

Have you ever heard a friend or relative say “I’m a vegetarian but I still eat chicken!”? This is a great example of a growing problem in America considering that chickens are, in my opinion, the most abused animals today. The average American now eats about eighty four pounds of chicken a year. This is compared to 1997, when Americans only ate about half of that. Chickens are often not considered animals at all. Factory farms that raise chickens are notorious for abusing chickens by using harsh chemicals that affect not only the chickens, but the people who eat the meat from those chickens. The chickens that are raised for meat are called “broiler chickens”. Chickens that are raised for egg production are called “egg layers”. Both “egg layers” and “broiler chickens” are subject to dreadful living conditions on factory farms. Factory farms often use unnecessarily harmful methods when raising chickens in order to make more money. These poor birds are treated as objects and this needs to change.(<http://www.pewenvironment.org>)

I’ve raised chickens for most of my life. Every day in the summer I would get up early to collect fresh speckled eggs. You could look out and see chickens grazing in the bright green fields, spreading out their wings to a clear blue sky, and pecking at the little bugs that scrambled through the grass. These chickens, to me, were like any other animal or pet. Even though we used them for eggs and meat, we always treated them as if they were any other animal, and raised healthy and happy birds. We treated them with respect and care. They were a delight, but I also learned a vast amount about chickens. I learned how to take care of them, what their basic needs were, and most

importantly, I learned the importance of treating animals with respect. This is when I started to get curious about where the eggs and meat at the store had come from. I did some research and the answers I found were horrific.

Suddenly, everything I knew about raising happy and healthy animals was destroyed by what I learned about factory farms. I was shocked when all the blue skies faded away and dusty, dank, enclosures stole their places. As day old chicks, the birds are sexed and sent their separate ways. The “Egg Layers” are sent to live in small cages until they are killed. These cages are called battery cages. Being less than eight point five inches by eleven inches, the cages are constantly rubbing against the birds feathers. This causes severe feather loss and pain for the birds. Broiler chickens, on the other hand, are sent to another area. These birds are given hormones to grow to a specific “market weight” and sent to slaughter. (<http://www.farmsanctuary.org>)

Caged and confined in small dirty houses, these birds could not walk let alone spread their wings! The maximum number for chicken captivity is ninety at a time, but factory farms often keep hundreds or even thousands of these peaceful birds in one space. This, an absolutely horrible fact, needs to stop immediately. The reason you can only keep a maximum number of ninety at a time, is because chickens have a pecking order. This means chickens often peck at the heads and sometimes bodies of other chickens to define who is the leader of their group. Most often, this is a rooster. Once you take this structure from them, these poor chickens struggle to conform to their altered “pecking order”. The struggle and confusion can often lead to serious injury and in most cases, a slow and painful death. This, along with the unnatural hormones, food and water issues, and small living spaces lead to the death of many chickens before

they are slaughtered. Walking around any captive environment, you will most likely find hundreds of chickens struggling to breathe or even lying dead on the ground. When you stop to think about it, the money lost when these chickens die prematurely, could be spent to correct these problems instead. (<http://www.backyardchickens.com>) (<http://www.peta.org>)

Moreover, on an equally serious note, the rate of disease in these small captive environments is astonishing. A study by the University of Mississippi researching poultry production suggests that when chickens use shared stagnant water, especially when trying to make up for lack of food, they spread these diseases far more quickly (<http://msucare.com>). When these birds are kept in small crowded spaces with limited, stale water, I think this is torture and should be corrected.

The living conditions for these animals are below standard. I couldn't disagree more with the injections, medications, and steroids these animals are subjected to. Hormones are given to our chickens to make them grow rapidly. They grow to the point where they are unable to stand or move. "Birds are now raised and slaughtered in half the time they were fifty years ago, but now they're twice as big" says the two thousand nine film, Food, Inc. Such rapid growth is extremely hard on their bones, organs, and development in general. The chickens are sprayed with pesticides which often remain on the chickens after they are slaughtered. This means that pesticides are in the eggs and meat we eat (Food, Inc.).

Obviously, this has a ripple affect. The meat and eggs we buy at the store come from chickens in this scenario. Often, feces and left over chemicals contaminate our food. This is why if you look closely at any package of chicken, you will find a warning

label. Mostly, this is necessary because e.coli bacteria, diseases the chickens carry, fecal matter and pesticide residue can make you very ill. This can cause food poisoning. For the most part, you need warning labels on most food, to tell you what “could” go wrong. In other words there is a very slim chance of these things happening. But what if I told you that for many of these companies, it’s not just a slim possibility we’re looking at. A recent study reported by foodsafetynews.com says “The analysis found that 97 percent of tested chicken breast samples harbored bacteria that could make you sick.” This is far beyond just a slim possibility.

So what can we do? Most times, when we hear about something like this, we don’t know how to fix it. It’s hard to imagine that we are the ones who run America in the end. But we are. And because you and I can make a difference, I decided to do something about this. I started with a simple petition stating that we should have better inspections and to use less hormone injections. Within the first day I already recieved one hundred signatures. Only a few weeks later I had reached five hundred and forty five! You could only imagine my excitement. This petition will need around one thousand signatures to go to the house of commons and we are already so close!

After I made the petition I realized my work still wasn’t finished. I needed to advertise. I brain stormed all the different ways I could get in some great advertising for free. Although I couldn’t exactly get a billboard, I did resort to social media. I created a Facebook page and my numbers increased significantly. I had gotten about two hundred and twelve Facebook shares and nine tweets. I sent it to family members,

friends, and everyone I knew as well as advertising on the web. Right now I have about half the signatures I need to send this to the house of commons.

As I'm sure, other people have most likely petitioned for this madness to stop. Even so, nothing has changed. But I believe persistence, justice, and a strong will can change all of that. One of my favorite presidents, Barack Obama, once said, "If you're walking down the right path and you're willing to keep walking, eventually you'll make progress." This is why I decided to make a difference. Because even if the house of commons doesn't accept this, the very least I did was raise awareness. So I'm going to keep fighting until a change is made.

In the same way I am fighting for these birds rights, I'd like to challenge you to do the same. I'd like to challenge you to take a stand for happy, healthy, poultry farms and to realize that small dirty cages aren't the only way. Demand fresh water and disease free chickens for our future and theirs. I want more people to stand up for all the birds that can't fight for themselves. With all of that being said, I encourage you to join me in this fight.

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