

# Big Birds, Big Cruelty

A guide to campaigning about intensive turkey farming in Australia



[www.bigbirdsbigcruelty.org](http://www.bigbirdsbigcruelty.org)



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All information in this toolkit has been drawn from a significant report on intensive turkey farming in Australia. For a copy of this report please visit:  
[www.bigbirdsbigcruelty.org/Campaignmaterials](http://www.bigbirdsbigcruelty.org/Campaignmaterials)

## INTENSIVE TURKEY FARMING IN AUSTRALIA: THE FACTS

*This is an activist toolkit to assist concerned people who may wish to campaign against the cruelty inherent in the factory farming of turkeys in Australia. The following information presents some key problems of intensive turkey farming in Australia. The next section of the toolkit contains some tips on how to campaign.*

### CONFINEMENT

- Commercially raised turkeys spend their entire lives in crowded grow-out sheds with thousands of other birds. Between three to five million turkeys are killed yearly in Australia for meat. This number is, however, rising due to increased popularity as turkey meat is considered a healthy dietary option.
- On average, up to 14,000 turkeys are placed in a shed at once. This equates to six birds per square metre of space. Turkeys have 46kg/m<sup>2</sup> of floor space which equates, on average, to an area the size of an A3 sheet of paper each. Turkeys grow to be much bigger than chickens, resulting in extremely cramped conditions for the duration of their life.

### MUTILATION

- Stress and frustration are endemic in these conditions and turkeys can resort to neurotic behaviour such as feather plucking and even cannibalism. Farmers often manage cannibalism by amputating a portion of the turkeys' beaks (debeaking).
- The Model Code of Practice for Poultry also allows the snood (skin drooping from the forehead), and the terminal segment of each inward pointing toe in breeding males to be cut off.
- These surgical procedures are carried out when the turkeys are only a few days old, without anaesthetic and with no follow-up care for pain or infection. If this was carried out on a cat or dog it would be illegal.



A turkey factory farm in Australia (8–9 week-old turkeys).



A rescued turkey poul from a factory farm in Australia. The poul has been debeaked and has an injured head (scab) and an injured eye.

## ARTIFICIAL LIGHTING

- In the sheds turkeys are forced to live in artificial fluorescent lighting which is used to distort their normal sleeping and feeding patterns in order to make them put on weight faster, perpetuating growth and susceptibility to metabolic diseases and circulatory problems.
- As slaughter time (approximately three months of age) approaches, the birds are exposed to fluorescent light for continuous periods. This exposure causes extreme stress, as the birds suffer ongoing sleep deprivation.
- Lower light levels may also often be used to reduce the aggression that results from the ongoing stress of the crowded conditions the birds are kept in.

## HEALTH

- By having large numbers of birds crammed together, factory farms create terrific incubators for disease. The stress of factory farm conditions weakens animals' immune systems. The sheds are not cleaned out from birth to slaughter which creates a build-up of ammonia.
- The poor air quality can cause respiratory and eye diseases and contribute to reduced food intake causing weight loss and lameness. Bacterial infections and respiratory disorders are common problems.
- The ammonia build-up causes turkeys to develop burns on their legs and breasts. Turkeys will often develop wounds which become infected after being covered in excrement.
- The lack of sunlight and fresh air facilitates the spread of bacteria and infection.
- As turkeys are bred to put on as much weight as possible in the shortest length of time they become susceptible to heart disease and experience difficulty in supporting their overweight bodies. They suffer painful swollen joints, obesity, crippled legs and feet and degeneration of the hip joints.
- In a typical turkey factory farm there are thousands of lame and ill birds who are unable to reach food and water and end up dying of starvation.



Australian factory-farmed turkeys living in accumulated waste. The foreground shows sick and injured birds experiencing difficulties standing.

## A GENETICALLY ALTERED BIRD

- Today's commercially raised turkeys have been so genetically altered they are often barely able to walk. Male and female turkeys are nearly twice the size of their wild counterparts. For example, a female wild turkey (hen) typically weighs approximately 4 kg, but domesticated hens can weigh 8kg or more. A wild male turkey (tom) can weigh up to 9 kg, whereas a domesticated tom weighs up to 17kg (and sometimes even more). Breeder turkeys can weigh up to 30kg.
- As a result turkeys suffer painful health problems such as crippled legs and swollen joints. On average, turkeys are slaughtered at approximately 10–12 weeks, after having gained about 1kg a week.

*One industry expert reports:*

*'If a 3kg human baby grew at the same rate as today's factory farmed turkey grows, when the baby reached 18 weeks, it would weigh approximately 227 kg'*

## ARTIFICIAL INSEMINATION

- Male turkeys are so big they are unable to perform natural behaviours such as mating. Instead, artificial insemination is practised.
- The male turkeys (toms) are 'milked'. A worker pins the turkey down in a bent-over position. The worker then grabs the turkey's penis, stroking and masturbating until the tom ejaculates.

*According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, this variety of bird used in factory farms would become extinct in just one generation without artificial insemination performed by humans.*

- The semen is milked, collected, and laced with extenders and antibiotics before being quickly sent over to the hen house. This semen is injected via syringe into the female turkey. The female turkeys are rushed along and the treatment or handling deteriorates as the workers become tired, frustrated and lose concentration, causing the turkeys to suffer increased pain and trauma.



One of the largest turkey producers in Australia: A turkey factory farm in Australia (Ingham's).

## TRANSPORTATION & SLAUGHTERHOUSE TRAUMA

- At the end of the growing period workers usually walk the birds to the edge of the shed, herd them up a loader (conveyor belt) and pack them into crates. During this process the birds can suffer injuries such as severe bruising, amputated toes, severe bleeding and a significant number will die before they reach the slaughterhouse.
- Once the birds have been stuffed into crates they are driven in a truck to the slaughterhouse. After the journey birds are tired, thirsty, hungry and stressed. Once inside the slaughterhouse, fully conscious birds are hung by their weak and crippled legs from metal shackles on a moving rail.
- They then proceed through an electrified stunning tank where their heads are put into an electrified bath of water which immobilizes them but does not render them unconscious. They often bend their necks in order to avoid the tank.
- Their throats are then cut by a blade, and they are defeathered in a scalding tank. The turkeys may curve their necks to avoid the blade and proceed to the scalding tank to be burnt alive in boiling water.

## ANTIBIOTICS

- Antibiotics are used to treat bacterial infections as disease and infections are common when large numbers of birds are kept in close confinement for extended periods of time. The birds may be fed antibiotics even if they are not sick to reduce the risk of outbreaks of disease. Doses are continuously fed to the turkeys in their production cycle via their feed. Antibiotics are also used to assist maximum growth in the birds.

*Laura Sayre, an expert on organic farming argues that, the more antibiotics used in animals for food, the more antibiotic-resistant bacteria and viruses (in humans) will become. More antibiotic resistance means more complications, more blood infections and higher human mortality.*

- The poultry industry claims that antibiotic residue in meat does not harm humans. Other research argues that antibiotics in animals lead to resistant bacteria and that these bacteria or their genes are passed onto humans via the food chain.

## TURKEYS

- Turkeys are beings that experience similar emotional states to humans, including fear, anxiety, frustration, boredom, pleasure and enjoyment. They are alert, sensitive and aware.
- Jeffery Masson (author of 'The Face On Your Plate') argues that despite the popular myth about turkeys being stupid, they actually recognise and remember hundreds of individual flock members.
- Turkeys are social, sensitive creatures capable of feeling joy and pain, much like one's cat or dog.

*Karen Davis from United Poultry Concerns, who has studied turkeys extensively, explains that when a factory farmed turkey has a convulsive heart attack, it can cause other birds around them to die indicating a strong sensibility in these birds.*



# WAYS TO CAMPAIGN

*This next section will describe various ways in which you can campaign about turkeys in factory farms. When using any of the following methods be clear about what you want to achieve.*

## DISCUSSION

Engage in active discussion about the issues by talking to family, friends and friends of friends. You can contact talk back radio or your local council. Discussion is vital as it allows the message to be networked amongst the community. Discussion also opens up the possibility of enabling others to learn and understand more about the cause.

## WRITE A LETTER

Write a letter to your local supermarket, fast food outlet, restaurant or café, local newspaper, your local member of parliament, or the minister responsible for animal welfare in your state. A letter to the editor of your local newspaper can reach thousands of people in your community. By writing a letter to the supermarket and similar places you are informing them of the issues and raising awareness about factory farmed turkeys. Sample letters are available on the website.



## TIPS

- Write and send letters when turkeys are in the news or are particularly popular, such as Christmas in July, Thanksgiving and Christmas.
- You don't have to be a great writer. Just keep it short, simple, to the point, then ask someone to proof read it and check the grammar and spelling.
- Do your research. Ensure you have enough knowledge about the issues you want to discuss. Websites and library material are useful. This toolkit includes key facts about the cruelty issues as a starting point.
- Avoid using excessively emotional language. It is ok to engage in some emotion driven language but ensure you are also sticking to factual based research.
- Focus on only one or two issues. It is better if a letter is concise and by focusing on too many topics you may not 'bring home' your central point.
- Write to your local newspaper. Link your letter to other letters or stories that have recently been published in the same newspaper – this will increase the likelihood of having it published.
- When writing to your local Member of Parliament or to the minister responsible for animal welfare ask them to outlaw factory farming of turkeys. Encourage as many people as possible to write letters – politicians may not read letters but they do count them!
- When you write to a supermarket or café, for example, you could also encourage them to offer vegan options to encourage animal-friendly and cruelty-free food choices.

## SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES

Social networking sites such as Facebook, MySpace and Twitter are great ways to spread the word about factory farming of turkeys, raising awareness and allowing your message to be networked locally, nationally and internationally.



## FACEBOOK

Facebook can be a highly effective way to spread the word about factory farmed turkeys. Creating a page and encouraging members to join is a very effective way of sharing information. Each member has a 'news feed' that announces group activity to friends, enabling a message to be spread quickly to a large number of people.

This website link has information on how to develop a Facebook page for a campaign: <http://www.digiactive.org/category/toolkit/online-social-networks>

### TIPS

- Understand your goals for the group. Putting these goals into clear and concise words at the top of the page is vital to ensure that your message encourages others to join the group.
- Invite your Facebook friends and friends of friends to join in order to develop a strong network.

- Encourage communication via the page to stimulate ongoing discussion about the cause (factory farmed turkeys). This will also help to involve other people in spreading the word to friends and family.
- Generate media support. If there is going to be an event or protest advertise it via the Facebook page and send out media releases to encourage media coverage.

## MYSPACE

Here is a website link showing you how to create a MySpace page: [http://www.ehow.com/video\\_4432587\\_start-myspace-account.html](http://www.ehow.com/video_4432587_start-myspace-account.html)

## TWITTER

Here is a website explaining how to use Twitter: <http://www.komarketingassociates.com/blog/the-most-basic-%E2%80%99Chow-to-start-in-twitter%E2%80%99D-tutorial-ever/>

- With Twitter, begin your journey by following other interesting twitter accounts. In this case it would be useful to find others interested in the same cause (as a beginning point).
- Engage in frequent conversations (tweets) to find your own voice and show others what you care about. This will enable your message to be spread quickly.
- Include photos or videos in your 'tweets'.



## TABLING

Tabling events (stalls) are effective ways to engage and educate people about factory farm abuse. Acting as an information source and presenting a wide range of literature regarding factory farmed turkeys will make people who are unaware more familiar with the issues.

### TIPS

- Pick a location that has a good flow of people. Be aware of your target audience and pick a location where they are likely to be. For example, if you want to target students at a university the peak time would be during the lunch period.
- Libraries, universities and festivals are great places to set up a table. However, it is important to obtain permission from authorities such as managers, storeowners, the university campus, local council or government.
- Pick a good time to set up a table. For example, there is a high demand for turkeys prior to Christmas, so ensure tabling events are taking place around this period.
- Ensure you have enough literature and visuals (such as effective photos and images) to attract audience attention and increase awareness.
- Have a letter or petition people can sign, and some items such as badges, patches, t-towels, cards, stickers, t-shirts to sell or give away. Around Christmas time it would be good to have pro-turkey Christmas cards and recipes for non-turkey Christmas meals.

## LEAFLETING

Leafleting can be an effective way to reach wider audience that might not ever approach a stall. Handing out literature and having one on one conversations are very influential ways of raising awareness.

### TIPS

- Be prepared. Pick an appropriate audience, time, and place and ensure you have enough leaflets to hand out. Turkey meat is particularly popular at Christmas, so leafleting during this period is important.
- Libraries, universities, festivals, exhibitions, sports games and concerts are great places to leaflet. Letterboxing and putting leaflets on notice boards and in cafes etc around your neighbourhood can also be effective.
- Smile and put on a friendly face. Ensure you know some facts and be prepared to engage in discussion with people who seem interested.
- Do not become involved in arguments or long discussions as will you miss the opportunity to engage others.



## USE VISUALS

Visuals in various forms can be very effective in getting the message out there.

### TIPS

- Wear a T-shirt
- Display stickers
- When stalls or tabling events are held ensure you have posters of turkeys, or images on a computer screen, to engage the public. You could also create papier mache 'turkeys' and put them on A3-sized pieces of paper to capture the interests of passers-by.

## DEMONSTRATIONS

A demonstration is an effective way to gain publicity to expose factory farming of turkeys to a wide audience. You do not need hundreds of people involved in the demonstration to make it successful. With some planning, a dozen people and media attention you can reach hundreds or thousands of people to raise awareness about factory farmed turkeys.



### TIPS

- Demonstrations are more effective if you are noticed, so plan your protest for a time and place that will ensure maximum exposure, such as lunch hour on a busy week day.
- Depending on where you want to have your demonstration you may need to obtain permission. Establish where it is legal to hold a demonstration by contacting your local council or relevant government department, and fill out an application for a permit if necessary. Contact authorities to let them know your plans.
- Have a clear message for your demonstration. Work out why you are doing the demonstration and what message you want to send to the public and the media. Keep it focused.
- Be creative. You can organise a 'street stunt' or a 'flash mob' rather than a traditional demonstration. Ensure there is some kind of visual symbol and give reasons for your street action. When planning this event ensure you know how many attendees there are likely to be. If you can't be sure of large numbers it is wiser to plan a 'stunt' that only requires a small number of participants that will still attract media attention.
- Make sure you have signs that indicate the purpose of the demonstration. They need to have big and bold pictures, photos and messages that are clear enough for the media and people passing by to read them. Humour works well.
- Contact the media at least a day before your demonstration. Write a succinct media release with a clear message and send it to all the major media outlets in your area. Ensure you have a designated spokesperson who can deliver a statement about the purpose of your demonstration. Be ready to answer questions and ensure you understand the topic thoroughly.

Here is a link on how to write a media release:

<http://www.flyingsolo.com.au/marketing/public-relations-pr/how-to-write-a-media-release>

## USE THE MEDIA

- Make your campaign action newsworthy.
- Contact journalists and radio/TV stations (by phone or email) and 'sell' your story.
- Write and practise what you will say to journalists before contacting them.
- Give adequate notice of any campaign action you are planning.
- Maintain an up-to-date list of media contacts.



## RESOURCES AVAILABLE

- A5 leaflet
- A4 fact sheet
- Stickers
- Posters
- T-shirts
- Photos of factory farmed turkeys (in Australia).
- 4-minute documentary with footage about factory farming of turkeys (in Australia).
- University report on factory farming of turkeys in Australia.

### Further reading:

Karen Davis, *More than a meal: The turkey in History, Myth, Ritual and Reality*. New York, (2001).

### For more information contact:

bigbirdsbigcruelty@gmail.com or visit  
[www.bigbirdsbigcruelty.org](http://www.bigbirdsbigcruelty.org)

## GLOSSARY

**Ammonia:** A strong gas with a pungent smell caused by a build-up of faecal matter. In high concentrations ammonia fumes can damage eyes and cause extreme pain.

**Artificial Insemination:** Artificial insemination, or AI, is the process by which sperm is placed into the reproductive tract of a female for the purpose of impregnating the female by means other than sexual intercourse.

**Factory Farming:** Raising livestock in confinement, with a high stocking density (thousands of animals in a strictly limited space). The farm operates as factories and restrict or prevent behaviors. The aim of the operation is to produce as many eggs, or as much meat or milk as possible.

**Genetic Manipulation:** Breeding and selection of birds for specific purposes, for example, producing meat or offspring. Controlled breeding for profitable inherited characteristics. This breeding is manipulated by humans rather than allowed to occur naturally.

**Hen:** Female Turkey

**Poult:** A young turkey

**Tom:** Male Turkey



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