

INFOSHEET

Fair Go for Farm Animals

FAIR GO FOR FARM ANIMALS

Each year Australians consume an average of 137 eggs and 107 kilos of meat per person.

It's not often that we stop to think where these products have come from.

When you think of a farm, you might think of animal grazing in wide open paddocks, sheepdogs, tractors and drovers on horseback.

But most of Australia's meat and eggs does not come from the traditional type of farm that you might imagine.

Farming today is big business, and in order to meet demand from here and overseas, intensive methods have been developed that promote high production levels for a lower cost and therefore, greater profits.

Sadly, these profits often come at the cost of the animals' welfare.

Each year, many of Australia's farm animals suffer from inhumane treatment and cruelty that most people would consider unacceptable.

Yet, quietly and steadily, these cruel practices - such as battery hen farming, live exports and the use of sow stalls - continue.

They continue because they are not illegal: and the RSPCA Inspectors who enforce animal protection legislation cannot prosecute for cruelty to animals, as long as producers are operating within the bounds of the law.

In order to make these practices illegal, Australians must tell their governments - federal and state - that cruelty to farm animals is unacceptable.

What does a Fair Go for Farm Animals mean?

In Australia, we often use the term 'fair go' to describe how we think people should be treated. Our belief in a fair go is so strong, it's grown to become a part of our national culture.

The RSPCA believes that wherever animals are used by humans, they must be treated humanely, compassionately and with consideration.

The term 'fair go' emphasises that the RSPCA does not oppose the farming of animals.

A 'Fair Go for Farm Animals' means the RSPCA believes that as long as farm animals are in our care, we have a responsibility to provide for (at least) their basic needs, in accordance with the RSPCA's Five Freedoms.

These basic needs may vary between animals but can be described in general terms: providing adequate space, food, and water; veterinary treatment when required; shelter from the elements; and the freedom to express some essential natural behaviours.

And if the animal is to be slaughtered, it should be done quickly and humanely.

Some people think that because these animals will eventually die anyway, it's okay to treat them badly (it's not).

Or that caring about farm animals means they won't be able to eat meat and eggs anymore (it doesn't).

*This infosheet has been prepared for your information by RSPCA Australia
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Animals in Australia's farms don't have a union to represent them. They have no way to argue for fair treatment or better conditions.

Together with the RSPCA, you can be the voice that demands farm animals be given a FAIR GO.

The Fair Go for Farm Animals campaign will focus on three issues that the RSPCA believes are among the most important welfare concerns faced by farm animals today.

Fair Go for sows

You've heard the phrase, 'as happy as a pig in mud'? Well, you can be sure a pregnant sow that spends most of her life in a metal crate that is only 60cm wide with a concrete floor is not happy!

She can barely move or even turn her head.

Pigs are intelligent sociable animals, and if kept outdoors, will spend many hours exploring their surroundings.

But a sow in a stall can't really mix with other pigs or her environment, which may cause her distress and frustration.

Keeping a pregnant sow in a stall may provide some protection from possible injury, can limit aggression between animals, and allows producers to watch nutritional intake of individuals more closely.

But due to the physical restriction and boredom, a sow in a stall may develop severe physical and behavioural problems. Muscles and bones may deteriorate, causing pain and difficulty in moving. Increased aggression and a repetitive swaying of the head may also develop.

These problems can be avoided by using a more humane system, such as group housing several pigs in a straw yard, where they have room to move around. Individual or electronic feeders can also be used to regulate food intake.

Fair Go for hens

There isn't much doubt as to which comes first in Australia's egg industry.

Most of Australia's eggs are produced in cage (battery) systems, which are a cheap and efficient way to produce a lot of eggs at a lower cost.

Unfortunately, this usually means each hen is standing on a wire floor space the size of an A4 sheet of paper for her entire adult life.

Eventually this is likely to cause crippling and painful injuries and deformities to her feet and legs.

She can't move freely, stretch or flap her wings. Hens have a very strong natural instinct to perch and lay their eggs in a nest, and these behaviours are completely denied in a battery system.

Already, many producers are using more humane barn-laid and free range egg systems that provide protection from the elements and predators, while allowing the hens to move around and behave more naturally (perching, dust bathing and so forth).

Fair Go for livestock

The long sea journey faced by up to 7 million Australian sheep, cattle and goats each year is no pleasure cruise.

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Many are transported long distances within Australia before reaching holding yards or feedlots, where they are then loaded onto enormous ships destined for Asia or the Middle East, with as many as 60,000 animals on one vessel.

The perilous journey from farm to slaughter can take up to three months in total, and each year, tens of thousands of Australian animals will die as a result of any one cause, or combination of the following: hunger, thirst, serious injury, excessive heat and/or high levels of stress.

In addition, countless more will suffer but survive, only to reach a destination where the Australian government has no control over their treatment – including how they are further transported, cared for and how humanely they are slaughtered.

What makes this situation even more reprehensible is that continuing live exports is completely unnecessary.

There is an alternative – livestock that is to be slaughtered should be humanely slaughtered here in Australia. The chilled or frozen meat can then be transported to other parts of the country or overseas as required.

In 2004, around 123 Australian abattoirs were already Halal certified, meaning they can process meat according to these strict religious and cultural requirements.

Australia already exports chilled and frozen meat to every significant market for live exports. This also means Australian live exports are actually competing with Australia chilled and frozen meat in the same overseas markets!

For example, a 16% drop in live sheep exports resulted in a 10% increase in sheep slaughter in Australia during the 2004/2005 financial year.

For as long as live exports continue, chilled meat exports will not realise their potential.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

- [Learn more about live exports](#)
- [Learn more about battery hen farming](#)
- Complete and send a Fair Go postcard (available from the RSPCA).
- Make your voice heard! Write to the [Australian Government Minister for Agriculture](#), your [State or Territory Agricultural Minister](#), [your local MP](#) and to local newspapers. Express your anger and opposition to cruelty in the farming industry.
- When shopping, look for welfare-friendly alternatives, such as free range pork and non-cage eggs.
- Buy a green RSPCA armband and help us raise funds and awareness to stop animal cruelty – they're available in two sizes and are just \$2 each from Bendigo Bank branches, Peter Alexander stores, veterinarians and the RSPCA.