

# Sentient Beings

*Exploitation and abuse of sentient beings is wrong*

## **Treatment on Factory Farms**

Cows, pigs, chickens, and other animals commonly exploited by agribusiness are sentient beings'capable of awareness, feeling, and suffering

Animals exploited for food and fiber in the United States are considered primarily as commodities or "tools of production," not sentient beings.

Farm animals are subjected to grossly inhumane conditions and suffer from both physical and psychological disorders as animal factories seek to maximize productivity and profitability. This commodification of sentient life leads to intolerable animal cruelty, and it serves to diminish us as human beings.

The Animal Welfare Act specifically excludes animals used in agricultural production.

They aren't 'farms' by any stretch of the imagination. They're torture chambers.

European law requires that animals be recognized as sentient beings, not commodities, and this has led to basic humane protections for farm animals.

Even though farm animals suffer more than any group of animals, the laws to protect them are extraordinarily weak or simply non-existent.

It is vital that we build a body of law to protect these creatures, who deserve protection every bit as much as any other animals.

The challenge we face is significant because agribusiness is a multi-billion dollar industry with an enormously powerful and influential political presence.

Senator Robert Byrd (on the floor of the U.S. Senate, July 9, 2001):

"On profit-driven factory farms, veal calves are confined to dark wooden crates so small that they are prevented from lying down or scratching themselves. These creatures feel; they know pain. They suffer pain just as we humans suffer pain. Egg-laying hens are confined to battery cages. Unable to spread their wings, they are reduced to nothing more than an egg-laying machine. . . . The law clearly requires that these poor creatures be stunned and rendered insensitive to pain before [the slaughtering] process begins. Federal law is being ignored. Animal cruelty abounds. It is sickening. It is infuriating. Barbaric treatment of helpless, defenseless creatures must not be tolerated even if these animals are being raised for food'and even more so, more so. Such insensitivity is insidious and

can spread and is dangerous. Life must be respected and dealt with humanely in a civilized society.”

If we saw someone treating a dog or a cat this way, we would surely be outraged and protest loudly. Are these animals any less deserving of our consideration, compassion, and respect because they are raised for food, because there are no laws to protect them, or because their number boggles the mind?

## **Sentience**

If dogs, cats, or parakeets were treated the same way as factory-farmed egg-laying hens, pigs, or veal calves, those responsible would face animal cruelty charges. The pain a pig feels is no different from the pain a dog feels.

Vertebrate animals suffer fear when their lives are threatened, pain when their bodies are mutilated, and boredom and frustration when caged for long periods of time.

Nonhuman vertebrates have well-developed nervous systems and pain receptors the same as humans. Like us, they show pleasure and pain and they present comparable evidence of fear and well-being. Animals cry out in pain, they nurse wounded body parts, and they seek to avoid those who have hurt them in the past.

The antiquated notion that humans are superior to animals, and that animals are somehow incapable of feeling (despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary) has resulted in widespread, horrific atrocities. The question is not, can they reason? Nor, can they talk? But, can they suffer? Why should the law refuse its protection to any sensitive being?

Studies on pigs' social behaviour at Purdue University in the US have found that they crave affection and are easily depressed if isolated or denied playtime with each other. The lack of mental and physical stimuli can result in deterioration of health and increased incidence of diseases. The EU has taken such studies to heart and has outlawed the use of isolating pig stalls by 2012, and mandated their replacement with open-air stalls.

## **Philosophy**

As a civilized nation, we have an ethical obligation to prevent animal cruelty and to treat animals, including farm animals, as sentient beings. In doing so, we prevent intolerable suffering, and we elevate the human spirit.

Suffering is bad and to be avoided. I know that I don't want to suffer, and for this reason, I don't want to cause suffering.

One of our greatest shames, as human beings, is the suffering we force upon other beings so that we might enjoy eating the flesh of their dead bodies. How narrow-minded and self-absorbed we are to assign only to our own species the right to life and liberty.

The cruelty and needless suffering our culture inflicts on innocent animals surely contradicts our claim to be a "civilized" society. Until we learn to extend compassion to all living creatures, we cannot expect to be free from the violence that plagues our nation.

Any belief system, which professes to value the sanctity of life, but does not respect the lives and liberties of other creatures, is shamefully inconsistent and hypocritical.

To defend cruelty as sacrosanct, because we've been doing it for hundreds or thousands of years is ignorant and denies our ability to improve on our past.

## **Ethics into Action**

Public opinion polls have found that the vast majority of Americans oppose cruel farming practices, and most are shocked to learn about the inhumane conditions imposed on animals for the sake of agribusiness profitability. But ironically, most Americans unwittingly support this cruelty by purchasing meat, milk, and eggs produced on factory farms.

We should re-evaluate our food choices, and we should seek to make conscientious decisions that are consistent with our values and that promote compassion instead of cruelty.

That farm animals are treated cruelly on U.S. factory farms is a moral blotch on our country's conscience. For the mere reason that to do otherwise would raise the price of meat is an outrage every person should fight to expose.