

# What every Canadian should know...

According to official sources, extreme suffering is inherent in the lives of farm animals



Most veal calves spend their entire short lives confined in a narrow stall.



Cages containing Canadian layer hens. Photo by Andrea Maenza.



It is common practice for female pigs to spend six months confined while they raise their young.

For the vast majority of farm animals in Canada, misery is a way of life. According to scientific and government sources, each year millions of animals are severely confined, stressed, broken and traumatized on their way to the non-vegetarian's dinner plate, victims of a system that simply cannot afford to care for its animals humanely. The cost of extending humane treatment to the 500 million farm animals in Canada would escalate the price of animal food-products far beyond the reach of most Canadians.

With only token exceptions, affordable beef, poultry, pork and dairy cannot be produced without intense abuse of animals.

## Animals face extreme confinement and painful mutilations

**Egg-laying hens:** On average, four hens are permanently confined in cages measuring 16 by 18 inches, analogous to four people living inside an elevator. In this unnatural environment, says poultry behaviourist Dr. Ian Duncan, "hens are not well off. They are unable to satisfy certain basic behavioural needs: foraging, walking about, pecking, scratching and in particular nesting."<sup>1</sup> The resulting stress leads to aggression in the form of hens pecking each other, the damage from which industry tries to control by debeaking the birds shortly after birth: their beak tips are amputated without anesthetic, an operation that industry admits will cause "acute and long-term pain" in these animals.<sup>2</sup>

The Canadian method of egg production is also known to routinely break the bones of egg-laying hens. Industry reports that "Broken bones ... have shown an alarming increase among laying hens."<sup>3</sup> The inactivity of the animals' intense confinement, combined with the calcium loss due to artificially accelerated egg-laying, induces osteoporosis in hens, rendering their bones fragile and easily broken. "Because spent laying hens are worth very little to Canada's poultry industry, not much care is taken ... the birds' fragile bones are often broken upon removal from cages."<sup>1</sup>

Meat-type chickens in Canada are confined to sheds that, according to Canadian Professor of Veterinary Surgery Andrew Fraser, expose the animals to extreme suffering. "At the beginning the young chicks

have adequate space to move around, but at the end of the seven-week growing period they are under very crowded conditions. As a result of this, many broiler chicks go unnoticed when they become injured or sick and therefore die without attention. In addition, this large population of individuals experiences circumstances occasionally which cause hysteria to spread throughout the birds, with resultant crowding and suffocation of large numbers."<sup>4</sup>

Further, ammonia emitted by the massive buildup of urine and feces in sheds will "irritate the birds' eyes and upper respiratory tract."<sup>1</sup>

Piglets are "due for a few unpleasant surprises in the form of minor surgery. Piglets' tails are usually clipped as a precaution against tail-biting ... Most male piglets are [also] castrated. Castration is done because consumers are thought to find the meat of intact males objectionable."<sup>5</sup>

**Female pigs:** For six months per year, most sows are confined in crates and stalls in which they cannot turn around. This confinement "can make it impossible for animals to perform natural behaviour ... We sometimes speak of intensively housed pigs suffering from boredom or under-stimulation or thwarting of natural behaviour. The problem is very real. Confinement can also put considerable stress on the legs and hooves of pigs. As a result, lameness and hoof injuries are important problems in some herds."<sup>5</sup>

The Canadian pork industry counters that sows must be confined to prevent them from crushing their piglets, but scientific experts say that "most crushing occurs in the first few days after birth."<sup>5</sup>

Furthermore, according to a University of Guelph study, an estimated "...30% of growing pigs suffer from ulcers, and between 10 and 40% may eventually die from the ailment." The same study reveals that the high percentage of waste in the pig's diet can cause vomiting and diarrhea.<sup>6</sup>

**Dairy cows,** while sometimes permitted to range in open pasture, still spend most of their lives chained by the neck in milk stalls, reduced to lethargic milking machines. Even Ottawa's Experimental Farm, known for relatively "humane" standards, says its dairy cows are chained by the neck 23 hours a day during winter months.

Veal calves are permanently confined to stalls in which they cannot turn around, a practice described by Agriculture Canada as "thought to have a negative effect on animal well-being" in the form of restricted movement and lack of outlet for natural behaviour.

As well, "anemia can affect special-fed veal calves during all stages of growth," which is caused by iron reduction.<sup>7</sup>

Beef cattle, castrated and dehorned, may initially be permitted to run free with their mothers on the open range for 6-11 months. After that period of freedom, however, calves are taken from their mothers, with whom they share a powerful instinctive bond, and are shipped to barren feedlots. On some larger feedlots, thousands of cattle can be lined up side by side in cramped quarters.<sup>8</sup>

## Severe heat stress

During severe heat waves, death and suffering among farm animals is both widespread and expected in Canada's pork and poultry industries. Since industry believes that the cost of air conditioning outweighs the economic cost of death, most pigs and chickens are left unprotected when heat waves increase the temperature of their indoor quarters to extreme levels.

In Ontario, the poultry industry reports that hundreds of thousands of hens can be wiped out in a single heat wave,<sup>9</sup> while many more will suffer intensely.<sup>1</sup>

And according to *Pork News and Views*, "Heat stress usually occurs in hot weather or during periods of physical activity when the pig can no longer maintain its body temperature by panting (pigs have no sweat glands) and the animals' body temperature rises to an uncontrollable level. A pig that is in distress makes loud, deep gasping sounds..."<sup>10</sup>

For animal agriculture, heat stress is so widespread that it's generated a thriving industry: "Ontario presently has some forty-five organizations involved in a large network of dead stock processing."<sup>10</sup>

## Traumatic transport

"The final hours for too many animals are unspeakably painful," says the Canadian Federation of Humane Societies (CFHS) in reference to transport of animals to slaughter in Canada. "There isn't the staff to enforce transportation regulations and the penalties have not been stiff enough to discourage careless truckers."<sup>11</sup>

Confirms Agriculture Canada research scientist Dr. David Fraser with reference to pigs, "Several rules of good husbandry may be broken all at once in the few hours before the animals are killed or moved to a new farm."<sup>5</sup>

Without question, farm-animal transportation in Canada is fundamentally inhumane.

## Animals crippled in transit are sometimes dragged alive from the truck by a chain or rope.

For example, livestock rigs do not contain air-cooling systems, meaning millions of animals are exposed to "extreme suffering due to severe heat stress."<sup>11</sup> Approximately 2.5 to 3 million poultry die annually in Canada during shipment to federally inspected slaughterhouses,<sup>12</sup> due to what poultry scientists call primarily "severe heat stress" and additional trauma.<sup>1</sup>

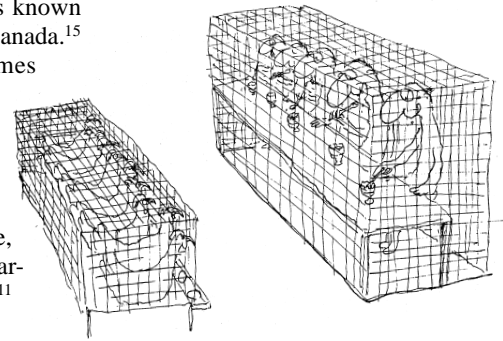
Despite Canada's bitter cold winter, transport vehicles are also not generally equipped with heating systems. "Too often the animals are left unattended for long periods in the back of a freezing cold truck," exposing animals to extreme suffering and even death.<sup>11</sup>

En route, animals may face severe food and water deprivation. Federal regulations allow farm animals to be transported without food or water for 36-72 hours, depending on the species.<sup>13</sup>

Furthermore, overcrowding of animals on vehicles is routine and expected in Canada. According to *Pork News and Views* "...there should be an adjustment in the number of pigs per load to avoid bruising, stress, and possibly death losses during transit."<sup>14</sup>

The combination of harsh farm life, rough han-

dling and severe overcrowding on trucks is known to cripple large numbers of farm animals in Canada.<sup>15</sup> Animals crippled in transit are "sometimes dragged alive from the truck by a chain or rope."<sup>11</sup> Referring to what the industry calls 'downers', Dr. Gord Doonan, Acting Chief of Humane Transportation, Agriculture Canada, confirms: "This has been a big problem in Canada."<sup>16</sup> In Ontario, for example, approximately 7,000 crippled dairy cows arrive at provincial slaughter plants annually.<sup>11</sup>



## Inhumane slaughter

A 1982 survey revealed that animals are abused or inhumanely slaughtered at a majority of Canadian slaughterhouses. Abuses included improper stunning leading to painful slaughter; dragging of crippled animals; leaving crippled animals to die lingering deaths; and castration of boars without anesthetic.<sup>17</sup>

In 1993, another survey recorded improvements in 11 Canadian slaughterhouses representing approximately 40% of hogs and cattle slaughtered. The plants, however, were not selected randomly, meaning unsatisfactory plants could be excluded; all plants received advance notice; and no provincial or poultry plants allowed inspection.<sup>18</sup>

A 1995 survey of 21 Canadian slaughterhouses was undertaken, but "The itinerary was predetermined by representatives of Agriculture Canada, the Canadian Federation of Humane Societies, the Canadian Meat Council and the Canadian Poultry and Egg Processors Council."<sup>19</sup> Nonetheless, even this highly controlled survey revealed that some slaughterhouses exposed animals to unreasonable suffering before and during the slaughter process: "Twenty one percent of the livestock plants and half the ritual and poultry plants were out of compliance."<sup>19</sup>

Problems noted included: catheterizing of conscious sheep; bashing of sheep repeatedly with a wooden board; throat-cutting of conscious hens; ineffective throat cutting in ritual plants; extreme pre-slaughter stress for terrified animals, including intense noise, slick floors and tying up of conscious animals.<sup>19</sup>

To industry's credit, the survey reports that at least some problems will be rectified; however, it is likely that similar problems will continue to exist in many other Canadian slaughterhouses, the vast majority of which were not covered in this survey.

Researched and written by Len Goldberg.  
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## FOR MORE INFORMATION please contact:

**Canadians for the Ethical Treatment of Food Animals**, Box 18024, 2225 W. 41st Ave., Vancouver, BC V6M 4L3, (604) 261-3801  
email: care@ceffa.com, web: www.ceffa.com

**EarthSave Canada**, G106-2480 Spruce St., Vancouver, BC V6H 2P6, (604) 731-5885,  
email: office@earthsave.bc.ca,  
web: www.earthsave.bc.ca

**People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals**,  
web: www.peta.org

**Toronto Vegetarian Association**

**www.veg.ca**

E-mail: tva@veg.ca

(416) 544-9800

Fax: (416) 544-9094



Chicken slaughterhouse in B.C.

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