



You Eat Chicken, Don't You?

by Francis Janes

Has anyone said to you recently,

*"I don't eat
much
RED*

MEAT Implicit in this statement is the perception that
"any more"? "white" meats are healthier. It is true
that chicken is lower in fat than beef.
But does that fact alone make it a
sound food choice? The reality is that

there is as much cholesterol in chicken as there is in beef. Cholesterol is found in the muscle of animal products. Trimming off the fat and removing the skin does not reduce the amount of cholesterol ingested. Chicken does not supply important nutritional allies such as antioxidants, phytochemicals and fiber. If that news wasn't already bad enough, National Research Council studies have found that a high percentage of chicken carcasses are contaminated with salmonella.

As beef consumption has steadily declined over the past decade, per capita consumption of chicken and other "light" meats has climbed. In North America, we consume over six billion chickens annually. If these 6 billion birds were laid out from beak to toe, the line would stretch to the moon and back twice. In order to meet the demands of the marketplace, agribusiness has created a nightmarish situation where the needs of the animals have no place in modern agriculture. Our factory farming systems are designed for maximum production and maximum profit. Inherent in this design is a system that inflicts suffering, pain and terror to the animals on a massive level.

Let's follow the journey of a chicken from the day it breaks out from its shell as a fluffy yellow hatchling. If a chicken hatchery is turning out "egg-type" birds or as they are known in the industry "layers", the first order of business is to sort the newly hatch baby chicks by sex. Males don't lay eggs and this, of course, makes them expendable. How are they disposed?

In less sophisticated operations, male chicks are pulled from sorting trays and dropped into garbage bags where they die from suffocation. Many operations simply grind up the live, newly hatched chicks and their shells into a meal, which is dehydrated and used as animal protein supplements for other animals. Other more "modern" methods of mass destruction include decapitation or asphyxiation in a carbon dioxide chamber.

In total, the egg industry in North America kills close to 300

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Poultry, which comprise more than 90% of all farm animals killed in the U.S., are exempt from the **HUMANE SLAUGHTER ACT**. Once inside the slaughterhouse, fully conscious birds are hung by their feet from metal shackles on a moving rail. Some birds suffer on the bloody floor, injured and dying.

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million chicks per year. The life that continues for the female chick is certainly not to be envied though. To reduce feather pecking and cannibalism, chicks have parts of their beak cut off at 10 days of age. This process is called debeaking and is standard industry practise. A red hot blade will both melt and cut through the beak. Because of the speed at which workers handle the chicks, “hack jobs” results in massive beak loss to some chicks, leaving them unable to eat or

drink. Some chicks will simply bleed to death from the trauma.

Egg-laying hens often live five to a cage only 18” wide, although a chicken’s wing span is 32”. To put some perspective on these dreadful living conditions, imagine this scenario. Picture yourself standing in a crowded elevator. The elevator is so crowded, in fact, that your body is in contact on all sides with other humans. This situation is not just a temporary nuisance however. This is permanent. This is your life. Your only release will be at the hands of the executioner.

Under natural conditions, chickens can live as long as fifteen to twenty years. In the modern factory farm, the hen’s egg production drops off at about a year and a half. When this point is reached, they are auctioned off where they are killed and their flesh is made into soup and other processed foods.

The early life of chickens raised for flesh, called “broilers” in the industry, is similar to that of their cousins in the egg business. The birds will reach a market weight of about 4 pounds in a little over 6 weeks. It used to take 12 weeks to fatten a chicken to 4 pounds but more intensive applications of growth stimulants and hormones has cut that time in half. During the last few weeks in the broiler house, when crowding is most severe, the birds are kept in near darkness to reduce fighting. When the flock is ready for the slaughterhouse, the birds are crowded toward one end of the building. Then, at night when the birds are drowsy, crews of workers wade in, catch them, and load them in crates stacked on the trucks outside.

I often wonder how and why we have become so fundamentally disassociated from our animal friends. I also have to wonder about the people who control and manage the animal factory systems. I don’t know whether I should feel sorry for them or be angry at them. But I think John Robbins said it best,

“I don’t know what shall be the destinies of those responsible for the animal factories of today. Treating animals like machines, they are profoundly separated from nature, deeply alienated from kinship with life. They are already in a kind of hell. If we buy and eat products of this system of food production, are we not colluding with them in creating this hell? Is that how we want to vote with our lives?”