For more information on what you can do to help chickens and turkeys suffering on factory farms, please visit farmsanctuary.org.

Farm Sanctuary is the nation’s leading farm animal protection organization. Since incorporating in 1986, Farm Sanctuary has worked to expose and stop cruel practices of the “food animal” industry through research and investigations, legal and institutional reforms, public awareness projects, youth education, and direct rescue and refuge efforts. Farm Sanctuary shelters in Watkins Glen, N.Y., and Orland, Calif., provide lifelong care for hundreds of rescued animals, who have become ambassadors for farm animals everywhere by educating visitors about the realities of factory farming.

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The Truth Behind POULTRY

TURNING ANIMALS INTO MEAT

While the federal Humane Methods of Slaughter Act requires that animals be rendered unconscious prior to slaughter, birds are specifically excluded from it. Though they feel pain just as other animals, and comprise more than 95 percent of all farm animals killed every year in the U.S., their suffering is disregarded.

- Birds are commonly shackled by their feet on a moving rail that dips them head-first into an electrified bath. The electricity paralyzes their muscles, but is not strong enough to numb the birds to pain or fear; it simply ensures that they hang limp as they continue down the line to another machine that cuts their throats.
- After the birds emerge from the water, their throats are slashed, usually with mechanized blades, and they bleed to death. Next, they are submerged in a scalding tank containing boiling water to facilitate feather removal.
- The mechanized blades meant to kill the birds before they reach the scalding tank invariably miss some of their intended victims. These birds are often dunked into the boiling water fully conscious. Sadly, this is an occurrence so common that the industry has developed a name for such birds: “redskins.”
Every year, nearly 9 billion chickens and more than 250 million turkeys are slaughtered in the U.S. for meat. These numbers have risen exponentially in recent decades, resulting in greater suffering for the birds, who are increasingly treated as mere production units.

- To prevent injuries from excessive pecking and clawing — abnormal behaviors that commonly arise due to overcrowding — the industry cuts off turkeys’ upper beaks, the ends of their toes, and their snoods without administering anesthesia.

**CONFINEMENT, CROWDING AND CRUELTY**

Chickens (called “broilers” by the industry) and turkeys raised for meat are crowded by the thousands inside huge warehouses where they have barely enough room to move. This mass-production system creates completely artificial conditions for chickens and turkeys, and causes massive suffering, disease and death.

- A typical poultry “grow house” contains 20,000 chickens or 10,000 turkeys. High stocking densities (the number of birds per unit of floor space) give each chicken just a half a square foot of space, while each turkey has less than three square feet of space, on which to live out their entire lives.
- The more closely birds are crowded together indoors, the more challenging sanitation becomes. Ammonia from wet, decomposing litter can irritate the skin and cause blisters, burns and ulcerations. As the litter becomes increasingly soiled, bacteria breaks down the accumulated excrement, releasing dust, fungus and other particulate matter into the air and causing severe respiratory problems.
- The grow house environment bears little resemblance to the habitat where chickens’ and turkeys’ wild ancestors originated, systematically thwarting most of the birds’ most natural behaviors such as nesting, roosting, foraging, and dustbathing. As a result, the birds become stressed and frustrated.

**FRANKENSTEIN FOWL**

Poultry producers also use selective breeding to make chickens and turkeys grow larger more quickly. Raising more birds in less time increases producers’ profit, but also severely compromises the health of chickens and turkeys and intensifies their suffering.

- Modern broiler chickens reach slaughter weight three times faster than their predecessors did only 50 years ago, and are killed after just 42 days. Similarly, domestic turkeys have been bred to grow three times faster than their wild counterparts, reaching slaughter weight in as few as 14 weeks.
- Hundreds of millions of broiler chickens and millions of turkeys die every year from organ failure, because the birds’ hearts and lungs do not grow as rapidly as the rest of their bodies, and cannot deliver enough oxygen to the muscles. The resulting strain can cause heart failure and sudden death.
- The birds’ legs also do not grow fast enough to support their abnormally heavy bodies, causing crippling joint disorders, skeletal deformities and lameness. Birds who are unable to walk cannot reach food and water stations, and may die from starvation or dehydration.
- To meet increased consumer demand for turkey breast meat, this body part is designed to grow to massive proportions on today’s domesticated turkeys. Their breasts grow so large, in fact, that they have become incapable of reproducing naturally, so they are now bred solely by artificial insemination.
- Because grow houses are highly automated, the care of thousands of birds may be left to a single worker. Sick or injured turkeys often suffer unnoticed, and those found are typically killed because culling those unlikely to reach slaughter weight is cheaper for producers than providing them with veterinary care.

**FROM GROW HOUSE TO SLAUGHTERHOUSE**

When birds reach slaughter weight (about five pounds for broiler chickens, and about 35 pounds for turkeys), they are gathered up and sent to slaughter. For most chickens and turkeys, this is the first and only time they will see the sky or breathe fresh air. The journey from grow house to slaughterhouse can be long and arduous, subjecting these frightened and defenseless animals to more misery.

- Chickens and turkeys are commonly shipped to slaughter in open crates stacked on large flatbed trucks. Though countless birds die en route from exposure to temperature and weather extremes, it is more economical for the industry to absorb high mortality rates than to shelter the birds during transport.
- At the slaughterhouse, workers pull the birds...