



Factory Pork Production

With corporate hog factories replacing traditional hog farms, pigs raised for food are being treated more as inanimate tools of production than as living, feeling animals. From beginning to end, this system is a nightmare from which the animals have no escape, and it all starts with the breeding sows.

Modern breeding sows are treated like piglet-making machines. Living a continuous cycle of impregnation and birth, each sow has more than 20 piglets per year. After being impregnated, the sows are confined in gestation crates – small metal pens just 2 feet wide that prevent sows from turning around or even lying down comfortably. At the end of their four-month pregnancies, they are transferred to similarly cramped farrowing crates to give birth. With barely enough room to stand up and lie down and no straw or other type of bedding to speak of, many suffer from sores on their shoulders and knees. When asked about this, one pork industry representative wrote, "...straw is very expensive and there certainly would not be a supply of straw in the country to supply all the farrowing pens in the U.S."

Numerous research studies conducted over the last 25 years have pointed to physical and psychological maladies experienced by sows in confinement. The unnatural flooring and lack of exercise causes obesity and crippling leg disorders, while the deprived environment produces neurotic coping behaviors such as repetitive bar biting and sham chewing (chewing nothing).

After the sows give birth and nurse their young for two to three weeks, the piglets are taken away to be fattened, and the sows are re-impregnated. An article in *Successful Farming* explains, "Any sow that is not gestating, lactating or within seven days post weaning is non-active," and hog factories strive to keep their sows "100% active" in order to maximize profits. When the sow is no longer deemed a productive breeder, she is sent to slaughter.

Approximately 105 million pigs are raised and slaughtered in the U.S. every year. As babies, they are subjected to painful mutilations without anesthesia or pain relievers. Their tails are cut off to minimize tail biting, an aberrant behavior that occurs when these highly-intelligent animals are kept in deprived factory farm environments. In addition, notches are taken out of the piglets' ears for identification.

By two to three weeks of age, 10% of the piglets will have died. Those who survive are taken away from their mothers and crowded into pens with metal bars and concrete floors. A headline from National Hog Farmer magazine advises, "Crowding Pigs Pays...",

and this is exemplified by the intense overcrowding in every stage of hog confinement systems. Pigs will live this way, packed into giant, warehouse-like sheds, until they reach a slaughter weight of 250 pounds at 6 months old.

The air inside hog factories is so polluted with dust, dander and noxious gases from the animals' waste that workers who are exposed for just a few hours per day are at high risk for bronchitis, asthma, sinusitis, organic dust toxic syndrome (ODTS) and acute respiratory distress syndrome (ARDS). Unlike these workers, the pigs have no escape from this toxic air, and roughly half of all pigs that die between weaning and slaughter succumb to respiratory disease.

Poor air quality, extreme close-quarters confinement and unsanitary living conditions combine to make diseases such as porcine reproductive and respiratory syndrome (PRRS), swine influenza virus (SIV) and salmonellosis a serious threat to animal welfare.

In addition to their direct effects on animal health, several viruses are known to suppress pigs' immune systems, leading to greater risk from opportunistic bacteria which further degrade health and result in on-farm deaths. These viral infections frequently go undiagnosed because they are masked by the overlying bacterial disease and testing is expensive.

The overcrowding and confinement is unnatural and stress-producing since pigs are actually very clean animals. If they are given sufficient space, pigs are careful not to soil the areas where they sleep or eat. But in factory farms, they are forced to live in their own feces, urine and vomit and even amid the corpses of other pigs.

In addition to overcrowded housing, sows and pigs also endure extreme crowding in transportation, resulting in rampant suffering and deaths. As one hog industry expert writes:

Death losses during transport are too high — amounting to more than \$8 million per year. But it doesn't take a lot of imagination to figure out why we load as many hogs on a truck as we do. It's cheaper. So it becomes a moral issue. Is it right to overload a truck and save \$.25 per head in the process, while the overcrowding contributes to the deaths of 80,000 hogs each year?

As factory farms create intolerable suffering under even "optimal" conditions, it should be no surprise that they become even more hellish when things go *really* wrong, as was the case in June of 2008 when levees broke and torrential rains in the Midwest flooded massive hog farms. While some producers evacuated their animals, several others failed to have evacuation plans for the thousands of animals in need of relocation. Some opened their barn doors before they fled for high ground, leaving the pigs to fend for themselves. Others left animals locked in their pens and gestation crates to thrash in vain against the bars as the water rose inexorably over their heads. Rescue workers found their bodies later, some contorted within gestation crates, some trapped in ventilation shafts, their last moments almost too terrible to imagine. In an industry where millions of animals are routinely forced into crushing confinement, the inevitable fire, tornado, flood, hurricane or epidemic disease means inevitable tragedy for those

trapped within. And yet, such tragedies may be no worse than countless unseen horrors that unfold behind slaughterhouse doors.

Prior to being hung upside down by their back legs and bled to death at the slaughterhouse, pigs are supposed to be 'stunned' and rendered unconscious, in accordance with the federal Humane Slaughter Act. However, stunning at slaughterhouses is terribly imprecise, and often conscious animals are hung upside down, kicking and struggling, while a slaughterhouse worker tries to 'stick' them in the neck with a knife. If the worker is unsuccessful, the pig will be carried to the next station on the slaughterhouse assembly line — the scalding tank — where he/she will be boiled, alive and fully conscious.