

The Guiding Principles to

Humane and Sustainable Farming



WSPA

World Society for the Protection of Animals

The guiding principles for humane and sustainable farming

The future of food and farming is an important public issue. The way that food is produced has serious impacts on food security, the future of rural communities, public health, the environment and the welfare of farm animals.

Many livestock farmers in developing countries still use small-scale extensive husbandry systems; these sustain rural livelihoods, providing food security, employment and income in rural areas.

Industrial animal farming methods, that in developed countries are often discredited and in some cases abandoned, are now being adopted in many developing countries. These systems are characterised by the rearing of large numbers of animals indoors in a small crowded space. This mass production of animals may seem like an efficient way to produce food but, as we shall see, in reality it is often extremely harmful. The World Society for the Protection of Animals (WSPA) urges developing countries not to introduce industrial systems, but instead to opt for sustainable and humane farming.

Industrial animal farming is a very inefficient way of feeding the world's growing population. Several kilos of human edible grain are needed in industrial systems to produce one kilo of meat

Industrial farming's harmful impacts

According to the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), countries in Latin America, Asia and Africa will be the world's leading producers of animal products by 2020 and much of that meat will be produced in industrial systems. This is a worrying prediction, as little work is currently being carried out to analyse the risks related to factory farming in developing countries. Research in more affluent countries such as the United Kingdom and the United States has raised considerable concerns in scientific literature about the catalogue of problems inherent in factory farming. So much so that in 2003 the American Public Health Association (APHA) urged the federal, state and local governments and public health authorities to impose a moratorium on factory farming systems, whilst investigations continue into the risks they pose to human health.



Obstructs poverty elimination

There is increasing recognition that industrial livestock production is often detrimental to poverty reduction. As mentioned above, industrial animal agriculture needs relatively little labour and therefore reduces rural employment. When large industrial farms are introduced into rural areas, local small-scale farmers often cannot compete and may be driven out of business. For example, in the Brazilian state of Santa Catarina there were 130,000 pig producers in 1990, but by 2000, through industrialisation, there were only 16,000 pig farms; in 1998 alone over 20,000 families left the countryside. In contrast to this, extensive animal farming allows small farmers to provide food for their families, and to earn extra income by selling produce to nearby markets and urban areas.

The World Bank (WB) itself has acknowledged that industrial animal farming may actually be damaging to rural livelihoods. A WB report stresses that livestock industrialisation brings “a significant danger that the poor are being crowded out, the environment eroded, and global food security and safety compromised.” The report concludes that the WB should “avoid funding large-scale commercial, grain-fed feedlot systems and industrial milk, pork and poultry production” (World Bank, 2001).

Destabilises food security

At first sight industrial farming appears to need less land as many animals are kept in a small space. However, industrial systems need huge amounts of grain to feed the animals and so put significant pressure on global land resources; indeed, one-fifth of the world's arable land is used to grow cereals for animal feed. Another key factor is that the world's increasingly scarce water resources are being over-used by the intensive production of crops for animal feed. Animal products use far more water than is needed to grow plant foods. Some developing countries are using currency that they can ill afford to import cereals for use as animal feed in industrial operations. Others are using domestically produced cereals, food which could better be used feeding local people instead of animals. In China, for example, 30% of grains produced are used for animal feed. The dramatic growth in world demand for grain to feed animals that will arise from a shift to industrial production may well force up the price of grain, putting it even further out of reach for poor people and seriously affecting global and national food security. Industrial animal farming is a very inefficient way of feeding the world's growing population. Several kilograms of human edible grain are needed in industrial systems to produce one kilo of meat. A hectare of land can feed many more people if it is used to grow cereals for human consumption, rather than as feed for animals.



Threatens human & animal health and food safety

The overcrowded, often unhygienic conditions of the industrial farm allow diseases to thrive, some of which cause food poisoning in people. The poor conditions lead to animals being so stressed that their immune systems may be compromised, making them vulnerable to disease. Moreover, once a disease enters an industrial shed, it can spread very rapidly among the densely packed animals.

To try and limit this, antibiotics are routinely used in industrial farming. The over-use of antibiotics on farms has contributed to the development of resistance in certain bacteria not only to antibiotics used on-farm, but also to certain related antibiotics used to treat serious human disease.

BSE or 'Mad Cow Disease' highlights the dangers of industrial farming. BSE results from the industrial practice of feeding meat and bone-meal to cattle, even though they are natural herbivores. BSE has been passed to people who have eaten beef from infected animals as a new variant of the fatal Creutzfeldt-Jacob Disease.

Pollutes the environment

Large amounts of cereals need to be fed to industrially farmed animals. This feed is itself often produced intensively, with the aid of artificial fertilisers, herbicides and insecticides, all of which can be damaging pollutants.

Although in reasonable amounts animal manure can enrich the soil, the liquid slurry emanating from industrial farms is a serious pollutant. Pigs and poultry excrete most of the nitrogen and phosphate in their feed. The nitrogen and phosphate are washed into rivers and lakes and leach from the soil into groundwater, contaminating drinking water.

Undermines locally adapted breeds

Popular breeds from the developed world are often introduced into developing countries in an effort to produce ever more cheap meat, milk and eggs, undermining local breeds and affecting genetic diversity. Native breeds have strong genetic resistance to local diseases and parasites and the ability to adapt to drought or climatic extremes. Genetic diversity is under threat as developing countries import breeds from developed countries, leading to cross breeding with, or even replacement of, local breeds.



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Harms animal health and welfare

Animals are sentient beings that can feel pain and suffering, and if given the chance, can also experience a sense of well-being. Animal welfare has developed into a science in its own right, allowing us to measure whether the welfare of an animal is good or poor. A growing body of research information is now available on animal welfare, much of it funded by governments.

Internationally, there's a growing awareness at official and legislative levels that animals should not be treated in ways that are inhumane. However, industrially farmed animals are treated inhumanely. As shown below, many suffer from serious health problems and physical pain. Moreover, being kept in tiny cages or stalls or in overcrowded sheds means that they are prevented from performing their natural behaviours.

Pigs – Sow stalls and tethers

As industrial farming spreads, sows (breeding females) are increasingly being kept in sow stalls (also known as 'gestation crates'). Sow stalls are so narrow that the sow cannot even turn round. She is caged like this, or tethered by a short chain, throughout her four-month pregnancy, pregnancy after pregnancy. In short, for most of her life. Scientific research shows that sows kept in stalls or tethers suffer from serious health problems such as weakened bones and muscles, reduced heart fitness and pain from infected cuts and abrasions. Humane alternatives to sow stalls and tethers exist, in which sows are kept in groups either indoors or outside in a free-range system. Sow stalls and tethers have been prohibited on cruelty grounds by the Philippines, Florida and the European Union (EU) (the EU has prohibited tethers from 2006 and stalls from 2013). WSPA urges other countries to also now prohibit sow stalls and the tethering of sows.

Fattening pigs

So far we have been looking at the sows whose role is to produce piglets. We now wish to consider the fattening pigs that are reared for their meat. Industrially farmed fattening pigs are kept indoors throughout their lives in overcrowded, often filthy pens. They are given no bedding, being forced instead to live on bare concrete or slatted floors.

In these barren conditions, pigs are unable to perform their natural behaviours. This complete lack of environmental enrichment or stimulation leads to frustration, which all too

often manifests itself in painful behaviours such as 'tail-biting' and 'ear-chewing'. To prevent this, farmers remove part of the piglets' tails. Scientific research, however, shows that the proper way to prevent tail-biting is to keep the pigs in good conditions, not to dock their tails. Most are also castrated and teeth-clipped; like tail-docking, these are also painful mutilations carried out without anaesthesia.

WSPA believes that pigs should be given enough space to prevent overcrowding and sufficient straw or similar material to enable them to engage in their natural behaviours of rooting, foraging and exploring. Routine mutilations such as tail-docking, castration, and teeth-clipping should all be ended.

Hens – Battery cages

In many countries most eggs come from battery hens. Usually anything from 5-11 hens are crammed into a cage so small that the hens cannot even stretch their wings, nor can they walk or peck and scratch at the ground. In the cage, hens are prevented from performing their natural behaviours; they cannot lay their eggs in a nest, perch or dust-bathe. Due to lack of movement in the cage, battery hens' bones are often so brittle that many suffer from broken bones by the time they come to be slaughtered.

Scientific research has condemned battery cages, concluding that they have inherent severe disadvantages for the welfare of hens. There are humane alternatives to cages; hens should either be kept free-range outdoors or in large barns in which they are able to move around easily. The EU has prohibited battery cages from 2012. WSPA urges other countries to also now prohibit battery cages. Moreover, eggs should be clearly labelled according to the farming method used to aid consumer choice.

De-beaking

The barren crowded confinement of the battery cage, often results in hens pecking each other feathers out. Rather than providing sufficient space and stimulation to prevent this distressing behaviour, the solution to date has been to slice off part of the birds' beak; a practice, known as de-beaking. This is a serious mutilation, which involves using a red-hot blade to amputate a third or more of the birds' beak. Some people falsely claim that this is no more painful than cutting the nails of humans. Scientific evidence, however, shows that debeaking causes pain at the time of the operation, and can also cause a lasting, chronic pain. WSPA believes that de-beaking should be prohibited.

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Anything from 5-11 hens are crammed into a cage that is so small that the hens cannot even stretch their wings



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Forced molting

After one year of production, hens will naturally stop laying whilst undergoing an annual moult. In order to ensure that hens return to production as soon as possible, they are deprived of food for up to 14 days. Such drastic feed withdrawal 'shocks' the birds' systems, inducing hens to shed their feathers unnaturally quickly. Speeding up the molting process in this way ensures the hens return to lay much faster than under natural conditions.

The practice of forced molting is already illegal in the United Kingdom and rarely practiced throughout Europe. WSPA believes that forced molting should be prohibited worldwide.

Mass-produced meat chickens

Chickens reared industrially for meat are not kept in cages. Instead, thousands are crammed into huge sheds. These are often so overcrowded that, as the birds grow bigger, one can barely see the floor so thickly is it 'carpeted' with chickens. The majority of chickens reared for meat in the world are now produced this way.

This system was initially conceived in the developed world and uses strains of bird that have been selectively bred to grow super-fast. Growth rate is further boosted by high-protein diets. These strains now put on weight twice as fast as the natural rate. So fast that their legs, hearts and lungs struggle to keep pace. The legs often buckle under the strain of supporting the rapidly growing body. As a result millions of chickens a year suffer painful, sometimes crippling leg disorders. Millions also succumb to heart failure.

Damaging impact on family farmers

Industrial chicken production has displaced many family farmers. In Thailand in 1985 over 99% of poultry was supplied by village farmers, while today most are produced industrially. Similarly, in Brazil traditional chicken keeping that provided livelihoods for thousands of farmers has largely been replaced by mass production systems, which require few workers. In China there is also a strong move to industrial chicken production, which is displacing small farmers.

A similar picture emerges in the Philippines. Forty years ago, the nation's entire population was fed on native eggs and chickens produced by the Filipino family farmer. This traditional livelihood using native strains of bird is threatened by a range of viral diseases brought about by the influx of the chicken breeds used in industrial production. WSPA recommends that meat chickens should either be farmed free-range or, if they are kept inside, they should be

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reared in small flocks and given ample space and natural light and ventilation. Slow-growing breeds should be used as they are not susceptible to the painful leg disorders and heart problems that are common in fast growing chickens.

Cows – Dairy cows

Today's cows have been pushed through selective breeding and unnatural cereal diets to produce huge amounts of milk – around 10 times as much as they would do naturally. These high yields put great strain on the cow's metabolism. Many suffer from hunger (they cannot eat enough to sustain the high yields); digestive disorders; mastitis (a painful udder infection); and lameness – overfeeding starchy concentrates causes laminitis, a form of lameness. One expert writes that, to understand the pain of laminitis, imagine crushing all your fingernails in the door and then standing on your fingertips. Traditional cows can give milk for 10 or more years, whereas today's cows are often sent to slaughter after just 3-4 lactations as their exhausted bodies are no longer able to produce enough milk.

Many cows are kept permanently indoors, often in narrow stalls and on concrete floors that can cause lameness; a system known as 'zero-grazing'. Some are tethered so that they can hardly move at all. Others are raised in drylots – outdoor enclosures with no grass. A drylot can hold thousands of cows at a time. They are rarely cleaned out and so manure and urine build up; such filthy conditions facilitate the spread of disease. WSPA believes that high yielding dairy cow breeds should not be used. Moreover, cows should be reared outdoors on grass, except when bad weather requires them to be housed indoors. Drylots should not be used. When they are kept indoors, cows should be housed in spacious, well-ventilated barns with bedding such as straw. They should not be tethered.

Beef cattle

Some beef cattle are kept indoors for much of their lives at high stocking densities on concrete or slatted floors. Some are permanently tethered. WSPA is opposed to such systems – and to feedlots. In feedlots, some of which can hold thousands of cattle, the animals are fattened for the last few months of their lives in overcrowded, manure-laden enclosures with no grass. They are fed an unnatural cereal diet that can lead to serious health problems.

WSPA believes that beef cattle should be grazed outdoors and only brought inside during bad weather. When housed indoors they should be given ample space and bedding; they should not be tethered. Feedlots should not be used.



BSE results from the industrial practice of feeding meat and bone-meal to cattle, even though they are natural herbivores



Transport

Each year millions of animals world-wide are transported huge distances to slaughter or for further fattening. Animals often suffer terribly during these long journeys. This could be avoided if journeys were kept reasonably short. To achieve this, WSPA recommends that animals should be slaughtered as near as possible to the farm of rearing; the meat could then be transported to wherever it is wanted. Long journeys to fattening are also unnecessary; animals should be fattened on or near the farm of birth.

Ill or injured animals should not be transported. Violence, such as breaking animals' tails to make them move, should not be used. During loading and unloading, animals should not be beaten with sticks or whips, nor kicked, nor should electric goads be used. Nor should they be suspended by mechanical means such as cranes, nor lifted or dragged by their head, ears, feet, tail, or fleece.

Live animal markets

Cruelty is common in markets. Diseased or injured animals – for example animals with broken legs – are taken to markets. While there, animals are often deprived of water, beaten and handled brutally, kept in overcrowded pens and given no shade in scorching heat. Poultry and rabbits are often kept in tiny, unsuitable cages. Such malpractices should be ended.

Slaughter

WSPA believes that animals, including poultry, should be slaughtered in a way that avoids as much pain and distress as possible. Inhumane pre-slaughter handling methods should be ended. For example, large mammals should not be suspended upside down by their legs while conscious. Nor should they be controlled by cutting their tendons, breaking their legs or injuring their eyes.

Before slaughter, animals should be rendered unconscious by stunning. The stun should produce immediate unconsciousness lasting until death. When it is not immediate, as with gas, the induction of unconsciousness should be non-aversive and cause no distress.

A humane, sustainable approach

Agriculture must be encouraged to develop in a sustainable manner. Industrial livestock production should be discouraged. Instead the crucial role of extensive family farming should be recognised. It forms the backbone of rural livelihoods, generating local employment and providing food security at household and country levels. As regards trade, farmers who export produce from free-range or organic systems may actually gain competitive advantage by meeting requirements in the developed world for welfare-friendly products.

One form of sustainable farming integrates crop production and animal farming in a mixed farming system. Crop residues are used as animal feed (rather than grain which could be used to feed the hungry) and the manure is used as fertiliser (rather than becoming the polluting slurry emanating from industrial farms).

Reference: World Bank Report by Cornelis de Haan and others, November 2001.
Livestock development: implications for rural poverty, the environment, and global food security.

Animals are sentient beings that can feel pain and suffering, and if given the chance, can also experience a sense of well-being

WSPA believes that:

- Animals should be reared free-range or, if they are kept indoors, they should be farmed in ways that allow them to perform their natural behaviours.
- They should be given plenty of space to prevent overcrowding, bedding such as straw and good ventilation – preferably fresh air.
- Cages, confining stalls/crates and tethering should not be used.
- Herd/flock sizes should be kept reasonably small – they should be appropriate for the species.
- Animals should not be selectively bred for increased productivity when this leads to ill-health or pain, as is the case with fast-growing meat chickens and high-yielding dairy cows.
- Painful mutilations such as tail-docking, de-beaking and teeth-clipping should not be carried out.

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