

HSUS Investigation Exposes One of Egg Industry's Cruellest Factory Farms

THE HUMANE SOCIETY OF THE UNITED STATES



Michael Foods is a major egg supplier that serves some of the biggest names in the food business. The food industry heavyweight also carries the unfortunate distinction of confining millions of egg-laying hens in some of the worst conditions in the egg industry—an industry already notorious for its disregard for animal welfare.

Last winter, an employee at a Michael Foods egg factory farm in Wakefield, Nebraska, documented the routine mistreatment of thousands of hens. The employee's primary job was simple: remove dead birds. The employee pulled hundreds of corpses out of cages for eight hours every day.

The employee also carried a hidden video camera. The footage from the farm shows live hens caught in cage wires and confined in cages with dead birds; sick and injured hens; and hens dying from dehydration and starvation, just inches away from food and water.

Michael Foods supplies some of the largest food companies in the nation, including Pillsbury, Hellmann's, Mrs. Smith's, Ben and Jerry's, Hostess, and Kraft. Yet it does not even participate in

the bare minimum voluntary egg industry program on animal husbandry. More than 80 percent of the industry follows those guidelines—which still permit routine abuse, but are better than no guidelines at all. Accordingly, Michael Foods ranks as a distinctly inferior egg producer when it comes to animal welfare.

Even the United Egg Producers' Scientific Advisory Committee, a group that still supports confining hens in battery cages, issued a statement in January 2006 saying that failure to meet its minimum guidelines is “not consistent with humane treatment of laying hens.”

“No socially responsible company should be associated with battery cage egg production, let alone with a company that doesn't even meet the paltry industry guidelines on animal husbandry,” says Paul Shapiro, director of the HSUS's Factory Farming Campaign. “Clients of Michael Foods should either demand that the company move to cage-free egg production or switch to a supplier which takes animal welfare more seriously.”

Consumers are starting to agree. While many major food companies still purchase eggs from one of the most abusive egg producers in the industry, there's a nationwide trend toward better egg production for grocery chains, food service providers, corporations, and

schools. In 2005 alone, Whole Foods Market, Wild Oats Natural Marketplace, Earth Fare, and Jimbo's...Naturally! implemented exclusively cage-free egg policies; Trader Joe's converted all of its brand eggs to cage-free.

How You Can Help

As a consumer: You can help reduce animal suffering every time you sit down to eat. The HSUS advocates a “Three Rs” policy for consumers: Refine, Reduce, Replace. Consumers can refine their diets by refusing to buy eggs from caged birds, they can reduce their consumption of eggs, and they can replace their consumption of eggs with non-animal products. For more information, visit www.HumaneEating.com.

As a humane officer: A common misperception is that the mistreatment of farm animals falls under the domain of state departments of agriculture. Nothing could be further from the truth: state agriculture departments generally have no jurisdiction over on-farm treatment of animals. But you can help prevent extreme acts of cruelty to factory-farmed animals, which are no doubt occurring in many jurisdictions today. Humane officers have pursued prosecutions and secured convictions in several factory farming abuse cases.

While legal protections for farm animals are often weaker than for dogs and cats, farm animals are not exempt from all animal welfare laws simply because they are raised for food. If you have law enforcement authority, please contact Carter Dillard, Esq., The HSUS's director of farm animal litigation, at 202-676-2326 or cdillard@hsus.org. 🐾

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