



## Poultry

With a growing number of consumers switching from red meat to poultry, the chicken and turkey industries are booming. In addition to the expanding U.S market, poultry companies are also benefiting from expanding markets around the world.

Record numbers of chickens and turkeys are being raised and killed for meat in the U.S. every year. Nearly ten billion chickens and over a quarter billion turkeys are hatched in the U.S. annually. These birds are typically crowded by the thousands into huge, factory-like warehouses where they can barely move. Each chicken is given less than half a square foot of space, while turkeys are each given less than three square feet. Shortly after hatching, both chickens and turkeys have the ends of their beaks cut off, and turkeys also have the ends of their toes clipped off. These mutilations are performed without anesthesia, ostensibly to reduce injuries that result when stressed birds are driven to fighting.

Today's "broiler" (meat) chickens have been genetically altered to grow twice as fast and twice as large as their ancestors. Pushed beyond their biological limits, hundreds of millions of chickens die every year before reaching slaughter weight at 6 weeks of age. An industry journal explains that "broilers [chickens] now grow so rapidly that the heart and lungs are not developed well enough to support the remainder of the body, resulting in congestive heart failure and tremendous death losses." Modern broiler chickens also experience crippling leg disorders, as their legs are not capable of supporting their abnormally heavy bodies. Confined in unsanitary, disease-ridden factory farms, the birds also frequently succumb to heat prostration, infectious diseases, and cancer.

Like meat-type chickens, commercial turkeys also suffer from serious physical malformations wrought by genetic manipulation. In addition to having been altered to grow quickly and unnaturally large, commercial turkeys have been genetically manipulated to have extremely large breasts, in order to meet consumer demand for breast meat. As a result, turkeys cannot mount and reproduce naturally, so their sole means of reproduction is artificial insemination. And similar to broiler chickens, factory-farmed turkeys are prone to heart disease and leg injuries as a consequence of their grossly-overweight bodies. An industry journal laments that:

Turkeys have been bred to grow faster and heavier but their skeletons haven't kept pace, which causes 'cowboy legs'. Commonly, the turkeys have problems standing and fall and are trampled on or seek refuge under feeders, leading to bruises and downgradings as well as culled or killed birds.

Chickens and turkeys are taken to the slaughterhouse in crates stacked on the backs of open trucks. During transport, the birds are not protected from weather conditions, and a percentage of the birds are expected to die en route. Birds freeze to death in winter, or die from heat stress and suffocation in warm weather. It is “cheaper” for the industry to transport the birds in open crates without adequate protection, despite high mortality rates. Upon arrival at the slaughterhouse, the birds are either pulled individually from their crates, or the crates are lifted off the truck, often with a crane or forklift, and the birds are dumped onto a conveyor belt. As the birds are unloaded, some miss the conveyor belt and fall onto the ground. Slaughterhouse workers intent upon 'processing' thousands of birds every hour have neither the time nor the inclination to pick up individuals who fall through the cracks, and these birds suffer grim deaths. Some die after being crushed by machinery or vehicles operating near the unloading area, while others may die of starvation or exposure days, or even weeks, later.

Birds inside the slaughterhouse suffer an equally gruesome fate. Upon entering the facility, fully conscious birds are hung by their feet from metal shackles on a moving rail. Although poultry are specifically excluded from the federal Humane Slaughter Act (which requires that animals be stunned before they are slaughtered), many slaughterplants first stun the birds in an electrified water bath in order to immobilize them and expedite assembly line killing.

However, stunning procedures are not monitored, and they are often inadequate. Poultry slaughterhouses commonly set the electrical current lower than what is required to render the birds unconscious because of concerns that too much electricity would damage the carcasses and diminish their value. The result is that while birds are immobilized after stunning, they are still capable of feeling pain, and many emerge from the stunning tank still conscious.

After the shackled birds pass through the stunning tank, their throats are slashed, usually by a mechanical blade. Inevitably, the blade misses some birds, who may still be moving and struggling after improper stunning. Proceeding to the next station on the assembly line — the scalding tank — the birds are submerged in boiling hot water. Those missed by the killing blade are boiled alive. This occurs so commonly, affecting millions of birds every year, that the industry has a term for these birds: "redskins."

## **About foie gras**

Foie gras (pronounced 'fwah grah') has been exalted in some gourmet food circles as a prized delicacy, but if most people knew how foie gras is produced, they would be horrified.

Foie gras, the French term for "fatty liver," is the product of extreme animal cruelty. It is the swollen, diseased liver of ducks and geese who are force-fed just up until the point of death before being slaughtered. Birds suffer tremendously, both during and after the force-feeding process, as their physical condition rapidly deteriorates. In just a few

weeks, their livers swell up to ten times their normal size, and the birds can scarcely stand, walk, or even breathe. At this point, they are slaughtered, and their livers are peddled as a "gourmet" delicacy.

The idea for this cruel force-feeding practice is thought to have originated in ancient Egypt, after people noticed that wild geese often gorge themselves before embarking on long migrations. Because Egyptians, and later Romans, considered the fat-laden flesh and organs of those geese caught after this pre-migration gorging to taste better, they sought to artificially induce and exaggerate this condition in captive geese. Thereafter, the practice of force-feeding took hold, later degenerating and devolving into what is now the modern foie gras industry.

### **Confinement and Cruelty**

Today foie gras production is concentrated in France, which produces and consumes roughly 75% of the world's foie gras. Roughly 24 million ducks and half a million geese are killed annually for France's foie gras industry. Nearly all of the birds are raised in intensive confinement systems, and all of them endure brutal, intensive force-feeding, several times a day, in the weeks prior to their deaths. Approximately 500,000 ducks are killed annually for foie gras in the United States and in Canada, respectively.

In modern foie gras factory farms, geese and ducks are confined, usually in either small pens or in tiny cages that virtually lock the birds in place. Thus restrained, the birds cannot escape the "feeder" and the mechanized feeding machine. One by one, the feeder grabs each bird and plunges the metal pipe of the feeding machine down the birds' throat. The machine pumps a huge amount of a corn-and-oil mixture directly into their gullets in just a few seconds, equivalent to one-fourth to one-third of the birds' own body weight each day.

This brutal treatment is devastating to the health of the birds. In a matter of weeks, their livers swell up to ten times their normal size. Breathing and walking become difficult as the liver pushes against other organs, causing respiratory stress due to decreased air sac space in their lungs, and forcing the legs to move outward at an unnatural angle. Ducks at foie gras farms have been observed panting and struggling to stand, using their wings to push themselves forward when their crippled legs can no longer support them. Struggling to move causes infection-prone open pressure sores to develop and fester on their hocks (legs) and keels (chest area).

In this compromised state, depressed birds can no longer engage in normal preening behaviors, and this is compounded by the fact that they are denied access to water sufficient for them to engage in normal, instinctual behaviors. Their plumage becomes encrusted with filth, and most of them develop what foie gras farmers call "wet neck"-when their unpreened feathers curl up and become coated with dirt and oil.

They also suffer, as do all factory-farmed ducks, from debilling, which is performed ostensibly to prevent them from pecking each other when they are so severely confined. Shortly after birth, the birds' beaks are cut off, slicing through tissue rich in

nerve endings. Debilled poultry suffer from chronic pain for the rest of their lives, often having trouble eating and preening.

As a result of these egregious conditions, the birds suffer both physically and psychologically.

## **Liver Disease**

Furthermore, liver function in foie gras birds is severely compromised. In medical terms, the liver is in a state of dysfunction called hepatic lipidosis or hepatic steatosis, meaning it can no longer perform its intended function. According to avian veterinarian Dr. Laurie Siperstein Cook, "The liver is there to clean out toxins from the blood stream. If the liver can't work properly, you've got all these toxins flowing through the blood, making them feel bad in various ways, so it can harm various organs as well as the brain."

Dr. Castes of L'Ecole Nationale Veterinaire de Toulouse describes this phenomenon further as "hepatic encephalopathy":

According to The European Commission's Scientific Committee on Animal Health and Animal Welfare (SCAHAW) report on the Welfare Aspects of the Production of Foie Gras in Ducks and Geese, "the liver steatosis obtained by force feeding induced an impairment of hepatic function, as demonstrated from morphometric, biochemical, histological and pharmacological points of view. The reversibility of steatosis which is reported above for many birds which have been force fed does not mean that the changes in the liver are not pathological." The report further states that "because normal liver function is seriously impaired in birds with the hypertrophied liver which occurs at the end of force feeding this level of steatosis should be considered pathological.

Not surprisingly, the mortality rate on foie gras farms can be up to 20 times higher than the death rate on conventional duck farms. Ducks can die when the metal feeding tube punctures their necks, from ailments related to liver failure, or when force-feeding overfills them to the point of suffocation. Necropsies performed on foie gras birds have shown them to suffer from grossly enlarged livers, lacerated tracheas and esophagi, pneumonia, throats and gullets severely impacted with undigested corn, massive internal bacterial and fungal growth and sore feet from bumblefoot - all consequences of the production method for which veterinary care is not profitable. A December 2005 [necropsy report](#) states: "The stresses of the final forced-feeding caused an acute respiratory limitation on ducks already suffering from pneumonia and severe hepatomeglia restricted respiratory activity due to liver pressure on air sacs. This killed the ducks."