



Dairy Cows

Traditional small dairies, located primarily in the Northeast and Midwest, are going out of business. They are being replaced by intensive 'dry lot' dairies, which are typically located in the Southwest U.S.

Regardless of where they live, however, all dairy cows must give birth in order to begin producing milk. Today, dairy cows are forced to have a calf every year. Like human beings, cows have a nine-month gestation period, and so giving birth every twelve months is physically demanding. The cows are also artificially re-impregnated while they are still lactating from their previous birthing, so their bodies are still producing milk during seven months of their nine-month pregnancy. With genetic manipulation and intensive production technologies, it is common for modern dairy cows to produce 100 pounds of milk a day — ten times more than they would produce naturally. As a result, the cows' bodies are under constant stress, and they are at risk for numerous health problems.

Approximately half of the country's dairy cows suffer from mastitis, a bacterial infection of their udders. This is such a common and costly ailment that a dairy industry group, the National Mastitis Council, was formed specifically to combat the disease. Other diseases, such as Bovine Leukemia Virus, Bovine Immunodeficiency Virus, and Johne's disease (whose human counterpart is Crohn's disease) are also rampant on modern dairies, but they commonly go unnoticed because they are either difficult to detect or have a long incubation period. A cow eating a normal grass diet could not produce milk at the abnormal levels expected on modern dairies, and so today's dairy cows must be given high energy feeds. The unnaturally rich diet causes metabolic disorders including ketosis, which can be fatal, and laminitis, which causes lameness.

Another dairy industry disease caused by intensive milk production is "Milk Fever." This ailment is caused by calcium deficiency, and it occurs when milk secretion depletes calcium faster than it can be replenished in the blood.

In a healthy environment, cows would live in excess of twenty-five years, but on modern dairies, they are slaughtered and made into ground beef after just three or four years. The abuse wreaked upon the bodies of dairy cows is so intense that the dairy industry also is a huge source of "downed animals" — animals who are so sick or injured that they are unable to walk even stand. Investigators have documented downed animals routinely being beaten, dragged, or pushed with bulldozers in attempts to move them to slaughter.

Although the dairy industry is familiar with the cows' health problems and suffering associated with intensive milk production, it continues to subject cows to even worse abuses in the name of increased profit. Bovine Growth Hormone (BGH), a synthetic hormone, is now being injected into cows to get them to produce even more milk. Besides adversely affecting the cows' health, BGH also increases birth defects in their calves.

Calves born to dairy cows are separated from their mothers immediately after birth. The half that are born female are raised to replace older dairy cows in the milking herd. The other half of the calves are male, and because they will never produce milk, they are raised and slaughtered for meat. Most are killed for beef, with close to one million being used for veal.

The veal industry was created as a by-product of the dairy industry to take advantage of an abundant supply of unwanted male calves. Veal calves commonly live for eighteen to twenty weeks in wooden crates that are so small that they cannot turn around, stretch their legs, or even lie down comfortably. The calves are fed a liquid milk substitute, deficient in iron and fiber, which is designed to make the animals anemic, resulting in the light-colored flesh that is prized as veal. In addition to this high-priced veal, some calves are killed at just a few days old to be sold as low-grade 'bob' veal for products like frozen TV dinners.