

May 10th 2008 Clare Druce's talk to the Anglican Society for the Welfare of Animals (ASWA).

There are so many reasons for opposing intensive animal farming! I expect that most of you here are first and foremost concerned with the cruelty involved, and that was certainly the starting point for the campaign I've been involved in.

Not long after the publication of Ruth Harrison's ground-breaking book *Animal Machines* I came upon it, and was appalled. I lent the book to my mother, Violet Spalding, and she too was deeply disturbed. This was back in the late 1960s.

We decided to take action. We'd concentrate on the issue of hens in battery cages. One massive industry was quite enough for we two to fight. When we started our campaign, 96% of all UK laying hens were in cages. I would never claim that we were lone voices. Already, *Compassion in World Farming* was just recently up and running. And there were others.

But for various reasons we decided to "go it alone". With hindsight, I think this was a good decision, since it meant we were free to delve deeply into this one area of animal abuse, and then pass on anything we discovered, for the possible benefit of others.

So we began to write letters, lots of them. We wrote to the Ministry of Agriculture, (now Defra), to companies, and to the Church. Sadly, reactions were cold, dismissive and often dishonest.

Our trademark became a mock battery cage, correct in all measurements, constructed by my father. (For the bars he used grey knitting needles.) We managed

to buy “spent” battery hens, from East End butchers’ shops, and from country markets, and eventually, much later, from battery farms, straight from the cages.

We took our hens walkabout in London, showing them to shocked locals and tourists. The Press was soon interested, and a leading German newspaper ran an account of an early demo, showing a photograph of five of us standing in a human-scale battery cage, in central London.

Partly because of our name, “Chickens’ Lib” (an inspiration of my mother’s) the media was intrigued, and over the years we obtained a great deal of publicity.

In those days nothing daunted us, and we “invaded” the Ministry of Agriculture several times, both in Whitehall and in its regional offices, complete with hens. Often, TV camera crews would accompany us. We dressed up, we sang, we talked our way into horrendous battery sheds, where we saw the most terrible suffering, and bought hens to prove it. Yet try as we may, we could almost never get any help from any official body.

As the years rolled by, we found ourselves battering our heads against endless brick walls. “All was well”, we continued to be assured. *All was under control!* Britain had the best animal welfare laws in the world. Nothing was amiss. Only *we* knew differently.

In January 1981 we took a beautiful wreath of spring flowers to Lambeth Palace, handing it over with a respectful message to the Archbishop of Canterbury, then Dr Runcie. Each flower represented one million battery hens, the estimated UK figure for caged hens then being fifty million. So, fifty flowers in our wreath.

The response we longed for – a strong and public condemnation of the cruel battery system from the Archbishop himself – never came. We repeated this exercise, both at Lambeth Palace and in York, always to no avail.

Behind the scenes, Chickens' Lib (now the Farm Animal Welfare Network) has always been a very small, almost casual organisation. Perhaps a *disorganisation*, you might say. But in being so small, we had an advantage. We could decide on a course of action and carry it out, maybe the very same day. No meetings were required, no voting.

As soon as we moved to Yorkshire, we had invaluable help from Irene Williams, whose wonderful support, both in campaigning tactics and with helping to run the office, will never be forgotten. When Irene could no longer continue, Penny Perkins stepped into the breach. My mother died in 1999, and had not been active for a while. Without Irene and Penny, FAWN could not have carried on.

Mercifully, we've always had a nucleus of loyal and generous supporters, and have had no need to spend time on fund raising. Many supporters came to us after a BBC2 television programme we made in 1975. Terrifying though it was (being live, with no chance of any re-takes) it went very well, and we showed viewers pitiful examples of ex-battery hens.

By way of contrast, we took with us a similar number of healthy, feathered birds. Thank goodness, they all behaved themselves, staying in their respective pens! In the ten minutes allotted to us, we did our best to alert viewers to the horrors of the battery system.

Our TV programme upset the egg industry deeply! An angry article appeared in Poultry World, the weekly industry magazine, sarcastically headed "Mrs Druce and

Mum to the rescue”. The Director General of the British Poultry Federation was livid that we’d been allowed ten whole minutes of unchallenged viewing time. He complained bitterly to the Director General of the BBC.

Eventually, the time came when we simply had to visit a real battery farm. To date, we’d based our knowledge on the written word, and on samples of hens bought from East End butchers, etc.

One hot summer’s day my mother and I set off, with my two young daughters in tow, to visit a huge battery farm we’d heard of, outside Birmingham.

Eventually we found it, and saw with horror the rows of grim battery sheds stretching into the distance. Ironically, the first one had roses trained around its forbidding door.

The owner wouldn’t sell, but he directed us to a smaller farm, owned by a family member. He phoned through, and it was arranged that we could to buy a few end-of-lay hens there.

This so-called farm was much smaller. We parked in the lane and approached the nearest shed, where two people were working. Then we went inside.

The shock was immense. The smell terrible. Flies everywhere. Slurry tanks full to overflowing. The birds, four or five to a cage, had the wretched look of prisoners in a concentration camp. (Years later, Bishop John, our greatly valued patron, when preaching in York Minster, likened broiler chickens to victims of Aushwitz.)

This was no natural disaster, but a man-made horror. Of course, we had to hide our feelings, and calmly stand by while a woman got five frightened hens out of their

cage and put them in the boxes we'd brought. Then we paid for them, a few pence for each little bird, and left.

Back home, we put them gently on the lawn, where they were totally helpless and confused. One tried to peck at the grass, but she toppled over, too weak to stand. Or perhaps she simply couldn't cope with having no bars underfoot to grip onto. This was the first of many, many batches of so-called "spent" hens we were to buy straight from their cages, to rehabilitate, or pass on to trusted supporters.

It's been both heart breaking and heart warming, to watch these victims of the battery system discover that by putting one foot in front of the other, they could actually walk. Memorably, we watched as one little hen who'd spent at least a year in a cage, make a deep, deep nest of straw, less than an hour after we'd installed her in a comfortable pen.

Until then, all her skills, all her instincts had remained locked away, ready and waiting for that miraculous moment. And we thought of the millions of hens, the billions world-wide, all with those same instincts, that same "ancestral memory", never to be fulfilled.

Something else I remember well - watching a group of rescued battery hens in our garden, enjoying sunshine for the very first time. Luxuriating in the feeling, they spread out their damaged, near-featherless wings, soaking up the sun's warmth.

In my children's book *Minnie's Dream* I've attempted to get inside the mind of a hen suffering the hell of life in a battery cage.

As you will know, an EU-wide ban should come into force in 2012, which is marvellous. However, the Directive is seriously flawed. There's something called an enriched cage, and it's not included in the ban.

There are two types of enriched cage – cages to hold four or five hens (so very similar to the “traditional” battery cage) and the colony system, which may hold around fifty hens to a cage, with appropriate floor space per bird.

The colony system is the better one, in that these cages allow more movement, but they’re metal all round, including the floor. In no way do they allow the hens to express behavioural patterns. Enriched or not, both are still cages, and the hens are, in Ruth Harrison’s words, still treated like animal machines.

So what do the regulations say about an enriched cage?

An enriched cage must provide extra space, must include a perch, a nesting box and an area with litter to scratch around in. This description sounds almost promising! The reality is not.

The minimum extra spaced per hen is about the size of a postcard. The nest box is inadequate, and will make daily inspection more difficult to achieve. The perch is bound to be used mainly as a way of getting off the harsh metal flooring, rather than for roosting at night.

And as for litter for scratching! Repeatedly, we have challenged this aspect of the enriched cage regulations, believing it to be impossible to supply litter in the context of a shed holding perhaps sixty thousand hens, maybe many more.

Hens allowed proper litter or soil kick it around, enthusiastically. Supply proper scratching material in a battery unit, and the shed would be full of choking dust, from particles of soil, sand or peat. Workers would soon complain!

The “solution”, or attempt to get around the demands of the EU Directive, seems to be to supply a small patch of “astraturf”.

FAWN has visited the farmer to whom the NFU sends people wishing to see the colony system in action. He puts a small piece of astraturf at one end of the cages, onto which a scattering of chicken feed is applied (mechanically) once a day. Hardly a hen's idea of somewhere to have a dustbath.

On entering this colony battery unit, I thought there'd been some mistake. Surely, this was an ordinary battery shed! The same feeling of stress filled the air, and the rows of cages stretched away into the distance, from floor level to high above our heads.

Already, around 2% of UK hens are kept in enriched cages, and the figure is expanding fast. These cages will, as stated earlier, be legal even after the 2012 battery cage ban. Hopefully, all animal protection societies will oppose the enriched cage.

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In the mid-1980s, and quite by chance, we broke our "battery hens only" rule. Up till then, there'd been very little active campaigning about the massive broiler industry. Broilers, as you will know, are the chickens genetically selected for their meat, not eggs. They're the clinically obese of the chicken world.

When the House of Commons Agriculture Committee investigated intensive farming for its 1981 Report, broilers were totally omitted. MPs had restricted their research to veal calves, battery hens and the pig industry.

I was driving with one of my daughters one hot sultry day, when we noticed a white chicken lying by the roadside. I stopped the car, and discovered the bird was alive.

We guessed she had fallen from a lorry taking her to slaughter. Once back in the car, my daughter held her, and I've never forgotten how the little bird rested her head on my daughter's arm, apparently grateful for some kindness and comfort.

And then we noticed the terrible smell. Once again I drew to a halt, and hurried into a nearby chemist to buy Dettol. Once home, we would clean up the filthy little bird.

A couple of minutes later I was back in the car, to find my daughter deeply shocked. She told me the bird was turning round to her tail end repeatedly, each time coming back with a beak full of maggots. This chicken was being eaten alive.

We took her home and washed her. I won't go into details. Then we went straight to the local vet. As we'd feared, our broiler chicken was beyond help. She was put to sleep.

But this one little bird started me thinking. I'd asked the vet if her terrible condition was unusual, and he came back with this unforgettable reply. "No, not at all unusual, in this hot weather." He visited farms regularly. He knew what he was talking about.

We buried our little "broiler" in the garden, vowing to make a thorough investigation into this disgusting, cruel and fast-expanding industry. Soon we were to discover that millions of broilers have faulty hearts, faulty blood supplies, weak bones and painful joints, all at a few weeks of age. Add to this the misery of ulcerated feet, breasts and hocks, the result of squatting down on dirty and often damp litter. All these conditions are caused by the ruthless genetic selection for fast growth and "meatiness", and filthy living conditions. Yet another man-made horror, and the story

of abuse doesn't end there. But before I describe the suffering of broilers' parents, I must tell you a little story.

Some years ago, we bought a mother bantam hen with eleven tiny chicks. We'd gone to an infamous market, looking for spent battery hens, and came away with something rather different! Until those chicks were several weeks old, the mother still sheltered them under her wings, calling them to her at any sign of danger. She did this at least up to the age at which the modern broiler is slaughtered. Those obese chickens we see on the supermarket shelves are simply grossly oversized chicks.

But to return to the parent stock. In order for the UK to produce eight or nine hundred million chickens a year, there must be an economically viable breeding stock. But obese and unhealthy chickens couldn't breed successfully, indeed many would die even before reaching sexual maturity. The industry's solution? Keep them hungry, slim and nimble, by feeding them severely restricted rations.

I was an expert witness for the defendants in the McDonald's libel case, back in the mid 1990s. To my delight, after Mr Justice Bell had heard the evidence, he described the practice of keeping broiler breeders on restricted rations as "*...a well-planned device for profit at the expense of the suffering of the birds.*"

In time, we included other species of poultry in our campaign. We even strayed into the world of farmed mammals, but poultry has remained our "speciality". From quail to ostriches, we've found horrible abuse. Turkeys and ducks are treated abominably.

Very briefly, turkeys, like broiler chickens, have been genetically selected to grow far heavier than is natural, and the males (stags) suffer greatly. A wild turkey can

fly at 40 mph, yet the modern male turkey especially is ungainly and obese, scarcely able to get his feet off the ground.

The male breeder can weigh as much as a nine-year-old child, yet may be hung up in shackles at slaughter. His unnatural weight and shape mean he can no longer mate naturally. The intensive turkey industry now practises artificial insemination (AI) 100%. Teams of AI operators “stroke” the males’ genitals until semen is ejected, and subsequently the females are inseminated. Both sexes suffer stress and sometimes injury during the AI process.

Millions of ducks are now victims of factory farming. Some years ago we were given eight day-old ducklings, straight from Cherry Valley’s huge hatchery. From day one, they proved to us (if any proof were needed) that ducks are aquatic birds. Water meant everything to our delightful little ducklings. Their extreme excitement at the sight of water, or even at the sound of a trickle of water being poured into their drinking bowl (at first the lid of a jar of instant coffee, to avoid the risk of drowning) was a lesson in itself.

In their natural state, ducklings follow their mothers onto the water from the moment they hatch out, safely waterproofed by their mothers’ oily feathers. In a factory farm, there are no mothers, and certainly no water for swimming (before ducklings grow feathers to replace their down they would in any case drown if allowed water, without the protection of a mother). Intensively reared ducks are slaughtered at around eight weeks of age (ducks can live for many years) and never swim. No use is made of webbed feet, or of bills cleverly designed to sieve out valuable foods from the river or pond. Like battery hens, they’re deprived of all that’s significant to their species.

Game birds attracted our attention too, and we've spread the word about their appalling lives *before* they're shot; far from being "natural" they are amongst the most cruelly treated of our intensively-reared birds.

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As with any crime, the damage spreads out, like the ripples from a pebble thrown into a pond. In any murder case, the victim's family and friends and those of the criminal's too are affected. Similarly, with factory farming, it's not only the animals who suffer. The gross abuse they endure is bound to bring disasters in its wake.

The reckless over-use of antibiotics soon became a major cause of concern to Chickens' Lib, and over the years we've done our best to raise public awareness of this looming danger.

Antibiotics should never be used to prop up systems of animal husbandry so unhealthy that animals are constantly at risk from disease. There's even a name for these diseases – diseases of intensification. If animals are kept crowded together in huge numbers, in filthy conditions, with no fresh air, no sunshine, essentially in slum conditions, and under continuous stress, they pay the price. And so do we.

The bugs that become resistant to the lavishly administered on-farm antibiotics can affect us all. Antibiotic resistance in the human population is now so serious that some physicians fear we are on the brink of an era when these life-saving drugs are no longer of any use. And that is indeed a terrifying thought.

The other knock-on effect of industrialised farming is world food and water shortages. Indeed, starvation for many.

Take water. Baby birds need the warmth of their mothers' wings for shelter. In the rearing sheds there are no mothers, so temperatures must mimic the mother's body warmth. Tiny chicks, ducklings and turkey poults are kept at around 90 degrees for the first week or so, before the temperature is gradually reduced. In the heat of the sheds, intensively-kept poultry drink unnaturally large quantities of water, every day.

To make matters worse, the feed is completely dry, so lots of water is needed, to aid digestion. Cleaning between batches of birds (or "crops", according to the industry) takes water, and the processing stage depends on large quantities too. Adding it all up, the 850 million broilers consumed annually in the UK alone account for a vast quantity of water use.

Imagine the added environmental strain imposed by animal farming in countries where water is scarce, and the human population, or at least the poor amongst it, lacking proper supplies.

In areas of increasing prosperity, for example India and China, intensive farming is expanding fast. Water will be used to keep millions of imprisoned birds and other farmed animals alive. The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation predicts that the use of water for livestock will increase by 50% by 2025.

Australia, well-known for its high consumption of animal products, is now in the grip of its worst drought on record, probably due to climate change. There, almost all laying hens are in cages, all drinking an unnatural amount of water, the sheds unbearably hot under Australia's burning sun.

How much better to use water to tend crops and then feed those crops directly to people. Years ago, Peter Roberts, founder of Compassion in World Farming,

commended, and indeed produced, “direct foods” – he may even have invented the term for eating grains and pulses without first processing them through animals.

In America, 90% of the soya crop is fed to animals. Worldwide, a staggering 97% of soya production goes to livestock, yet soya is a food as high in protein as beef, with none of beef’s health disadvantages.

In many parts of the world, especially in the precious rain forests which help to regulate our climate, trees continue to be cut down, often illegally, to grow more and yet more animal feed, or to make space for short-term, unsustainable grazing land for cattle.

The UK imports large quantities of soya to feed to its imprisoned animals, and at present half the wheat and barley grown in the UK goes for animal feed.

Surely, in a world where millions are starving, it’s nothing short of a crime to process valuable food through farmed animals, thereby wasting its potential food value to humans several times over.

There is no doubt at all that in those areas of the world where meat eating is on the increase intensive farming is spreading like wildfire. It is indeed sad to think the Western world has exported such a time bomb of troubles, worldwide.

Over the last few weeks, news has been coming in from all over the globe of hardship and unrest, following huge increases in the price of staple foods. An expanding world population, the potentially disastrous decision to convert good agricultural land for bio-fuel, and the increase of industrial-style farming are coming together, and spelling disaster. Harvest Festival this coming autumn may well be a time for heart searching, rather than for celebration.

Our environmental footprints involve farmed animals in ways little mentioned until recently! In its excellent 2008 report “Global Warning” CIWF points out that emissions from farmed animals account for a greater percentage of greenhouse gases than all forms of transport put together. Yet the global trend now is towards an increasingly unsustainable dependence on meat, milk and eggs.

Personally, I would love to see the planting of millions more trees, including fruit and nut bearing varieties. The UK still imports around 90% of its timber. Surely, we could grow a lot more of our own, so helping global warming, while supplying sustainable resources and jobs, and to some extent food itself.

It’s often claimed that more and more intensive farming is the answer to feeding the world. But intensive farming’s inherent cruelty, its dependence on drugs, the fact that it takes valuable protein and vital-to-life water out of the mouths of the poor, plus its massive environmental footprint, all deem it no solution at all.

How wonderful if church-goers up and down the land could be heard condemning intensive farming, as an abomination against Creation.

How powerful it would be to hear this message from every pulpit!

Much of our animal-based food production goes on behind closed doors, in a twilight world of suffering. Everyone who cares about animals (including those of the human kind) should put our sick farming methods at the top of their “to do something about” agenda.

For we are fast running out of time. It’s incredibly urgent that the terrible wrong done to our so-called “food animals” is put right. The task ahead of us is massive, but we must not be daunted. The animals are waiting, all over planet Earth, desperate for their freedom.

Clare Druce May 10th 2008

Minny's Dream is available online from www.lulu.com

