

Farm Animals are Sentient Beings

Exploitation and abuse of sentient beings is wrong.

Treatment on Factory Farms

The Animal Welfare Act specifically excludes animals used in agricultural production. Cows, pigs, chickens, and other 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.

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."

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. They 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?

Philosophy

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.

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.

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.

It is time to re-evaluate our food choices, and make conscientious decisions that are consistent with our values and that promote compassion instead of cruelty.