

The Welfare of Ducks and Geese in Foie Gras Production



**A Summary of the
Scientific and Empirical Evidence
A Farm Sanctuary Report**

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Introduction

Foie gras, a French term meaning "fatty liver," is produced by force-feeding ducks and geese large amounts of meal that enlarges their livers up to 10 times the normal size. In medical terms, ducks and geese raised for foie gras suffer from hepatic lipidosi, a pathologically enlarged, physiologically impaired liver.

Foie gras was traditionally produced from geese, but the trend in recent years has been toward using ducks, who require less space to house and are slaughtered younger. Only ducks are currently being used in the US to make foie gras. The species of duck used in foie gras production is a hybrid between the Muscovy duck (*Carina moschata*) and the domestic duck (*Anas platyrhynchos*). A male Muscovy duck, which is nearly twice the size of a female Muscovy, is crossed with a domestic female duck such as the Pekin, and the result is a sterile hybrid called the Mulard duck. Male Mulard ducks are used for foie gras production, while the females are either killed at birth or raised and slaughtered for meat consumption.



During the force-feeding process, the duck is grabbed by the neck, and a metal or plastic tube 8 to 12 inches long is inserted down the esophagus. The desired amount of high fat, high carbohydrate corn mash is pushed through the tube and into the duck's esophagus by either a manual or a pneumatic pump. The amount of food the birds are forced to ingest is far greater than what they would eat voluntarily. In fact, by the end of the force-feeding period, each ten-pound duck is forced to consume 400 to 500 grams of food a day, approximately one pound of a corn-and-oil mixture (Beck et al, 1996, p. 45). This is an amount that, for a 175-pound person, would be equivalent to 44 pounds of pasta per day (Gazetta Ufficiale, 2001). The force-feeding process is repeated 2-3 times a day for up to one month. In order to facilitate the force-feeding process for the farm workers, the ducks are either confined in groups in small pens, or they are restrained in individual cages so small the birds can't turn around or stretch their wings.

In the US, foie gras is produced by two companies - Hudson Valley Foie Gras in New York State and Sonoma Foie Gras in California. The New York and California operations force-feed and slaughter approximately 350,000 and 55,000 ducks each year, respectively (Moore, 2003; Greenhouse, 2001).

Documentation of animal welfare problems associated with the production of foie gras has been gathered through scientific study and first-hand evidence obtained from foie gras operations. Such documentation convinced the Supreme Court of Israel to rule, in August 2003, that the force-feeding of ducks and geese in that country violates the nation's animal cruelty law (BBC News, 2003; Supreme Court of Israel, 2003). In addition, at least 7 other countries either prohibit the practice outright or consider it a violation of anti-cruelty laws, according to Professor Paul Waldau of the Center for Animals and Public Policy at Tufts University (cited in Brown, 2003).

Natural Behavior of Ducks and Geese

The foie gras industry has justified the practice of force-feeding by claiming that it takes advantage of a bird's anatomical abilities, mimicking the natural tendency of birds to overeat in preparation for

migrating. This is a specious argument for several reasons.

First, while some geese and ducks do put on fat stores for migration, the Muscovy duck is a tropical bird that does not migrate in the wild. The Pekin duck (which the Muscovy is crossed with to produce the Mulard duck commonly used in foie gras production) is completely domesticated and incapable of flying. Therefore, "whilst the domestic goose might well be adapted to store food before migration, it is less likely that a cross between the domestic duck and the Muscovy duck, the Mulard, has such a potential for food" (SCAHAW, 1998, p. 26).

Second, under no circumstances would a bird gorge himself to the extent that occurs in force-feeding; with a liver swollen to 10 times its normal size a duck is barely able to walk, much less fly a long distance. Furthermore, while "under natural conditions, before migration, one can observe with certain migratory birds, a slight accumulation of fat in the peri-lobular hepatocytes. . . This accumulation is in the form of micro-vacuoles and do not distend the cell. It is physiological and is not associated with symptoms of cellular or animal suffering. In the case of foie gras, on the other hand . . . one observes the establishment of fatty degeneration (Beck et al, 1996, p. 21). The health of ducks and geese used in foie gras production is compromised to such a great degree that the birds would die if they weren't slaughtered after being subjected to the process for just a few weeks.

Finally, the diet forced upon birds raised for foie gras--mainly a mixture of corn, oil, and salt-- is severely deficient in several ways and is destined to produce physiological suffering. According to one veterinarian,

The food given to waterfowl does not suit the physiological needs of the species. It forms an unbalanced diet intended to artificially induce hepatic lipidosis. If it were given under natural conditions, the birds would refuse it. Even if it were given in normal quantities, the birds could not survive due to the deficiencies that it would lead to in the long term (Beck, 2004).

Ducks and geese are naturally omnivorous, and in the wild these animals would spend most of their active time exploring food sources and participating in actual foraging behaviors such as food manipulation and ingestion. Muscovy ducks are most active at dawn and dusk when they forage, while the middle of the day and nights are spent resting in tree branches close to water. Geese forage both on land and in the water, eating aquatic plants, insects, mollusks and other small animals. Most of the goose's daylight hours are spent foraging. Both ducks and geese are considered to be social animals. Ducks spend a large part of their time in groups, and geese form lifelong pairs to raise their young.



In 1998 the European Union requested that its Scientific Committee on Animal Health and Animal Welfare (hereafter referred to as "SCAHAW") produce a report on the animal welfare aspects of the production of foie gras using ducks and geese. Members of the SCAHAW foie gras working group included a dozen highly-regarded professors of veterinary medicine and agricultural scientists from across Europe. After a thorough investigation, SCAHAW concluded that force-feeding birds to produce foie gras should be discouraged on humane grounds. SCAHAW and others have found that methods used in foie gras production negatively impact the birds' physical and psychological welfare (SCAHAW, 1998, p.65).

Behavioral and Psychological Disorders

Confinement in a barren environment that prevents the performance of species-specific activities can cause frustration, stress, and other behavioral problems for ducks and geese raised for foie gras. According to veterinarians in the 1996 Belgian report,

[T]here is absolutely no doubt, that force-feeding subjects them to physiological and behavioural suffering which dramatically reduces their well-being. This is why the assertion that these animals would not produce foie gras (and in such quantity) if they were maltreated seems to us, untenable. On the contrary, force-feeding constitutes a reprehensible practice from an ethical point of view (Beck et al, 1996, p. 6).

Depression and Frustration

Some foie gras operations, including Sonoma Foie Gras in California, keep the ducks or geese in near darkness for the 2-4 week force-feeding period, in an attempt to keep the birds calm (Brown, 2003; Moore, 2003). This prevents normal exploratory behavior, which results in the birds not receiving adequate exercise (SCAHAW, 1998, p. 35). Confinement, as well as reduced light levels, also affects the birds' abilities to interact socially in a normal manner (SCAHAW, 1998, p. 35). Ducks who are housed in individual cages during the force-feeding period have their social instincts completely thwarted. Despite the fact that the Council of Europe specifically recommends that "ducks shall not be kept in individual cages" (Standing Committee, 1999), as of 1998, 80% of force-fed ducks were confined in individual cages (SCAHAW, 1998, p. 55), described as "45-50 centimeters long, 20-21 centimeters wide, and 27-33 centimeters high (a shoe box in which they can hardly turn around)" (Beck, 2004).

Confined so tightly in these cages, "[t]he animals cannot move about normally and they are aggravated or hurt by the grills (notably when the neck, progressively deplumed, goes outside of the cage). When they become too large, the animals can even put their heads outside of the cage. Obviously it is out of the question that the birds can fly, as they can barely move" (Beck et al, 1996, p. 44).

The physical and psychological effects of confinement, force-feeding, and insufficient access to water also impact normal preening behavior (SCAHAW, 1998, p. 64). A veterinarian who examined ducks from the California foie gras operation, as well as another vet who witnessed videotape taken from the farm, noted the ducks to be heavily soiled indicating they had been denied adequate access to water for bathing, a strongly motivated behavior among waterfowl (Levine, 2003; Siperstein-Cook, 2003).

The impulse to bathe and immerse themselves in water is so strong, that in one experiment, ducks lifted the heaviest weights in order to gain access to a pen with water at least as often as they would lift the weights in order to access a pen with food in it (SCAHAW, 1998, p. 31). In accordance with this, the guidelines of the European Council state:

Access to an outside run and water for bathing are necessary for ducks, as water birds, to fulfill their biological requirements. Where such access is not possible, the ducks must be provided with water facilities sufficient in number and so designed to allow water to cover the head and be taken up by the beak so that the duck can shake water over the body without difficulty. The ducks should be allowed to dip their heads under water (Standing Committee, 1999).

On foie gras farms, however, access to sufficient water is completely denied. Eyewitness accounts

from an investigation of the California farm noted the ducks' water supply was low and of poor quality (Parme, 2003; Bott, 2003). At the New York farm, eyewitnesses noted that the ducks' water supply was often frozen over, completely denying them access to any water (Blum SJ, 2004; Shapiro, 2004).

For ducks and geese living this way deprived of adequate access to water, "it is impossible for them to swim or clean their plumage, which remains dehydrated because the natural lubrication of the feathers cannot take place." (Beck et al, 1996, p. 45).

Stress

In reference to the tremendous stress endured by foie gras ducks, Dr. Christine Nichol, a Professor of Animal Welfare at the School of Veterinary Science at the University of Bristol, states:



My view on the production of foie gras is clear and supported by biological evidence. This practice causes unacceptable suffering to these animals. . . It causes pain during and as

a consequence of the force feeding, feelings of malaise as the body struggles to cope with extreme nutrient imbalance and distress caused by loss of control over the birds' most basic homeostatic regulation mechanism as their hunger control system is over-ridden (Nichol, 2004).

Evidence that force-feeding is stressful to ducks and geese comes mainly from observations made by animal health and welfare experts at foie gras farms. Anyone who has watched ducks and geese being hand-fed by members of the public at city parks knows that these birds usually react positively to the feeding experience. However, when members of the SCAHAW working group on foie gras observed force-feeding they found that ducks and geese avoided the person performing the procedure. At the conclusion of the procedure, even though the birds were panting and unable to move well, they still attempted to get away from the worker who had force-fed them. The scientists concluded that the force-feeding procedure was aversive to ducks and geese (SCAHAW, 1998, p. 33).

This conclusion is validated by the results of a study conducted by a team of French scientists. The researchers monitored two groups of ducks, one force-fed in a feeding pen and the other allowed to eat the same amount of food ad libitum in the same feeding pen. The control group learned to leave their living pen without being driven to go to the feeding pen to eat. The force-fed ducks, however, did not willingly leave the living pen to go to the feeding pen, and when they were driven, some balked and refused to enter the feeding pen (unpublished research cited in SCAHAW, 1998, p. 33).

Regarding the psychological stresses suffered by force-fed birds, ethologist Renee Zayan (2001) reports that "the worst suffering in terms of social needs resides in the abusive use of the ethological process of filial impregnation extremely characteristic of ducks and geese." He explains that this 'filial impregnation' (imprinting) will be directed towards whatever a young bird perceives as his source of food, water, and warmth. In factory-farmed ducks, this is most often the human farmer. This might explain why a force-fed duck may initially show little fear of the person performing the force-feeding. However, he explains, that as the force feeding continues, ducks show a "flight response" and

[T]he force feeder has to sometimes pursue and catch the animals, or at the very least restrain them

manually to prevent their flight, in such a way that the animals are going to suffer an intense emotional conflict between their tendency to be social towards humans and their tendency towards mistrust then of fear towards the force-feeder. This anxiety will increase with the repetition of the cause of the stress and the pain associated with the procedure of force-feeding (Beck et al, 1996, p. 46).

Finally, witnesses at Hudson Foie Gras in New York have described ducks confined in individual cages, barely larger than their bodies, who "appeared to have developed neurotic conditions due to their intense confinement and isolation" (Shapiro, 2004).

Physical Disorders

Bronchial obstruction, fibrosis of the liver, enterotoxemia, and enteritis are afflictions that can threaten force-fed birds, according to a French industry manual. The same manual also describes various painful injuries to the esophagus, including hemorrhagic inflammation and perforations of the esophagus, which can be compounded by the subsequent growth of opportunistic germs and fungal growth (Banon et al, 1989).



According to the SCAHAW report, impaired animal health can be determined by "clinical signs of disease and anatomical, physiological and immunological signs that the individual is having difficulty coping with its environment or failing to cope" (SCAHAW, 1998, p. 3). The occurrence of injury is also an indicator of poor animal welfare. In the case of foie gras production, there are a number of signs that force-feeding and confinement are detrimental to animal health and welfare. Among the physical problems that result from force-feeding are impaired mobility, respiratory difficulties, injuries, liver damage and other metabolic disorders, and increased mortality.

French veterinarian Dr. Yvan Beck points out that foie gras production violates the European Council's directive that "no animal may be fed in a way that results in unnecessary suffering or harm." He goes so far as to suggest that foie gras producers place a warning label on their product stating that "[f]oie gras is a sick organ. Its production violates European standards for the protection of farm animals" (Beck, 2004).

Impaired Mobility

Investigations into the condition of ducks raised in foie gras operations have repeatedly found birds unable to stand or walk normally (Bott, 2003; Huemer, 2003; Parme, 2003). This is likely a result of their restricted movement, metabolic disorders, and other illnesses resulting from the way they are being raised. A veterinarian viewing videotape taken of the Sonoma Foie Gras farm noted that several of the ducks were limping (Levine, 2003). Upon examining ducks from a foie gras farm, Dr. Siperstein-Cook reported that the ducks "could barely stand and walked with difficulty." She explained that the birds' excessively enlarged livers "push the legs out laterally, making it difficult for the bird to walk properly" (Siperstein-Cook, 2003).

Veterinarians conducting necropsies on ducks from the California foie gras operation noted various foot and leg disorders, which would have compromised the birds' ability to walk. One vet observed that ducks kept on wire surfaces, as is usually the case in foie gras production, "will develop foot sores that lead to the infection called bumblefoot. This is a painful condition that can progress into

the joint of the foot causing pain and difficulty walking" (Siperstein-Cook, 2003). Another veterinarian who examined ducks from the California foie gras facility noted that "[t]he legs of both ducks also appeared swollen, and the bottoms of the feet were encrusted with ulcerated calluses. It appeared that the act of walking (or attempted walking) caused the ducks considerable pain, and they therefore avoided it when possible" (Feldman, 2003).



In the investigation of French foie gras operations, members of the SCAHAW working group found some birds unable to stand and noted that the birds seemed to spend most of their time sitting rather than standing. Their group reported that the legs of the force-fed animals were pushed outwards, away from the mid-line of the body so that the legs could not be held vertically when the birds were standing or walking. They concluded that it was caused by the abnormal expansion of the liver and severely impaired the birds' natural gait and ability to walk. The experts also assumed that the weight of the hypertrophied livers must place increased force on the birds' leg joints (SCAHAW, 1998, p. 34).

Respiratory Difficulties

A New York Times reporter permitted to observe force-feeding procedures at Sonoma Foie Gras saw ducks "so fat they moved little and panted" (Brown, 2003). Other eyewitness accounts of ducks in foie gras production as well as veterinary examinations of such ducks have also documented panting and other breathing problems (Blum SJ, 2004; Bott, 2003; Huemer, 2003; Shapiro, 2004; Siperstein-Cook, 2003). Respiratory difficulties are common among ducks and geese raised for foie gras due, because as the force-feeding process continues,

the liver reaches a very large size, distends the peritoneum and occupies a place normally reserved for other organs, notably air sacs. This leads to respiratory difficulties, which have still not yet been detected because the animals, shut into narrow cages, cannot make any muscular effort, and above all have enormous difficulties in controlling their temperature. There is also vessel compression which develops into circulatory problems (Beck et al, 1996, p. 24-25).

Dr. Emily Levine, a veterinarian and expert in animal behavior, viewed a videotape of ducks at the California foie gras operation and made the following observation: "I saw several birds that were exhibiting clinical signs of respiratory difficulty and or distress (panting, open mouth breathing, distinct abdominal effort to breathe, and tail bobbing). In the case of the Foie Gras birds, the respiratory difficulty is likely to be due to the enlarged liver, which can compress the air sacs, making breathing difficult in general and certainly during times of stress" (Levine, 2003).

Injuries

According to SCAHAW, a high percentage of ducks force-fed in individual cages are noted to have lesions of the sternum and bone fractures at slaughter (1998, p. 46). Eyewitnesses at Hudson Valley Foie Gras in New York, where thousands of ducks are kept in individual cages, reported seeing ducks whose wings had been bloodied from scraping against the sides of their cages (Blum SJ, 2004; Shapiro, 2004), as well as empty cages that appeared to be stained with blood (Blum SJ, 2004).

The SCAHAW animal welfare experts observed that the risk of damage to stretched tissue in the lower part of the esophagus is greater than that to normal tissue, although the problem has not been specifically studied in force-fed ducks and geese. SCAHAW also noted that insertion and removal of the feeding pipe could cause injury to the pharynx and esophagus. The report states: "Most injuries caused by tissue damage during handling or tube insertion would result in pain. The oropharyngeal area is particularly sensitive and is physiologically adapted to perform a gag reflex in order to prevent fluids entering the trachea. Force-feeding will have to overcome this reflex and hence the birds may initially find this distressing and injury may result" (SCAHAW, 1998, p. 35).

Dr. Ian Duncan, a poultry expert at the University of Guelph, explains that "the regular insertion of a feeding tube down the esophagus several times a day will inevitably lead to damage of the esophagus. When the esophagus becomes damaged, then the painfulness of every force feeding episode will be exacerbated" (Duncan, 2004).

Possible esophageal injuries are further described by Dr. Siperstein-Cook, who states that "the esophagus of force-fed ducks exhibit scarring from the repeated trauma from the wide metal tubes that are pushed down the esophagus during the force-feeding process. Rough handling by the workers doing the force-feeding would exacerbate this trauma to the mucosal surface of the esophagus" (Siperstein-Cook, 2003).

Force-feeding can also lead to starvation if the feed becomes impacted in the esophagus and does not pass through the ducks' digestive system. A necropsy of a duck from Sonoma Foie Gras in California found evidence of severe impaction of the esophagus as well as esophageal lesions in which bacterial and yeast growth had proliferated (Feldman, 2003).

The opportunistic growth of fungus and bacteria in injured tissues is not uncommon, as "Candida or thrush principally attacks the esophagus and the crop. . . Candida albicans is an opportunist which takes advantage of any kind of lesion of the esophagus or weakness in general health to spread" (Beck et al 1996, p. 35).

Necropsies performed on ducks from New York's Hudson Valley Foie Gras determined that some of the birds had died of aspiration pneumonia—a painful condition that results from food being pushed into the birds' lungs during the force-feeding process (Kincaid, 2002).

Sanitary conditions at the California foie gras operation were so poor when an investigation was conducted in 2002-2003 that videotape taken at the time appears to show floors covered with feces and regurgitated food and rats running freely (Bott, 2003; Huemer, 2003; Parme, 2003). An eyewitness account documented rats chewing on ducks too weak to defend themselves (Huemer, 2003). Evidence of similar injuries was seen on several other ducks (Huemer, 2003; KGO-TV, 2003; Moore, 2003). News reports noted that video and photographs from the investigation showed images of injured birds with blood on their feathers (Severson, 2003). Likewise, eyewitnesses at the New York operation report wading through floors covered in feces (Shapiro, 2004) and seeing cage floors and cage bars covered in a sludge of feces, regurgitation, and feathers (Blum SJ, 2004).

Liver Damage and Other Diseases

Force-feeding causes a rapid, ten-fold increase in the size and weight of the birds' livers (Janan et al., 2000; Blum, 1997; Banon et al, 1989). The process changes the chemical composition of the liver and results in impaired hepatic function (SCAHAW, 1998, p. 40; Bogin et al, 1984). Lipid (fat)

composition of the liver also increases by at least ten-fold. The liver of a normal goose is composed of 6.6 % fat, but the liver of a force-fed goose is 55.8% fat. And for a force-fed duck, lipid composition can account for 60% of the liver weight (SCAHAW, 1998, p. 42).



While foie gras producers often argue that such a transformation is merely an extension of a migrating bird's 'normal' capacity for fat storage, most avian veterinarians surveyed about the issue fail to concur. French veterinarian Marianne Heimann, for one, has concluded that the state of the extremely fattened livers of force-fed ducks and geese are "not part of the normal physiological process" and that

[i]n no instance, can this increase be considered normal. It is a categoric sign of a diseased state and a clinical symptom (difficulty in breathing, difficulties in regulating their temperature, exhaustion, difficulties in making an effort etc.). Therefore one is not making use of a natural physiological process in palmipeds to produce a delicacy but rather a pathological process, which can be reproduced in certain species. If the liver of a goose or a duck is used, it is because the pathology is easier to reproduce (Beck et al, 1996, p. 25).

Dr. Laurie Siperstein-Cook, an avian veterinarian interviewed by a San Francisco TV station on the topic of force-feeding for foie gras, commented, "The liver is there to clean out toxins from the blood stream. If the liver can't work properly, you've got all these toxins flowing through the blood, making them [the birds] feel bad in various ways, so it can harm various organs as well as the brain" (KGO-TV, 2003).

The deleterious effects of liver malfunction on the brain was described in 1996 by Dr. Yvan Beck as "hepatic encephalopathy." He explains:

This is the result of an endogenous intoxication due to the hepatic impairment; the liver can no longer play its role as a circulatory filter. As a result, various metabolites appear in the blood that are usually stopped by the liver (ammonium, mercaptans, short-chain antigens) and that may then reach the central nervous system (particularly sensitive to these compounds) and trigger central nervous troubles such as circling movements, epileptiform crisis, and increase of the intracranial pressure accompanied by migraines, and finally stupor, coma and death (Beck et al, 1996).

In surveys cited in the SCAHAW report, 25 pathologists from various countries were asked their opinions of the condition of force-fed livers. Most of the pathologists stated that the condition of the livers was pathological. The report concludes that

it appears that the level of steatosis normally found at the end of force feeding would not be sustainable for many of the birds. For this reason, and because normal liver function is seriously impaired in birds with the hypertrophied liver which occurs at the end of force feeding this level of steatosis should be considered pathological (SCAHAW, 1998, p. 41).

It further states that "[t]he reversibility of steatosis which is reported above for many birds which have been force fed does not mean that the changes in the liver are not pathological." Another vet-

erinarian explains that most illnesses are reversible, and "the fact that damage may be reversible does not mean that it is not caused by illness. In the case of foie gras, the process becomes irreversible and leads to the death of the ducks once a certain point is reached" (Beck, 2004). Dr. Heimann, in describing the damage to the liver cells of force-fed ducks as lesions, concurs that "[t]he reversibility of a lesion absolutely does not mean that there is no pathology and no suffering" (Beck et al, 1996, p. 20)

SCAHAW noted that foie gras producers are careful not to continue force-feeding even just a few days beyond the standard period because the "effects of force feeding are lethal when the procedures are continued" (SCAHAW, 1998, p. 62). In fact, the owner of Sonoma Foie Gras admitted to a television reporter that all of the ducks would die from the force-feeding if they were not slaughtered first (KGO-TV, 2003).

In the words of Dr. Ian Duncan, "Force feeding quickly results in birds that are obese and in a pathological state, called hepatic lipidosis or fatty liver disease. There is no doubt that in this pathological state, the birds will feel very ill. In my view it is completely unethical to deliberately promote a diseased state in an animal" (Duncan, 2004).

Force-fed ducks and geese also suffer from semi-liquid feces, overheating and lethargy (SCAHAW, 1998, p. 61). Moreover, Janan et al. (2000) found that force-fed geese had significantly lower levels of a thyroid hormone, which is known to negatively affect an animal's metabolic state. The manager of the Sonoma Foie Gras operation told a reporter that some ducks die from heart failure as a result of the feeding and others from "choking when they regurgitate after drinking water" (Moore, 2003).

Mortality

Surveys on mortality due to force-feeding have been performed in France, Belgium, and Spain. Approximately 2% to 4% of force-fed birds in these countries were found to have died during the force-feeding period compared with only 0.2% of comparable non-force fed birds of about the same age (SCAHAW, 1998, p. 62). Other statistics from within the French agriculture industry put the mortality rate of force-fed birds at 2 to 5% (ITAVI, 2004). This amounts to a mortality rate for force-fed birds that is 10 to 25 times greater than that of conventional duck farming.

Comparisons can also be made between the mortality rate of Mulard ducks during force feeding and the mortality rate of Mulard ducks during the rearing period (from hatching until the commencement of force feeding). Based on 2002 statistics published by the French foie gras industry, the death rate per day of force-fed ducks is 6.3 times higher than that of ducks over the entire rearing period (CIFOG, 2002). This rate, although considerable, is still understated because it compares the death rates during force-feeding to death rates over the entire rearing period-including the first few days after hatching, in which mortality is normally extremely high-rather than death rates only for ducks of the same age.

Statistics are not available on mortality rates at the two US foie gras operations. However, eyewitness accounts and photographic and video evidence have documented the presence of barrels of dead ducks as well as numerous dying and dead ducks in pens at the Sonoma Foie Gras operation (Bott, 2003; Huemer, 2003; Parme, 2003; Blum SJ, 2004). Eyewitnesses at the New York facility reported seeing many dead and dying ducks inside the pens and the individual cages (Blum SJ, 2004; Shapiro, 2004), and one eyewitness reported seeing the bodies of ducks that had fallen into the manure pits under the cages and were left to rot (Blum SJ, 2004).



Conclusion

Techniques used in the production of foie gras cause birds to suffer severe physical and psychological disorders. After conducting an extensive investigation, detailed in a 90-page report, the Scientific Committee on Animal Health and Animal Welfare of the European Union concluded that force-feeding for foie gras production is detrimental to the welfare of birds. Force-feeding of ducks and geese along with confinement housing causes physical problems, including respiratory, metabolic, and locomotive impairment. Foie gras production facilities prevent birds from

engaging in their natural exploratory activities and social behaviors, leading to depression and frustration, while the force-feeding process is traumatic and stressful. Elevated death rates, another indication of poor welfare, are further evidence of welfare problems associated with foie gras production. The mortality rate of ducks on foie gras farms is approximately 10 to 25 times greater than the mortality rate of non-force fed ducks of the same age who are raised for meat.

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