

Horror Story: Inhumane CAFO Animal Breeding Techniques

CAFOs exist to minimize livestock producers' costs and maximize their profits. Since the beginning of the industrialization of animal husbandry after World War II, the industry has sought to genetically manipulate livestock to create physical characteristics that would increase the market value of their final product.

Dairy cows, for example, have been genetically manipulated to produce up to 12 times the amount of milk needed to feed their calves. However, producing such vast quantities of milk in one lactation cycle stresses a dairy cow to the extent that she is typically declared "spent" after only three or four years and sent off to the slaughterhouse. Before industrial farming, cows could live up to 25 years. In order to produce milk, a dairy cow must give birth to a calf. Immediately after their birth calves are separated from their mothers. Most female calves are kept with the herd for future milk production, but males are immediately taken away to supply the veal or beef industry.¹

Hutches at an industrial dairy:

where newborn female calves live in winter among mud, feces, and urine.

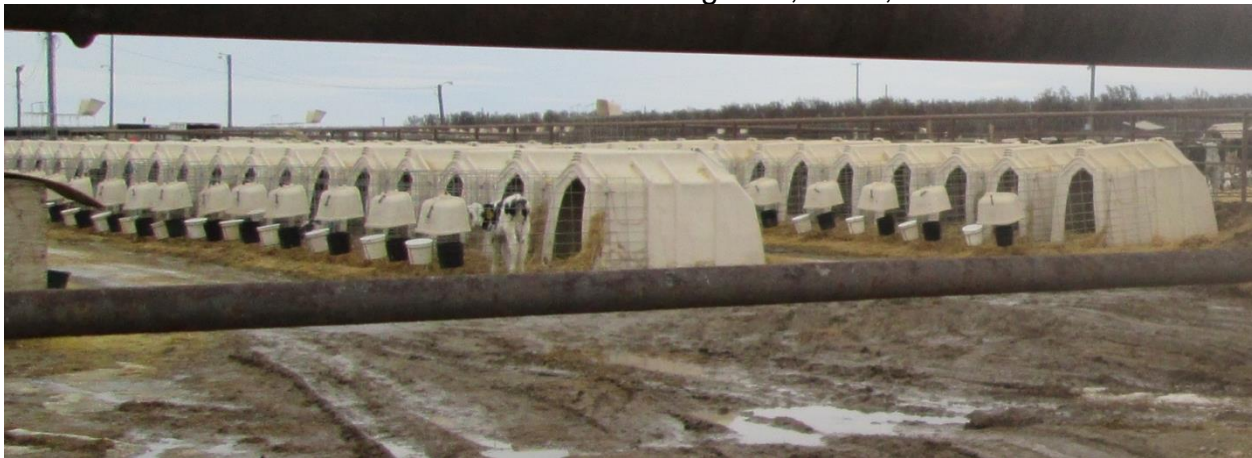


Photo by Jean Mendoza.

In hog CAFOs pregnant sows are traditionally confined to narrow crates for their four-month long gestation. While in the crates, these sows can only stand in place or lie down and are deprived of any other mental and physical stimulation. Shortly before they give birth, the sows are transferred to similarly restrictive farrowing crates that limit physical interactions between the sow and her piglets except for suckling. After the piglets are weaned, the sows are impregnated again in a cruel cycle of stress and deprivation until they are worn out and sent to slaughter.²

In May of 2023 the US Supreme Court upheld a California law, approved by a statewide referendum, banning the use of gestation crates for pigs. This ruling is a positive step that will hopefully lead to an improvement in the treatment of sows over time. Nine other states have enacted a similar ban.³

An extreme CAFO breeding program, for "broiler" (ie. meat) chickens, is still ongoing. The historical publication, *History of Yesterday*, reports that chickens produced today in

CAFOs are four times heavier than those produced prior to the onset of selective breeding techniques in the 1950s. Decades of artificial genetic selection have resulted in animals that grow as fast as possible and, especially, present with huge breasts prized by consumers.⁴ But there are consequences to these birds who are condemned to be born into freakishly overgrown bodies.

A 2020 study by researchers at the University of Guelph, Ontario confirmed that this genetic manipulation comes at a great physical cost to the birds. They examined 16 different chicken breeds, each growing at different rates. The researchers found that the fastest-growing chickens spent significantly more time sitting, leading to increased foot and leg sores and reduced ability to maneuver over obstacles or to stand in one place. They also incurred muscle damage and other abnormalities that could lead to the meat being downgraded or condemned.⁵

At the same time meat chickens in today's CAFO barns are crammed tightly together and spend their lives standing or sitting amidst their waste. The typical barn housing broiler chickens is 43' wide by 500' long and in 2012 the average stocking density was less than one square foot per bird.⁶ A new barn may be as huge as 60' wide by 600' long.⁷ Currently the industry calls for at least 1.5 square feet per bird, which is still very tight.⁸ The fact that they are commonly called "broiler chickens" suggests the industry views these creatures only in terms of their eventual use.

References.

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