

— Field Report: Update on Farm Sanctuary's California Hen Rescue —

From Susie on February 28:

We took just over 400 hens this week, some Leghorn and some Brown chickens. Thirty have not been able to stand without falling since I arrived... the Leghorns should weigh about four pounds, and all weighed less than one pound. Absolutely heart breaking to watch. They seem to take comfort in being given fluids and being hand-fed. Some of the sickest are pulling through. They are eating and drinking on their own after the first three days of fluids, tube feedings, injectable vitamins, and trying different types of foods. There are some who are not even able to absorb subcutaneous fluids — their kidneys are shutting down in complete renal failure. It is a horrible thing to watch.

We've checked every one of the birds individually. They are coated with poultry mites; these cause anemia and are extremely debilitating to animals in such critical condition. Today all were treated, and the mite-coated feathers were trimmed out. Most of the girls are so exhausted and sick, not one has laid an egg yet. Even spent hens lay tons of eggs, so this is really unusual. They are truly depleted.

The first day they were terrified — running into corners when you walked in, if they could; some just huddled together in piles. Now more are sunbathing, dust bathing, and doing the playful run that hens do — running as fast as they can across the barn flapping their wings. They're not fast yet, but they are *really* trying.

Oh! The nails on some hens were over 5" in length! Once they were trimmed — and we trimmed ALL of them — they did the high-step because they weren't used to having normal nails. Some hens have foot injuries; one is blind in one eye due to trauma; a few are missing toe tips, which were probably ripped off in wire battery cages; all are debeaked; a few with prolapses; and, of course, some have horrible mite infestations.

We had to tarp the barn so there are no drafts. They have no body fat or muscle. We have heat lamps, and we built enclosed boxes for the thinnest and weakest girls with lamps positioned directly on them. We are still concerned that these girls could crash... their immune systems are weak and things like mites or a chill can easily be fatal. But, they thrive on the sun, and they've been able to sunbathe for the first time in their lives!