

# ANIMAL WELFARE

**Every year, hundreds of thousands of animals** experience terrible living conditions because the majority of meat, dairy, and poultry produced in the U.S. is from factory farms or confined animal feeding operations (CAFOs). Animals suffer needless mutilation and cramped, confined living conditions, exposing them to a wide range of injury and disease. They are routinely kept alive with daily doses of antibiotics.

## COWS

Calves born into dairy factories are usually removed from their dam, or mother, after about 12 hours. Male calves that are to be raised for veal are castrated and sent to feedlots to be fattened. In rare cases they are raised for breeding. The heifers, or young female cows, are raised as “replacement heifers” on the same farm or sold to another dairy farm where they would replace aging members of the herd.

Calves are dehorned, extra teats are removed (cows have four teats, any more than that are considered extra), and they are usually fed a milk replacer. This practice can lead to the spread of BSE (bovine spongiform encephalopathy, or Mad Cow Disease) which is transmitted when cows are fed byproducts of other infected animals and can cause death in the animal it infects and/or significant health risks to anyone who eats the meat of that animal. See [www.sustainabletable.org/issues/madcow](http://www.sustainabletable.org/issues/madcow) for more information. Calves also have about two-thirds of their tails removed – a process called tail docking, which is done without anesthetic and is meant to keep the cow from developing infections caused by constant exposure to manure – something that has yet to be proven effective. With so many cattle in close quarters, the animals often suffer diseases of the feet and udder from standing in their own manure and being exposed to harsh weather conditions. Close living conditions, excess hormones, and a diet of corn (that cows do not digest well) rather than grass provide a perfect environment for disease to flourish.

Once beef cows have grown to an adequate size and dairy cows are no longer producing milk at an acceptable rate, they are taken to be slaughtered. While slaughterhouses are required to meet USDA standards for cleanliness and humane treatment, some process up to 400 cattle per hour, a speed at which it is “nearly impossible to guarantee each is slaughtered within the regulation” according to Michigan State University. In

addition, slaughterhouses have been reported as regularly failing to completely stun animals before the process begins, resulting in cows being hung and bled while they are still conscious.

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## PIGS

On a factory farm, once impregnated, a sow, or mother pig is placed into a small crate, completely limiting her movement. Before giving birth the sows are transferred to a slightly larger crate that will allow her piglets to feed. The piglets’ teeth and tails are clipped soon after birth. The practice of tail clipping or docking is done to prevent them from biting each other’s tails, but this tail biting has only been observed in pigs living in factory farms.

Once the piglets are weaned, they are separated from their mother and confined in pens with concrete floors. Rooting, or digging in the dirt and straw, is a natural activity for pigs; and when restricted from this activity, they show visible signs of stress and aggression, such as tail biting. The concrete floors have also been linked to skeletal deformities

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## ANIMAL WELFARE (cont'd)

of the feet, and the poorly ventilated confines result in frequent lung damage and pneumonia. The stress and mistreatment pigs experience during transport, in combination with illness and injury arising from poor housing conditions, cause many to die on the way to the slaughterhouse.

### CHICKENS

Broilers (chickens raised for meat) are bred to grow muscle at an unnaturally fast rate that is often not matched by bone growth and can cause serious deformities, leaving the chickens unable to walk. Layers (chickens used to lay eggs) can essentially be starved for up to two weeks to induce molting and increased egg production once the feeding cycle is resumed. About 98 percent of chickens used in egg production live in cages with a base about the size of a standard piece of printing paper. Broiler chickens are

often reared at similarly high densities in pens with concrete slatted floors or occasionally litter (straw) covered concrete floors. Due to these stressful conditions, chickens often become aggressive and can peck each other to death. To prevent this, it is common practice to sear off about half their beaks, causing severe and lasting pain.

### DID YOU KNOW?

- Ammonia and other gases from manure irritate animals' lungs. One USDA study of 34,000 pigs found that 65 percent had "pneumonia-like lesions" on their lungs.
- While the Federal Animal Welfare Act prescribes minimal standards for the humane care, handling, treatment and transportation of animals, the law does not apply to animals being raised for food

## What You Can Do...

The best possible thing consumers can do to improve the standards of animal welfare in farming is to buy from local, independent, small-scale, family farms that provide their animals with good food and housing, and allow them to carry out their natural behaviors like rooting, pecking, and grazing. Talking to the farmer and visiting

their farm will give you a good idea of how their animals live. By supporting humane farming, consumers vote with their dollars for a higher standard of treatment and better quality of life for the animals that feed us. To find humanely raised meat near you visit [www.eatwellguide.org](http://www.eatwellguide.org).



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Find more detailed information about animal welfare on our website at [www.sustainabletable.org/issues/animalwelfare](http://www.sustainabletable.org/issues/animalwelfare)

