

Re: From Shell to Hell: the modern egg industry

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From: Derek Moody (derek_at_farm-direct.con)

Date: 08/07/04

Date: Sat, 07 Aug 2004 22:35:14 +0100

On Sat, 7 Aug 2004 20:45:45 +0100, Jon <spam@unlockingshop.co.uk> wrote:

>*go@fish had a brainwave and did spout the following:*
>> > *BSE, CJD, F&M does anyone still eat meat?*
>
>> *They shouldn't. Who knows where that stuff has been!*

On Sat, 07 Aug 2004 09:00:27 +0100, Derek Moody
<derek@farm-direct.con> wrote:

>*Bloody hell is nothing safe from the loony factory farmers? Who on
>earth would actually eat this garbage? remember that next time you are
>eating out.*

>
>*Found on the Animal Aid website.*
>
>
>
><http://www.animalaid.org.uk/farming/shell.htm>

> *Factfile: August 2004*

>>*From Shell to Hell:*
>*the modern egg industry*
>*The modern chicken is descended from the Red Junglefowl (Gallus*
>*gallus) of Asia and has been domesticated for around 8000 years.*
>*During the breeding season, the hens would lay 5-6 eggs in a clutch*
>*before incubating them for 18-20 days (del Hoyo et al, 1994). Compare*
>*this with modern breeds of domestic hen, which lay more than 300 eggs*
>*in a year.*

>
>*In the wild, hens are active from dawn to dusk, walking, running,*
>*pecking and scratching in the ground for food, dust-bathing and*
>*nest-building. Their natural lifespan is up to ten years. Chickens*
>*farmed for meat are killed when they are six weeks old. Egg laying*
>*hens are killed when around 72 weeks of age.*

>

>The modern poultry industry

>Meat production

>These days, the poultry industry is divided into two areas: egg
>production and meat production. Meat – 'broiler' – chickens have been
>manipulated, through selective breeding techniques, to make them grow
>around twice their natural rate, to get them as fat as possible in as
>short a period of time. They grow so big, so fast, their legs are
>unable to support their weight and they frequently collapse. Broiler
>chickens are slaughtered at six weeks of age – they are still babies,
>trapped inside obese, deformed bodies.

>

>

> 'Farm fresh', 'country fresh' and 'fresh from the barn' are all terms
>conjured up to disguise the cruelty involved in egg production. You
>think eating eggs is a cruelty-free option? Think again.
>Photo shows a recently rescued free range hen. Credit: FAWN

>

>Egg production

>Egg-laying hens are a different 'type' of chicken to broilers. Bred
>specifically for high egg production, they do not put on weight
>quickly enough to be considered economically-viable for meat
>production. A particularly tragic occurrence springs out of this
>difference: the destruction of male chicks, deemed useless because
>they cannot lay eggs but are not suitable for meat production either
>(see below).

>

>Despite centuries of domestication, laying hens retain the natural
>behaviours shown by their wild ancestors. This 'ancestral memory' of
>the birds' natural way of life has been carried down the generations
>so that hens retain the need to carry out behaviours such as building
>a nest, perching, pecking and scratching at the ground, dust-bathing,
>etc. (Dawkins, 1993). For the majority of the world's egg-laying hens,
>the farming system renders it impossible to live anything remotely
>resembling a natural lifestyle.

>

>The global egg industry

>Around the world there are approaching 5000 million egg-laying hens.
>The latest numbers available show that China had the largest flock
>(800 million), followed by the European Union (271 million), the USA
>(270 million), Japan (152 million), India (123 million) and Mexico
>(103 million) (IEC, 2001).

>

>Globally, between 70–80% of laying hens are housed in battery cages.
>The proportion of caged hens in the EU is about 90% (Williams, 2000).

>

>There are about 30 million hens in the UK egg-laying flock. Some 72%
>are currently in cages, 23% kept free range; and 5% in perchery/barn
>systems (BEIS, 2004).

>

>UK laying hens currently produces around 10,000 million eggs. In the
>UK, the average consumer eats 170 eggs per year.

- >
- >
- > *Of the 30 million egg-laying hens in the UK, around 75% are kept in*
- > *battery cages. The others are kept in 'alternative' systems such as*
- > *'barn' or 'free range'. But look at the photos on this page. Is there*
- > *really much difference?*
- >
- > *Labelling: what does it really mean?*
- > *The egg industry has created a very successful smoke-screen to hide*
- > *the harsh reality of modern egg production by using terms such as*
- > *'farm fresh' and 'country fresh'. As with 'free range', these*
- > *misnomers conjure up images somewhat different from the true picture.*
- > *One would not normally describe eggs covered in excrement, lying*
- > *amongst the decomposing bodies of dead hens in battery cages as*
- > *'fresh'!*
- >
- >> *From 2004, European Union legislation will make the egg industry more*
- > *transparent when it becomes compulsory for eggs to be labelled*
- > *according to the method of production. The following terms will apply:*
- >
- > *Battery eggs will be labelled "Eggs from caged hens";*
- >
- > *Barn eggs will be labelled "Barn" eggs;*
- >
- > *Free-range eggs will be labelled "Free Range" eggs.*
- >
- > *Farming systems for eggs*
- > *Battery Cages*
- > *Battery farms consist of huge, windowless sheds housing thousands of*
- > *hens who are crammed four or five at a time into small wire cages*
- > *stacked on top of each other in rows. The hens are put in to the cages*
- > *at around 18 weeks old and will not come out again until they go for*
- > *slaughter (around 72 weeks of age).*
- >
- >
- > *In battery units, four or five hens are crammed into a space not much*
- > *bigger than a microwave oven. They are barely able to move, let alone*
- > *stretch their wings.*
- >
- > *Battery cages are one of the factory farming industry's most cruel*
- > *inventions. Each hen has 450cm² of space – the equivalent of an A4*
- > *sheet of paper. The average wing span of a hen is 76cm – the cages are*
- > *so small that the hens will never be able to stretch their wings,*
- > *raise their heads properly or move freely, and because they are barren*
- > *the birds cannot exhibit any of their natural behaviours such as*
- > *dust-bathing or building a nest. Free-range birds have been found to*
- > *spend half their time freely feeding and foraging (Appleby & Hughes,*
- > *1991). Battery hens are denied the ability to do either.*
- >
- > *Most intensive egg farms are fully automated – everything from the*
- > *lighting to the feeding, watering and egg collection is controlled*

- >automatically. *The cage floors slope forward so that eggs roll on to a*
- >conveyor belt and are taken away to be boxed. *In order to promote*
- >egg-laying, the sheds are artificially lit for approximately 17 hours
- >each day, with the lights coming on at around 3am.
- >
- >Keeping animals in such confined, overcrowded conditions obviously has
- >serious implications for their welfare and health. *Unable to perform*
- >their natural behaviours, the bodies of battery hens degenerate
- >through lack of exercise. *Unable to scratch at the ground, their claws*
- >overgrow and may curl round the wire mesh of the cage.
- >
- >Hens in traditional battery cages perform 'vacuum' dust-bathing, i.e.
- >mimic the actions of dust-bathing even though they have no 'dust'.
- >This behaviour is abnormal and the frustration of hens' normal
- >dust-bathing behaviour is recognised as a source of suffering (Baxter,
- >1994).
- >
- >Hens are frequently cannibalised or crushed to death by their
- >cage-mates. *The decaying corpses of dead birds are not always removed*
- >as farm workers do not see them lying at the back of the cage. *The top*
- >and bottom rows of cages, potentially housing thousands of birds, are
- >particularly difficult to view simply because they are not at eye
- >level and involve either bending down or standing on something to look
- >inside. *Battery farms are frequently staffed by only a few people. If*
- >enough staff were employed to enable each cage to be inspected each
- >properly, the battery system would no longer be financially-viable due
- >to the high cost of staffing.
- >
- >
- >
- > Battery cages are so inhumane that they will be banned in the EU from
- >2012. *But that means years of suffering ahead, and the replacement –*
- >so-called 'enriched' cages – *will make little difference because a*
- >cage is still a cage and the extra space the hens will have is
- >equivalent to the size of a postcard.
- >
- >Barn (perchery) systems
- >Eggs labelled 'barn' are laid by hens who are not caged but are
- >confined to a shed, often in filthy, stinking cramped conditions. *The*
- >birds may be able to stretch their wings – *and are therefore probably*
- >slightly better off than battery hens– *but they will never see*
- >daylight or breathe fresh air and are still denied real freedom,
- >comfort or ability to exercise their natural instincts. *Flock sizes*
- >can be huge, with some barns housing up to 16,000 birds. *The name*
- >'barn' is used to deliberately mislead the public into thinking the
- >hens are kept in bright, airy conditions with fresh straw on the
- >floor. *Not true!*
- >
- >Free Range Systems
- >Many people associate the term 'free range' with 'cruelty free' and
- >assume the hens live a natural lifestyle, merrily pecking at the

- >ground, willingly giving the farmers the daily gift of an egg.
- >Unfortunately, this is not the case!
- >
- >The EU guidelines, to which egg farmers are legally obliged to adhere
- >(Welfare of Laying Hens Directive), state that in order for eggs to be
- >labelled 'free range', the hens must have access to an outdoor range
- >area, accessible through openings in the sides of the barn. The barn
- >can be stocked at a density of 12 hens per m² (hardly a lot of
- >space!), and the total opening between the barn and the outside must
- >not be less than 2m per 1000 hens. Farmers with fewer than 350 birds
- >in their flock are exempt from the Welfare Directive (unless their
- >eggs are sold graded as Class A).
- >
- >The reality is that 'free range' hens are often kept in 'barn'-type
- >sheds in flocks of up to 16,000. In large-scale free range units,
- >often fewer than 50% of the birds regularly go outside. Some barns,
- >for example, only have doors down one side – imagine the scrum trying
- >to get through the holes to the outside; the hens at the back of the
- >barn are unlikely ever to be able to pick their way through.
- >
- >Free range hens are frequently debeaked (see below), and, as with all
- >commercial laying hens, they are usually slaughtered after one year of
- >egg production.
- >
- >
- > Barn hens are still confined to dirty, overcrowded sheds. They will
- >never see daylight, breathe fresh air or be able to exercise their
- >natural instincts.
- >Photo shows barn hens. Credit: Viva!
- >
- >European Scientific Veterinary Committee Report: an admission of
- >cruelty
- >In 1996, the European Union's committee of scientific and veterinary
- >experts published a report acknowledging the behavioural needs of hens
- >and the welfare problems caused by caging. The report recognised that:
- >
- >"Hens have a strong preference for laying their eggs in a nest and are
- >highly motivated to perform nesting behaviour."
- >
- >"Hens have a strong preference for a littered floor for pecking,
- >scratching and dust-bathing."
- >
- >"Hens have a preference to perch, especially at night."
- >All of these behaviours are denied to caged hens. The report's
- >conclusions were:
- >
- >"Battery cage systems provide a barren environment for the birds... It
- >is clear that because of its small size and its barrenness, the
- >battery cage as used at present has inherent severe disadvantages for
- >the welfare of hens."
- >

>1999 Laying Hens Directive

>In 1999, the European Union announced that conventional battery cages

>would be banned from 2012. The new Laying Hens Directive (Council

>Directive 1999/74/EC) also forbids the introduction of newly-built

>battery cages from 2003, and requires, until the complete phase-out,

>that the space allowance in existing conventional battery cages be

>increased from 450 cm² to 550 cm² per bird. Whilst a minor

>improvement, to put these space allowances into context, an A4 sheet

>of typing paper covers 620 cm².

>

>

> Many people associate 'free range' with 'cruelty-free' and assume the
>hens live a natural life. The reality is very different.

>Photo shows free range hens. Credit: FAWN

>

>'Enriched' cages

>The proposed replacement for battery cages is the 'enriched cage',

>which is slightly bigger and taller than a battery cage and will

>contain some 'furniture' such as a shared perch and nest box, plus

>litter and a claw-shortening device. However, a cage is still a cage,

>despite these changes, and the caged hens will still be denied the

>ability to exercise their instincts and fulfil their natural needs.

>

>The actual usable space allotted to each bird in an enriched cage will

>be 600 cm² – in effect the increase in space the hens will have is

>equivalent to the size of a postcard. Furthermore, consider that the

>average hen at rest occupies 600 sq. cm (Dawkins & Nicol, 1989) –

>enriched cages, therefore, still only offer the absolute minimum space

>required by a hen lying down.

>

>The introduction of enriched cages also has the potential to create

>further welfare problems for the hens on top of those already

>associated with being kept in such intense captivity. Due to the

>severely restricted space they are confined to, the birds are already

>in constant contact with each other and the sides of the cage, the

>addition of furniture gives them another obstacle to brush up against.

>Feather loss is generally worse in cages due to a combination of

>abrasion from mesh and feather pecking (Appleby & Hughes, 1991;

>Rollin, 1995). Indeed, the provision of furniture actually carries the

>disadvantage of increasing the amount of potential abrasive surfaces

>and obstacles to free movement in the birds' environment.

>

>Problems such as feeding birds being scratched by the claws of

>perching birds and build-up of droppings under perches indicate the

>problems of introducing 'enrichment' in a confined space (Walker,

>2001).

>

>It is a travesty that one cage system is going to replace another, but

>egg producers are desperate to keep their production costs down – to

>keep the consumers happy – and caging birds is, unfortunately, the

>most economical way of rearing them.

- >
- >
- > *Each year in the UK, approximately 30 million day-old male chicks are*
- > *gassed or tossed alive into giant industrial shredders – 'disposed of'*
- > *because they are unable to lay eggs and are considered too scrawny a*
- > *type of chicken for meat production.*
- >
- > *Health problems associated with egg-laying hens*
- > *The laying ordeal*
- > *Factory-farmed hens lay eggs five or six times a week. The hens become*
- > *highly stressed and aggressive during the pre-laying period because of*
- > *lack of privacy and nesting materials. When an egg is produced, the*
- > *hen's vent becomes distended, red and moist, attracting the attention*
- > *of bored and frustrated birds. Vent pecking can occur, and even lead*
- > *to cannibalism.*
- >
- > *The unnaturally high level of egg production also contributes to*
- > *osteoporosis (see below) as calcium is drained from the hens' bodies*
- > *for the production of egg shells, often leading to severe osteopenia*
- > *(RSPCA, 1989).*
- >
- > *Brittle bones*
- > *Battery hens suffer Caged Layer Osteoporosis (CLO), or brittle bones.*
- > *Research has shown that 35% of premature deaths in cages are due to*
- > *CLO, a slow death from paralysis and starvation at the back of the*
- > *cage. This is clearly illustrated by the fact that, because of their*
- > *ability to move about, non-cage birds may have 41% more tibia strength*
- > *than those raised in cages (Meyer & Sunde, quoted in Appleby & Hughes,*
- > *1991).*
- >
- > *Injured feet*
- > *Confined to the cage, the hen is unable to forage by scratching and*
- > *pecking at the ground. Denied this simple activity, the hen's claws*
- > *can grow long or twisted and be torn off; or even grow around the wire*
- > *mesh of the sloping cage floor. The slope itself puts painful pressure*
- > *on the hen's toes, causing damage to the bird's feet.*
- >
- >
- > *This shocking photo shows chicks being sorted, prior to the males*
- > *being gassed.*
- > *Credit: Poultry World*
- >
- > *Malignant tumours*
- > *Another welfare problem associated with pushing hens to lay increasing*
- > *numbers eggs is the development of malignant tumours of the oviduct.*
- > *In one investigation, a significant proportion of malignant tumours of*
- > *the oviduct were identified in 20,000 'spent' layers selected from ten*
- > *different farms. The researchers concluded, "... the increase in the*
- > *prevalence of the (magnum) tumour coincides with continued selection*
- > *of fowl for high egg production" (Anjum, 1989).*
- >

>Debeaking

>As often occurs with all other intensively-farmed animals, the stress
>of living in such unnatural, cramped conditions causes hens to behave
>aggressively towards one another. Hens frequently exhibit the abnormal
>habits of pecking at each other and pulling one another's feathers
>out. In extreme cases this can lead to cannibalism. In an attempt to
>curtail this behaviour, chicks are routinely subjected to the
>mutilation of debeaking.

>

>The industry describes the practice as 'beak trimming' but it is much
>more than that. A sharp, hot blade will slice off the end of the
>chick's beak. Sometimes a chunk of face may be sliced off too as the
>birds are shoved without care into the slicing machine.

>

>Egg producers will maintain that debeaking is no more painful to a
>bird than cutting nails is to humans, but scientific evidence proves
>that hens not only feel pain at the time of the operation but can also
>suffer a lasting, chronic pain.

>

>The slaughter of male chicks

>Chick hatcheries breed one or other strain of chick depending on which
>industry they supply – egg or meat. Male chicks born of the egg-laying
>variety are deemed useless because they cannot lay eggs, but are no
>good for meat production either. Each year, approximately 30 million
>day old male chicks are 'disposed of'.

>

>

> Eggs contain saturated fat, one of the main causes of heart disease –
>and they are among the highest sources of dietary cholesterol.

>

>At the hatcheries, eggs laid by breeding hens are taken away to
>develop inside giant industrial incubators. Once hatched, the newborn
>chicks pass down a production line to be sexed and sorted. Sick,
>weakly and male 'reject' chicks are pulled out and thrown into giant
>sacks or crates. Some are crushed to death or suffocate. The chicks'
>next stop is either the gas chamber or the macerator – a giant mincing
>machine – into which they are tossed alive.

>

>The slaughter of 'spent' hens

>Most egg-laying hens (including free range) are slaughtered at around
>72 weeks of age, because, as their egg production drops, they are not
>considered profitable enough to keep alive.

>

>The transport and slaughter of hens is an incredibly traumatic
>experience. Once caught, the hens are held upside down, several per
>hand, and carried out to be packed into crates for transport. Rough
>handling and complete disregard for their welfare often leads to them
>breaking bones in the process (Turner & Lymbery, 1999). One study
>found that at the time of catching and crating, levels of the stress
>hormone corticosterone in battery hens were ten times higher than
>normal.

- >
- >*On average, 29%, of battery hens arriving at the slaughterhouse are*
- >*reported to have at least one freshly–broken bone. Removing the birds*
- >*from the crates and hanging them upside down to await slaughter*
- >*increases the proportion of hens with broken bones to 45% (Gregory and*
- >*Wilkins, 1989; Gregory, 1994).*
- >
- >*The slaughter process for hens is the same as for all poultry: they*
- >*are shackled upside down, dunked into an electrified waterbath to stun*
- >*them, dragged past either a slaughterman with a knife or an automatic*
- >*rotating blade to have their throats slit, and then dipped into a*
- >*'scalding tank' to loosen their feathers. Birds may 'swan neck' (raise*
- >*their heads) causing them to miss the stun bath and may have their*
- >*throats cut whilst fully conscious. Some birds may not have their*
- >*throats cut properly, meaning they are still alive when they enter the*
- >*scalding tank.*
- >
- >*'Spent' hens can be worth as little as two pence per bird. Their*
- >*carcasses will be used in cheap products such as chicken soups,*
- >*pastes, pies, pet food, etc.*
- >
- >
- >*Research indicates that eggs can inhibit the absorption of iron*
- >*(needed for healthy blood, cells and nerves) and contribute to the*
- >*loss of calcium (necessary for healthy bones).*
- >
- >*The impact of eating eggs on the environment*
- >*Farming hens for their eggs is a huge waste of resources. It takes 3*
- >*kilos of grain (in the form of chicken feed) to produce one kilo of*
- >*eggs. This is because the conversion of crops by farm animals into*
- >*food for humans is grossly inefficient. And it is not only food*
- >*(grain) that is wasted. Each battery egg takes approximately 180*
- >*litres of water to produce. This is a shocking statistic considering*
- >*the volumes of water human beings use in developing countries: in*
- >*India, for example, the poorest people use an average of only 10*
- >*litres of water each per day (O'Brien, 1998).*
- >
- >*Studies of farm animal housing have shown that egg farms have one of*
- >*the highest farm emission rates of ammonia gas, a serious*
- >*environmental pollutant linked to acid rain.*
- >
- >*Health hazard!*
- >*Eggs – in particular, raw eggs – can be a cause of salmonella food*
- >*poisoning.**
- >
- >*In 2003, there were 9,743 laboratory–confirmed cases in the UK of*
- >*salmonella enteritidis, a pathogen commonly linked to the consumption*
- >*of eggs. Between 1992–2002, of 143 outbreaks of food–borne Infectious*
- >*Intestinal Disease (food poisoning) where eggs were reported as the*
- >*vehicle of infection, 124 were caused by salmonella enteritidis. (By*
- >*definition an outbreak involves more than one person with an*

>established link between the cases.) (PHL 06.01.04)
>
>Advice from the Government's Food Standards Agency (FSA) is that
>"eating raw eggs may pose a health risk. Vulnerable groups such as the
>elderly, the sick, babies and pregnant women should only consume eggs
>that have been cooked until the white and yolks are solid" (FSA,
>2001).
>
>
> There are no nutrients in eggs that cannot be obtained from other
>foods. Cutting out animal products entirely is the really healthy
>option.
>
> * Nowadays, the majority of – but not all – eggs on sale in the UK
>bear the Lion Brand stamp of approval which means they have come from
>hens who were vaccinated against salmonella. However, the data show
>that salmonella clearly has not been eliminated.
>
>Not all they're cracked up to be
>Eggs are high in saturated fat and cholesterol – one of the main
>causes of heart disease. Eating protein-rich animal products can
>actually cause calcium loss: for every 100g of egg consumed, 20mg of
>calcium is lost. Eggs also stop our bodies from absorbing
>plant-derived iron. There are no nutrients in eggs that you can't get
>from elsewhere. In fact, cutting out animal products entirely is the
>really healthy option.
>
>With grateful thanks to the following groups who supplied much of the
>information for this factfile:
>
>The Vegan Society
><http://www.vegansociety.com/>
>Farm Animal Welfare Network
><http://www.fawn.me.uk/>
>Viva!
><http://www.viva.org.uk/>
>
> For more information – including our new egg leaflet and tasty
>egg-free recipes – send for a free Go Veggie Pack today.
><http://www.animalaid.org.uk/veggie/index.htm>
>
>www.animalaid.org.uk | [site map](#) | [about us](#) |
>
> Animal Aid campaigns peacefully against all animal abuse, and
>promotes a cruelty-free lifestyle. You can support our work by
>joining, making a donation, or using our online shop. Contact Animal
>Aid at The Old Chapel, Bradford Street, Tonbridge, Kent, TN9 1AW, UK,
>tel +44 (0)1732 364546, fax +44 (0)1732 366533, email
>info@animalaid.org.uk

sci.agriculture.poultry: Re: From Shell to Hell: the modern egg industry

*>If anyone else is considering posting to this thread, could we have a
>bit of trimming please?*

We dont do requests here.

Cheerio,