

## The Tragedy behind Foie Gras

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Row by row, ducks and geese are held in their small cages in damp, dark buildings. Their majesty and grace is lost amidst the filth and grime which encrusts their cages and bodies. They are suffering from something which is the exact opposite of starvation. Rather than beg for food, these birds would beg to skip a meal and relieve their stomachs from their bloated state which nears the brink of explosion. Yet this is impossible — skipping a meal is not likely. Their terrors start each day when they see the same ominous metal tube approach, and they know exactly what is going to happen. Forcefully, the tube is pushed down their throats, filling their stomachs with feed.

The cruel process of foie gras production is basically unheard of in the United States, yet foie gras or “fatty liver” is considered a delicacy among certain nations around the world. Yearly millions of ducks and geese are cruelly force-fed and slaughtered for their fattened, buttery livers which form when a duck or goose is extremely overfed. The process by which farmers achieve the production of foie gras is sometimes fatal, yet the sad truth and graphic stories rarely leaves the confines of a bird’s cage.

To produce foie gras farmers must fatten the liver of a duck or goose by extensive over-feeding, however ducks and geese do not eat enough customarily to cause their livers to grow as large as is needed to produce the buttery consistency foie gras is known for. Therefore, the ducks and geese are introduced to a high fat diet consisting of corn and oil, and at the last few weeks of their lives they are fattened through force-feeding

(PETA). This graphic process of force feeding, sometimes called gavage, begins with the insertion of a long metal tube which is pushed down the bird's esophagus followed by the release of feed until the birds throat is literally overflowing with food (Farm Sanctuary). Not only is this process vulgar but it is painful, having been said that "force-feeding results in accumulated scar tissue in the esophagus" from the dangerous metal pipe (hsus.org). This process of force-feeding sometimes lasts for up to three weeks, and over that time they gain damaging weight, crippling them for the brief remainder of their lives (The Farm Sanctuary). The mass amount of their weight is accumulated in the liver, which expands up to ten times its normal size. The reason for this massive expansion is because the corn and oil food mixture is lacking the amino acid chlorine, which helps the liver to work normally (stopforcefeeding.com).

As the livers of ducks and geese raised for foie gras become more and more enlarged, a disease called hepatic steatosis develops (Farm Sanctuary). Hepatic steatosis or "fatty liver" is the storing of abnormal amounts of fat in the liver (Gale Encyclopedia of Medicine). In some cases hepatic steatosis becomes so extreme that the enlarged liver presses against a bird's lungs, causing him to suffocate. Yet there is no way of preventing hepatic steatosis from taking place in ducks and geese on foie gras farms — in fact, an oversized, fatty liver is exactly what each bird is expected and forced to develop.

While their treatment through feeding is cruel, a bird's other living conditions on the farm are almost worse. Each bird is held in a small cage with no space to move

whatsoever, and according to The Farm Sanctuary, as the birds gain weight from being over-fed they are no longer able to stand comfortably or normally in their small cages. Soon they become so overweight that their bulging abdomens push their legs awkwardly forward, and as they vainly struggle to stand upright normally their legs can become injured and develop wounds which are likely to become infected in their dirty environment.

Several especially heartbreaking scenes in foie gras farms are related through GourmetCruelty.com when they wrote about “ducks who had literally burst open through overfeeding”, and others “who had choked to death on their own vomit.” PETA also reported: “One bird had a maggot-covered wound that was so severe that water spilled out of it when he drank.” Compared to ducks on normal farms, ducks raised for foie gras are twenty times more likely to die (Farm Sanctuary).

Being constantly confined in a cage means that ducks and geese are never allowed to swim or be around water, their natural habitat. Gradually, a bird’s identity is stolen. Never having the opportunity to preen, the birds’ instinct to do so is soon stunted, causing their feathers become ill-kept and dirty. An even sadder reality is that some ducks are never given the opportunity to preen, as it has been recorded that ducks raised on foie gras farms had their bills cut off at a young age (PETA). De-billing is a painful process which cuts away one of a bird’s most essential parts (The Farm Sanctuary).

In the world today, France is the leading producer of foie gras, killing about

24 million ducks and half a million geese each year to supply themselves and other places with this buttery “delicacy.” But the foie gras industry is not confined in France: half a million birds are raised and killed yearly in the United States and Canada, while as of late China has also joined in the foie gras industry (Farm Sanctuary).

Although combating foie gras production is often difficult, one success has been that California will be removing foie gras completely from their restaurant menus and store shelves in 2012. Strauss, a restaurant owner in California, has already taken foie gras off of his menu even though the ban is not effective yet, acknowledging that because the livers of the ducks and geese were so noticeably enlarged “It cannot be comfortable for the duck” (Warth).

One of the most effective ways of stunting the foie gras industry from growing and continuing, besides not eating foie gras yourself, is by simply by informing people you know on how it is produced. Because foie gras is not widely known of in America, few people hear about the cruelty which ducks and geese are suffering to fatten their livers even though it is taking place in America today. Through educating friends, family, and surrounding areas about the appalling truth behind foie gras production we could possibly begin to see a steady downfall in foie gras sales.

What are some ways to spread the word and fight against foie gras farms? The simplest way is by word of mouth, but there are many other ways to inform people you know. I learned about foie gras production through an informative e-mail which I quickly forwarded to all of my friends and family. Not to mention all of the ways you can spread

the word online through placing links about the cruelty on foie gras on a personal webpage.

However, we cannot forget about restaurants which we must educate about foie gras production. Surprisingly, the chefs who are cooking foie gras may not even know how it was made. A good way to inform them is by finding any restaurants in your area which may have foie gras on their menu, printing out a sheet of paper with a few facts about foie gras production on it, and handing it to them the next time you pass by. They may be startled by the truth but will probably be grateful that they now know through serving foie gras, they are actually supporting this shocking animal treatment.

Other countries have already begun setting a strong example for the world by taking a stand against foie gras. Great Britain and Switzerland have already made force-feeding ducks and geese illegal and require all foie gras products to have informative labels on them to notify the public on how the product is being made, while Israel and Germany have taken forbidden foie gras production completely (PETA).

As the word about foie gras farms spreads throughout the world we may hope that the brutality against force-fed birds will soon stop. Through educating people in America who are completely unaware of what foie gras is, we will be able to make a huge difference in the future of possibly millions of tortured ducks and geese. Although it is argued that foie gras is quite a profitable business for farms and restaurants, a pound of foie gras selling for up to forty dollars, the suffering which each duck and goose endures for that liver could never justify the pleasant taste which it leaves on one's palette.

Citations

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