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THE NEED FOR ETHICAL CHICKEN FARMING IN THE US:

Factory Farming and its Risks for the Future

CHICKENS COMPILE THE LARGEST PERCENTAGE OF FARM ANIMALS IN THE UNITED STATES- ALMOST 9 TIMES AS MUCH AS ANY OTHER ANIMAL ("THE UNITED STATES MEAT INDUSTRY AT A GLANCE"). CHICKENS ALSO MAKEUP THE LARGEST CONSUMED ANIMAL PROTEIN IN AMERICA, WITH CONSUMPTION NUMBERS EXPECTED TO RISE EACH YEAR (SUPER). HOWEVER, IF YOU ARE LIKE MOST AMERICANS, YOU HAVE PROBABLY NEVER THOUGHT ABOUT THE JOURNEY CHICKEN TENDERS MAKE IN ORDER TO REACH YOUR PLATE.

THE HARMFUL TRUTHS OF FACTORY FARMING

CHICKENS	CONSUMERS	ENVIRONMENT	FACTORY WORKERS
<p>Develop severe anatomical and behavioral problems- such as aggression, and stress (Leder 73).</p> <p>Most are fed a predominantly grain diet which lacks necessary nutrients. As a result, the chickens have compromised immune systems and are subject to a greater variety of diseases (Williams 4).</p> <p>Frequently debeaked by farmers- which is unnatural and painful (8).</p>	<p>The chickens have a higher fat content, which has helped contribute to an epidemic of obesity among overfed Americans (Leder 73).</p> <p>Has caused an increase of animal diseases (e.g., mad cow disease) due to anti-biotic resistant bacteria in chickens (73).</p>	<p>CFAO operations are energy-intensive and largely petroleum-based, which use up a large amount of nonrenewable resources (Leder 73).</p> <p>Produce large quantities of environmentally toxic waste, which contributes to increased levels of pollution (73).</p> <p>Produces more greenhouse gases than the whole transportation industry (Williams 4).</p>	<p>The air quality inside the the pins where the chickens are kept are often filled with fecal matter, toxic gases (ammonia and hydrogen sulfide) (Lawrence).</p> <p>These all pose long-term respiratory risks ("Food Empowerment Project").</p> <p>The workers often make marginal levels of salary for extensive amounts of labor (about 42 hours per week with an average pay just at the minimum wage) ("Low Wages").</p>

Chickens are organic and non-GMO ("Inhumane Practices on Factory Farms".)

Chickens can display their natural behavior yet still be profitable ("inhumane Practices on Factory Farms").

Chickens display natural-behavior practices Inhumane Practices on Factory Farms").

The chickens have a longer and overall higher -quality of life.



The chickens experience an often shorter, minimized quality of life filled with pain.

Chickens are infused with antibiotics and growth hormones (Williams 4)

Concerns of welfare and ethical violations- confinement, seclusion, separation (Lawrence; (Williams 4),

Designed to maximize productivity and profit (McMullen 128).

HIGHER WELFARE FARMS vs. CFAOSs

THE PROBLEM

Each year, 99% of the chickens the American consumers are farmed on what is considered factory farms (Williams 3). The other 1% of chickens are farmed on what are considered to be higher-welfare farms (3). In recent years, it has come apparent that the negative consequences from factory farms outweigh the positives, and that in order to alleviate these effects, the best case scenario for all would be to transition to higher-welfare farms.

WHY CHICKENS?

Chickens are cheap to take care of, and cheap to buy. They also do not require much space, allowing farmers to capitalize on area (Williams 8). Additionally, they are also one of the healthiest protein sources and widely available food sources in America- making them a staple to most American diets (Rude; Williams 8). The American government even promotes the consumption of chicken and heavily subsidizes chicken farming (Rude). Because of these factors, chickens have become indispensable and crucial to the American economy (Leder 79).

HOW FACTORY FARMING BECAME SO WIDESPREAD

Factory Farming in America has increased significantly due to the need for food at a faster and cheaper rate in order to satisfy the demands of a growing US population (Thornton). Technological advancements from the Industrial Revolution onward have made factory farming possible as the creation of antibiotic and hormone injections, as well as altered care practices, have allowed chickens to be produced in a faster, and thus, unnatural rate (Thornton; Traini 20).

SUPPORT FOR CHANGE

In recent years, organizations like the People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) and American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) have helped to illuminate factory farming and its harmful effects to the public. Through interviews, documentaries, and photo journalism, these organizations have helped increase transparency (Marmor Shaw). As a result, consumers are being more vocal in requesting ethically-raised poultry, and support for sustainable farming is increasing (Marmor Shaw; Spain et. al).

WHY A LACK OF POLICY STILL EXISTS

The three main obstacles facing this issue is bias, overcomng Washington, and the lack of visibility. Most of the public grossly misunderstands/ is unaware to the unethical practices that occur on factory farms. Quite simply, it is because the chicken and meat industry do not want us to know. The meat industry in general holds extreme amounts of power in Washington in terms of lobbying- especially for the GOP ("Meat Processing & Products"). Because of this, many policymakers are unwilling to challenge the industry for fear of losing large sources of funding. There is also ag-gag legislation in 7+ states, that restrict access and observation of farms as well as prevent whistleblowing ("What is Ag-Gag Legislation"). Lastly, many people either: do not regard chickens as sentient beings, and/or worthy of legal protections.

Currently, in the United States, there are no federal laws protecting animals on farms ("Farm Animal Welfare"; Spain et al.).

This must change.

USING EUROPE AS A MODEL

Because animal farming laws are almost nonexistent in America (there are two federal laws that cover farm animals during transport and slaughter but they exclude chicken, we will look to our neighbors for guidance ("Farm Animal Welfare"). Europe has seen much more progress concerning ethical farming, in large part because of pressure from NGOs and direct democracy/ citizen activism. Some measures include the creation of the European Food Safety Authority, which provides scientific evidence to policymakers about animal welfare on farms, as well as the elimination of factory-farms through timed phase-outs with economic and political incentives/assistance (Bock and Buller 391; Pluhar 460). However, the effectiveness of these laws is somewhat hindered because unless citizens or factories and workers themselves report violations, it is extremely easy for them to go unnoticed.

POSSIBLE COURSES OF ACTION

Following Europe's lead, the US should pass legislation that would require a gradual abandonment of factory farms and the transition to sustainable farms (Bock and Buller). The process would occur over a number of years, with a deadline set in the future, and would involve cooperation across many different sectors (business, farmers, etc). This would allow time for the transition and for the meat industry to change their standards of farming. Also looking to Europe, the United States should require that all chickens be cage-free, thus, making them free range (Bock and Buller). This is a small change for farmers but it would have a monumental impact for chickens, as it would eliminate a majority of welfare problems associated with abnormal growth rates and behavior patterns (Lawrence).

There is also a need for chickens on factory farms to have some type of protections and standards in place that are not only enforced, but also contain provisions for penalties when they are not met. Only through these protections can factory farming change. These protections should focus on the traditional agricultural practices that existed prior to factory farming (and still exist on smaller farms and sustainable farms) ("Inhumane Practices on Factory Farms"). These practices emphasize pasture-raising, grass-feeding, and free-grazing (Williams 4), and not administering antibiotics or hormones unless as a means to improve the lives of the chickens.

LOOKING AHEAD

The fact is: ethically raised chickens produce better quality food for humans. And when asked, upwards of 70-80% of Americans support better practices of chicken farming (Marmor Shaw; Spain et al.). However, as it can be seen so far, marginal leads have been made by groups, but all are working independently. Now, the need is for multi-collaborative efforts from all levels of government, farmers, environmentalists, the business sector, and consumers all over the country to address this problem. There is also no wrong or right way to address this lack of policy, as there are many routes that the US government can take. However, action needs to be taken now. By campaigning for chickens and partnering with businesses and the farming industry to show that sustainable and ethical farming can be sustainable and profitable, consumers, the chickens themselves, factory workers, and the environment, will be better off (Marmor Shaw).

Chickens raised in
CFAOS
are now...

"...three times higher in fat, one third lower in protein, and lower in beneficial omega-3 fatty acids now than [they were] in the 1970s."

-Philip LyMBERG,

Chief Executive of Compassion in World Farming (Lawrence)

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