

## **Egg production : laying hens: imprisoned for life / Friends of Animals Under Abuse (FAUNA)**

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Photo © Fred Hess

### MALE CHICKS

There's cruelty involved, not only in the production of battery eggs, but in 'free-range' egg production also. For every laying hen, whether free range or battery caged, there are an equal number of males - 50% of all chicks hatched are male. Because the males cannot produce eggs and are not genetically bred to fatten up quickly for meat, they are killed as soon as they've hatched at one day old. This means that egg production in Britain results in the slaughter of over 32 million male chicks each year. Because there are no laws governing the way in which day-old chicks are killed, a number of barbaric methods are used: Chicks are put in a machine which mechanically crushes them to death. The machine is capable of mincing 1,000 chicks to pulp every two minutes. Other killing methods are: drowning, decapitation, neck dislocation, decompression, gassing and asphyxiation with carbon dioxide. The cheapest method of killing is by suffocation, where thousands of chicks are packed on top of each other in sealed plastic bags. They suffer a slow painful death.

### YOU CAN CHANGE THIS

- **DON'T EAT OR BUY ANY EGGS**  
(As an alternative try 'scrambled' tofu and in sponges & cakes use Ener-G egg replacer from health shops).
- **SEND FOR OUR FACT SHEETS**
- **JOIN US NOW !**

please ✓

#### SUPPORTERS FORM

- ☐ I would like to join FAUNA, and I enclose a cheque / PO made payable to FAUNA for £6 annual subscription. (unwaged £4)
- ☐ Please send me an information pack. (I enclose a sae)
- ☐ I enclose a £ donation to help your campaigns.

Name: .....  
Address: .....  
Post code: .....

**The FRIENDS OF ANIMALS UNDER ABUSE (FAUNA)**  
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## EGG PRODUCTION



PHOTO © FAUNA

**LAYING HENS – Imprisoned for life**





#### LAYING HENS

Laying hens are kept only for the eggs they produce. They are a totally different strain from the chickens reared for meat known as broilers. Originally descended from Asian red jungle fowl which lay 20 eggs a year, today's laying hens have been specially bred to produce an unnatural amount of eggs. Each hen now lays over 250 eggs a year.

There are approximately 32 million laying hens in the UK. Over 28 million of these hens are kept confined row upon row in tiny wire cages known as battery cages.

#### BATTERY CAGES

At around 18 weeks of age, just before they start to lay eggs, young hens known as 'pullets' are imprisoned in battery cages where they will stay for the rest of their lives. Battery cages are kept in rows, stacked 4-6 tiers high, in huge, windowless, foul-smelling battery sheds. Five hens are crammed into every cage. One shed may contain over 30,000 hens. Each cage has a sloping wire floor and measures 46cm x 51cm, yet a hen has a wingspan of 81cm. The living space for each hen is smaller than the cover of a telephone directory.

Treated as nothing more than egg laying machines, battery hens are forced to live out their entire lives in these unnatural and barren conditions. After a year of confinement they are slaughtered. Their natural life span is around 10 years.

#### CRUELTY IN THE BATTERY CAGE

In natural conditions, hens are very active, continuously scratching and pecking at the ground, but in battery cages, hens cannot fulfil any of their natural instincts. They never experience fresh air, daylight or freedom. They are unable to peck the earth, ground scratch, exercise, perch, dust-bathe, build a nest or seek seclusion and privacy to lay their eggs. They cannot even stretch their wings.

Boredom and frustration frequently leads to aggression and feather pecking, so the birds are often debeaked with a red hot blade.

Most battery hens lose nearly all their feathers from rubbing up against the bars of the cage.

Because they are forced to stand on uncomfortable sloping wire floors, they suffer from severe foot deformities and claw damage. Sometimes their claws grow around the wire and become trapped.



Lack of daylight, exercise and movement result in weak brittle bones that easily break. The majority of hens are fed a red colouring to give a golden colour to their egg yolks - despite fears that it can cause vision defects in humans.

#### DISEASE

Despite routine use of antibiotics in poultry feed, battery hens suffer from many diseases including liver and kidney disorders, prolapses, infectious bronchitis, egg-peritonitis, impacted eggs, brittle bones, cancers and salmonella. Salmonella can be transmitted to humans through eggs. Diseases and painful injuries go unnoticed and sick birds are ignored in the overcrowded, dimly lit battery sheds. Over 2 million hens die in their cages every year in the UK.

Many so-called 'fresh-farm' eggs are laid beside the bodies of dead and decomposing cage-mates.

#### CATCHING and TRANSPORT

Battery hens are slaughtered at around 15 months old. They are called 'spent' or 'end-of-lay' hens. During catching, their brittle bones can literally snap, as they are grabbed by gangs of catchers and loaded into crates for transporting on the slaughterhouse lorry. Often in the mass panic, their legs get torn off and left behind, as the terrified hens are wrenched from their cages. Crammed into crates, they are forced to travel long distances to slaughter. Often nearly featherless, they may endure journeys in near freezing conditions, whilst transportation during hot weather can cause death from heat-stress and suffocation.

#### SLAUGHTER

At the slaughterhouse, their feet are thrust through metal shackles and they are hung upside-down on a moving shackle line. Their heads pass through an electrically charged water bath, which is supposed to render them unconscious and insensitive to pain, but the very impact of the high voltage current, causes their weak bones to shatter. Over 98% of hens suffer multiple broken bones before they are slaughtered. A widely used 'solution' to this 'problem' is to lower the electric current, resulting in the hens being inadequately stunned. Consequently huge numbers of battery hens go to the automatic throat cutter and meet their death whilst fully conscious. Many enter the scalding tank alive. Their pitiful frail exhausted bodies, end up in soups, sandwich pastes, stock cubes and baby foods.

#### PULLED EGGS

Even when dead the hens egg production isn't over. Unlaid eggs are removed from the dead bodies of slaughtered hens and used in the commercial manufacture of cakes, biscuits and pasta.

**Over 87% of British eggs are taken from hens kept in battery cages. Don't be fooled by advertising pictures showing farmyard scenes of 'happy' hens or slogans such as 'Country fresh' or 'Fresh farm'.**

**'COUNTRY FRESH' & 'FRESH FARM EGGS' are BATTERY PRODUCED EGGS**