

Standard Agricultural Practices

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The following practices / mutilations are common on small and large farms, even those that have been certified 'humane.' Even the most rigorous humane label in the U.S., Animal Welfare Approved, permits all three castration methods to be performed without anesthetic.

Severe Confinement / Crowding



"Free-Range" Chicken Farm

Lax regulations and plentiful loopholes mean that many animals raised under free-range, cage-free, and other humane labels spend most or all of their lives in extreme confinement.

In confinement operations, thousands of chickens, turkeys and pigs are packed into warehouse-style sheds where severe overcrowding prevents them from performing even the most basic instinctual behaviors essential to their well-being.

Grass-fed and pasture-raised cows often spend their last year of life crowded into muddy, barren feedlots where they are fed an unnatural diet of corn or other feed grains to bring them to slaughter weight more quickly.

Debeaking



Debeaked Turkey

In response to severe overcrowding, turkeys and chickens will compulsively peck each other from stress and boredom.

In order to minimize carcass damage, producers “debeak” the birds (also called “beak amputation” or, euphemistically, “beak trimming”), a painful procedure in which 1/3 to 2/3 of each bird’s sensitive beak is seared or sliced off without pain relief.

Chickens’ and turkeys’ beaks are complex sensory organs loaded with nerves and receptors, much like human fingertips.

The pain and impairment caused by debeaking is so extensive that birds sometimes die from starvation, yet debeaking is permitted under most humane labels.

Castration



Castrating Male Dairy Goat

Male animals are typically castrated **without anesthetic or pain killer** on all industrial farms, and on most small and humane label farms.

Even the most rigorous humane label in the U.S., Animal Welfare Approved, permits all three of the following castration methods to be performed without anesthetic.

- *Surgical castration:* The scrotum is cut with a scalpel, the testicles are dissected out, the cord and veins connecting the testicles are cut and the testicles are removed by twisting, cutting or tearing.
- *Rubber ring castration:* A tight rubber ring applied to the scrotum above the testicles results in lack of blood flow, killing the testicles, which fall off after two to four weeks.
- *Crushing castration (Burdizzo method):* Crushing castration is performed by crushing the spermatic cord and blood vessels of each testis with a pliers-like clamp, without breaking the skin. The clamp is held in place for several seconds and may be applied twice per testicle.

Branding



Calf being branded

Almost half of the 35 million cattle slaughtered for beef every year in the U.S. are branded for identification.

Searing hot-irons are pressed into the flesh of restrained animals for five to ten seconds.³

Hot-irons (968°F) burn both the hide and underlying tissue, leaving a permanent hairless scar. During the procedure, calves thrash, cry out, and frantically roll their eyes.

Branding is permitted under many humane labels, including free-range, pastured, grass-fed, organic, and Certified Humane.

Ear Notching



Ear-notched Piglet

Ear notching is a form of identification most commonly used on pigs and goats.

A hole-punch type device is used to cut triangles of flesh out of the nerve-filled ears of piglets.

Ear notching without pain relief is standard procedure even on many small and free-range farms, and is also permitted under Animal Welfare Approved standards.

Tail Docking



Tail-docked Piglet

Pigs raised in confinement typically have their tails cut off (without pain relief) within the first few days of birth, as they will often bite one another's tails from agitation or boredom in poor welfare environments.

Many dairy cows also have a portion of their tails amputated without pain relief. Usually, tight rubber bands are used to restrict blood flow until the tail falls off, or it is severed with a sharp instrument. This mutilation is not only painful, but causes ongoing stress because it renders cows defenseless against biting flies.

Dehorning / Disbudding



Hot iron disbudding of goats without anesthesia is permitted under the Certified Humane label and is standard practice on small & free-range operations.

On most farms, cattle and goats have their horn buds removed without anesthesia or pain relief.

Dehorning (also known as disbudding) involves removal of the sensitive, nerve-filled horn bud tissue that will grow into horns.

Dehorning is typically achieved by pressing a searing hot iron thoroughly into the bud and surrounding flesh for 8-15 seconds per burn, with two or three burns per bud.

While most third-party certified humane labels (which produce less than 2% of animals used for food) require use of local anesthesia for dehorning of calves, standards may be more lax for goats, and dehorning is often performed without anesthesia, causing young goats to scream and thrash throughout the extremely painful process.

Nose Ringing



Nose-ringed Pig

While pastured pigs who spend time outdoors experience a better quality of life than pigs raised in confinement, they are also frequently subjected to excruciating mutilations such as nose ringing.

Pigs are highly inquisitive animals and will spend hours exploring. Their most instinctive exploratory behavior is rooting, or turning up soil with their noses.

The ability to root is considered a basic welfare need of all pigs.⁴ But many farmers complain that rooting destroys their land.

To prevent rooting, free-range pig producers commonly insert wires or metal rings into the sensitive nose discs of pigs, which makes this natural activity very painful.

In addition to causing physical pain, nose rings are a source of ongoing stress and emotional suffering for pigs, constantly thwarting one of their most basic desires.

Artificial Insemination / Sexual Violation

Artificial insemination (A.I.), is the most commonly used method of breeding farmed animals in 'developed' countries.

If it seems extreme to call artificial insemination a sexual violation, please see our expanded video section below, with footage and details of the processes involved in the forced reproduction of farmed animals.

And please consider that whether on factory farms or small, organic farms, enduring months of forced pregnancy and a painful birthing process is an inherent violation, even when other aspects of animal welfare are less cruel.

Artificial Insemination – Turkeys

Nearly all turkeys sold for meat — and 100% of white-feathered, broad-breasted commercial turkeys — are bred via artificial insemination. In part, this is because turkeys killed for meat have been bred to grow so large and so fast that they cannot mate naturally.

Workers on breeding farms crudely squeeze and pinch male turkeys’ genitalia to extract their semen, then restrain and roughly inseminate female turkeys with syringes.

Artificial Insemination – Cows

Most cows are impregnated via A.I. To maximize profits and keep them at peak lactation, “producers” re-impregnate dairy cows once a year after a short time to “dry off.”¹



Forcible Insemination of Dairy Cow

Insemination involves an invasive procedure in which farmers insert one arm up to the elbow into the cow’s rectum, while using the other hand to insert an “A.I. gun” deep into the cow’s cervix.

Rectal violation plays no part in natural cow mating, and frequently results in cows violently defecating, as seen in the clip below.

After carrying their babies for nine months, dairy cows endure permanent separation from their calves within hours of birth in order for humans to take the milk intended for them.

Artificial Insemination – Pigs

The majority of sows used to breed pigs for meat are also impregnated via A.I.²

During pig breeding, a chained boar is paraded or dragged through a barn full of restrained sows while workers rub and fondle them in order to provoke sexual excitement. Workers will often even mount the backs of sows to simulate the boar's role, while forcibly inserting pipettes of semen into the sows' vaginas, as seen in the clip below.

Breeding sows spend most of their lives in crates so narrow they can't even turn around. They are impregnated twice a year and their babies are taken from them in the first two to three weeks of life.

References:

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4. Studnitz, Merete, Jensen, Margit Bak et al. 2007. "Why do pigs root and in what will they root? A review on the exploratory behaviour of pigs in relation to environmental enrichment." Applied Animal Behavior Science (107): 183-197.