

Monday 23rd May, 2016

Think your quail eggs are high-end? The vast majority are factory farmed in atrocious conditions

Compassion in World Farming has carried out a new investigation into the highly unknown quail farming industry in Europe.

Quail is marketed as a 'luxury' product, yet Compassion's investigation uncovered a farming industry that cages over 142 million animals every year, creating suffering on an enormous scale. The majority of these quail are used for meat production and spend their entire lives on overcrowded factory farm floors or in cramped cages – many have as little space as a beer mat.

For the 400,000 egg laying quail in the EU, life is even worse, with more than 90% of them spending their entire lives in tiny barren cages, where they have no space to move and express their natural behaviours.

The investigation shows quail confined in tiny cages of bare wire, causing injuries and stress. When the quail leap – a fear response triggered by workers entering the barns – the cages are so small that they hit their heads on the roof of the barren environment. Foot injuries caused by the wire mesh floors are common, as well as significant feather loss.

A member of Compassion's Investigation Unit said: *"Witnessing such tiny, fragile birds being subjected to the callousness of overcrowded, filthy factory farm conditions was devastating.*

"There was no straw for enrichment, nowhere for the birds to dustbathe and absolutely nowhere for the quail to hide. This must be torture for an animal that would naturally seek cover in undergrowth, forage for insects and dustbathe regularly.

"The lack of care was palpable and widespread. I was stunned. How could anyone stand by and let this happen? How could these little birds be so shamelessly and extensively abused? Quail are the smallest animal to be factory farmed, but this comes at a big price."

These shy and wary birds are the third most caged farm animal in Europe. Despite this, the barren battery cage ban which was introduced through the EU to protect the welfare of laying hens, does not extend to egg laying quail. The investigation shows just how far Europe's quail producers have to go to meet acceptable standards. Unfortunately, the poor welfare conditions uncovered are likely to be the norm across all EU member states in which quail farming is undertaken and not just confined solely to the farms visited.

Higher welfare systems for farming quail do exist, where birds are kept in naturally lit barns with more space to roam and dustbathe, and straw bales to hide in and peck at. Unfortunately though, almost all of the EU's quail production is undertaken in low welfare, barren conditions.

Carol McKenna, Compassion's Director of Campaigns says: *"Quail are seen as a delicacy when in fact the reality couldn't be further from the truth. Sold for a premium price in supermarkets and top restaurants in the UK, Portugal, Spain, and Germany the vast majority of quail are reared in horrendous conditions.*

"It is unacceptable that the EU has banned the keeping of hens in barren battery cages while still permitting quail to be kept in similar cages. The farming of quail in cages is cruel and must be phased out."

During the winter of 2015/16 investigators visited factory farms in four Member States: Italy, France, Portugal and Greece. Of these countries, three of them (Italy, France and Portugal) are amongst the top four EU quail-producing nations.

This investigation is the first to have gained footage from multiple farms of both egg-layers, meat birds, cage manufacturers and the slaughter process, documenting a substantial cross-section of the industry as a whole.

Ends

Notes to Editor

Please watch our investigation film, [here](#)

Compassion in World Farming was founded in 1967 by a British dairy farmer who became horrified at the development of intensive factory farming. Today Compassion is the leading farm animal welfare organisation dedicated to ending factory farming and achieving humane and sustainable food. With headquarters in the UK, we have offices across Europe in the US, China and South Africa.

To find out more about Compassion in World Farming visit: www.ciwf.org

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