

Why Dog and Cat People Should Care About Farm Animal Welfare

Whether you're an omnivore, a vegetarian, or a vegan, there's no better time than now to consider how to improve the miserable lives of the billions of animals who languish in intensive factory farm systems—and whose only significant difference from cats and dogs is that people define them as food

BY LINDA HUEBNER



I want to address something more taboo than politics or religion—food. Or more precisely, the animals used to produce food. Today, we in the humane field either dance delicately around this issue or brawl about it; neither approach advances farm animal welfare. Farm animals are as capable of suffering as any other animals, yet we do not typically treat them accordingly. In fact, on most industrial (factory) farms, they are treated like milk-, egg-, or meat-producing machines instead of living, feeling beings.

There are no morally significant differences between the animals we define as pets and those we define as food.

The differences in their treatment cannot be based on intelligence or capacity for suffering—they are purely cultural preferences. The lines are blurred when shelters care for animals who are seen as food in this country, such as ducks and pigs, or animals who are seen as food by other cultures, such as horses and even dogs and cats. It is our refusal to see the similarities among the species that allows for the differences in their treatment.

Imagine providing farm animals with welfare considerations equivalent to those afforded to shelter animals. Even conditions in the smallest, most fiscally challenged shelters are better than those on factory farms, where the vast major-

ity of American farm animals are raised. Small kennels in some older shelters are luxurious compared to battery cages where several laying hens, naturally active animals, must crowd together into a space so small that each has less room than the area of this sheet of paper. Small dog runs are spacious compared to barren metal gestation crates where pregnant sows spend their days cramped so restrictively that they can't even turn around. Though pigs are every bit as playful, social, intelligent, and curious as dogs, those raised for meat can express hardly any of their natural behaviors while living in a small, filthy pen over a slatted floor instead of outside where they can root, nest, and explore.

Factory farms prioritize profits over animal welfare, emphasizing productivity in the forms of unnaturally rapid weight gain, greater milk yield, higher rates of egg-laying for chickens, and, for breeder animals, exhausting cycles of reproduction. The facilities themselves are overcrowded, noisy, stressful, boring, and frustrating; they deny animals' basic needs and provoke neurotic and aggressive behaviors. Cruel and inhumane practices of factory farms include forced molting (the practice of withholding food from hens to induce extra lay cycles), beak trimming, dehorning, tail docking, tooth grinding, and branding; these mutilations are performed without anesthesia.

Industrialized facilities typically do not allow visitors, which keeps people removed from their food and perpetuates the myth of Old MacDonald's Farm. In reality, very few American farm animals are treated in the idyllic way that old song suggests, though we would like to believe that they are. We do not want to know about the horrors of the factory farm and so, too often, choose blissful ignorance while the animals suffer.

Not only do farm animals endure intensive confinement and stressful transport from factory farms and feedlots to slaughterhouses, they suffer horribly during slaughter, too. Though better slaughter systems designed by animal science professor Temple Grandin have improved conditions in many slaughterhouses, most farm animals are still killed on mass production lines where they may not even be unconscious before their throats are cut and their bodies dismembered. Shelters for cats and dogs, on the other hand, offer a humane death to the animals in their care if those animals cannot be placed in good homes.

Even if we don't consider the specifics, the numbers alone are compelling. There are millions of animals in American shelters each year, approximately 3 to 4 million of whom are euthanized, usually humanely. At the same time, roughly 10

billion farm animals are killed annually in this country alone, usually brutally. That's about one million animals per hour killed for human consumption. No other use of animals even comes close to that mind-boggling figure; consequently, there is no greater opportunity to improve the lives of vast numbers of animals.

We cannot deny the suffering of farm animals and, as humane people, must therefore act accordingly. Every time we purchase and eat food, we make choices that affect farm animals. There are many ways to bring our compassion to the table to improve farm animal welfare; even small, easy changes can make big differences for the animals.

We in the humane community have an opportunity to set an example by considering what—and whom—we eat,

where our food comes from, and what messages those choices send to the public. People already respect the work we do in animal care and control, humane education, pet-facilitated therapy, and other programs. When we take a step further and make conscientious, compassionate choices that support the well-being of all animals, not just those in our care, we set good examples, send consistent messages, and improve the lives of countless animals. Isn't that why we got into this field? **AS**

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How You Can Help Farm Animals—Starting Today!

Fortunately, each of us can make a significant difference in the lives of farm animals and help decrease their suffering. Visit The HSUS's HumaneEating.com for tips on making compassionate food choices and getting more involved in campaigns to improve the lives of farm animals. And read up on the following ideas for adjusting your diet:

Reduce: Every hour in the United States, about one million animals are killed for human consumption. If every American cuts back on animal consumption by only 10 percent, about one billion animals per year would be spared a lifetime of suffering.

Refine: If you eat animal products, know that not all animal products are equal when it comes to animal welfare. Each industry employs its own abusive practices, some much crueler than others. The chicken, egg, turkey, and pork industries, for example, tend to be far more abusive to animals than the beef industry. But a growing number of producers are raising animals without intensive confinement. Refining your diet by choosing cage-free animal products, instead of the conventional factory farm products that fill most supermarket shelves, will help diminish animal suffering.

Replace: You can help prevent animals from suffering in factory farms simply by choosing vegetarian options. It's never been easier to replace animal products with readily available vegetarian alternatives. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, vegetarian diets can meet all the recommendations for necessary nutrients. And, according to the American Dietetic Association, vegetarian diets even "provide health benefits in the prevention and treatment of certain diseases."