat production.

The hens are sent for slaughter after just 18 months when they start to lay fewer eggs and become less profitable for the farmer.



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Sheep

Sheep and lambs may spend most of their lives outside in the fields where they often have to stand out in rain, snow or scorching heat due to a lack of shelter. It is estimated that 5% to 8% of ewes (female sheep) die each year – that’s a loss of 800,000 to 1.3 million ewes annually.¹³

To maximize productivity, ewes have been selectively bred to give birth to larger litters earlier in the year. Multiple births are common in many modern sheep breeds and often result in problems for the ewe during delivery and the production of more vulnerable lambs.

In the UK, as many as 15% of lambs do not survive.¹⁴ Each year around one million lambs die of hypothermia.¹⁵

Many sheep and lambs are killed or injured by dog attacks. A survey of farmers in 2020 found that 95% of sheep farmers had experienced a dog attack on their farm in the previous 18 months, with 49% of the incidents proving fatal.¹⁶

Lambs reared for meat are usually sent for slaughter at around four months old.

‘Dairy’ cows

Most cows reared for milk are kept outside on pasture from mid-spring to mid-autumn, but for six months of the year they are kept indoors. However, around 20% of cows in the UK are now being permanently confined indoors in what are known as ‘zero-grazing’ units.¹⁷

For cows to produce milk, they have to give birth to a calf. To keep up the supply, they are kept in a constant cycle of being made pregnant and having their babies taken away, usually within 24 hours of birth, so that the milk meant for the calf can be bottled up for humans. This separation of the newborn calf from the mother is upsetting for both cow and calf.

Female calves often replace their worn-out mothers in the dairy herd. Some male calves are sent to be fattened up for meat, while others, seen as a waste by-product, are shot soon after birth.

When dairy cows reach five to six years of age, they are sent to slaughter because their milk yield drops.



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New born dairy calf



Calf is taken from his mother after only one day



Cows in a zero-grazing unit



Cows reared for meat

Often ‘beef’ cattle graze outdoors in fields for part of the year and are housed in sheds in the winter months. However, those reared on ‘intensive’ factory farms may be kept inside sheds for their whole lives.

Most calves are disbudded to prevent the growth of horns and to minimise the risk of cattle injuring each other. The procedure is carried out by using a hot iron to burn, or cauterize, the horn bud. Disbudding is a painful procedure and although the use of a local anaesthetic is a legal requirement it is not always given.¹⁸

Cows reared for meat are usually sent for slaughter when they are just 1 – 2 years of age.¹⁹

There is a better way

Jay Wilde took over Bradley Nook Farm in Derbyshire after his father died in 2011.

For the next few years however, Jay and his wife Katja had a crisis of conscience. It is, Jay said, 'very difficult to do your best to look after them and then send them to the slaughterhouse for what must be a terrifying death.' It was 'soul-destroying', he said, every time he consigned an animal to their death in an abattoir.

Eventually, they decided to go into vegan organic farming and stop cattle farming. But then that brought up the issue of the cows.

Fortunately, Hillside Animal Sanctuary in Norfolk offered to help and in June 2017, 59 of the cows were sent off to the sanctuary to happily live out their lives in peace. Katja said 'we kept the

rest of the animals as they were particularly close or not well enough to travel.'

Jay said 'I'm relieved to have made the decision to no longer farm animals, something which I always found quite upsetting. Cows have good memories and a range of emotions. They form relationships.

Both Jay and Katja are now vegan.

Watch the BAFTA award-winning film *73 Cows* to hear the story of how the cows were saved.



© Maria Wilde

Questions and answers

At what age are most farmed animals killed?

	Natural lifespan	Age at which they are typically killed*
Cattle raised for meat	20 years	1 - 2 years
Dairy cattle	15 - 20 years	20 years
Sheep	15 - 20 years	4 - 7 months
Pigs	15 - 20 years	6 months
Chickens raised for meat	10 years	42 days
Egg-laying hens	10 years	18 months
Turkeys	10 years	12-26 weeks
Rabbits raised for meat	6-14 years	8-12 weeks

Are animals slaughtered humanely?

Most poultry and pigs are gassed to death, while most cattle and sheep are 'stunned' using a captive bolt or electric tongs before they have their throat cut.

Animal Aid does not believe that the killing of animals in slaughterhouses can ever be humane. Evidence gathered by our undercover cameras inside a number of slaughterhouses around the country has shown that animals are frequently cruelly abused and mistreated. The footage shows that animals are often not stunned properly before being killed.²⁰



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Does free-range mean cruelty-free?

Some animals reared on free-range farms have a better quality of life. Outdoors, pigs can root and dig in the soil, and piglets can run around and play. Chickens reared in fields can flap their wings and dust-bathe. However, not all free-range farms are the same - often animals live in crowded sheds with little access to outside. 'Pop-holes' allow chickens in and out of the sheds but crowding often means that only a few birds can actually reach them.²¹

And of course, at the end of their short lives, animals reared on free-range farms suffer the same brutal death as those who are factory-farmed.



Things you can do to help make a difference

- Go vegan - order a free *Go Vegan action pack* at animalaid.org.uk/youth
- Visit our website and watch our *From farm to fork* film
- Join Animal Aid and help to campaign against animal farming
- Ask your teacher to invite someone from Animal Aid to give a talk in a lesson on animal farming.