

Animal Cruelty Regulations in the United States

“And we ought not to confound speech with natural movements which betray passions and may be imitated by machines as well as be manifested by animals; nor must we think, as did some of the ancients, that brutes talk, although we do not understand their language.” (Descartes, 1600s). The words of Rene Descartes, the greatest philosopher of the 17th century, perfectly encapsulate the attitude of society at the time: animals are machines with no feelings or soul. And yet, these words hail from a time of great moral injustices and human brutality, a world where slavery and discrimination were commonplace facts. As the modern world has developed, so have our beliefs and ideals, creating a world more amicable and equal for humans, but despite the change of morals regarding our own humanity, the mindset and ignorance that society holds towards the treatment of animals have remained stagnant. In contemporary times, industry sectors abuse and neglect animals with little regards to the animals’ welfare. I argue that to maintain the high moral integrity that society demands of humans in regard to other humans, we must uphold these same standards when it comes to animals and tighten regulations concerning the treatment of animals in the industries of meat farming, fur trading and product testing to move towards a world where all living things are treated with decency.

Most people have a basic understanding of what happens at animal meat farms. After all, the meat that is produced at these farms is directly supplied to consumers, used as a necessary food source by countries around the world. And yet, few seem to have a real understanding on the kind of cruelty that takes place at industrial factory farms every day. In the United States, Under the laws imposed by the United States legislation, farm animals are

considered to be the legal property of their owners. The complete absence of regulations on the federal level have left the task of forcing regulatory changes upon the states, which, in their own right, have been very lax in imposing any real change. Outside of some state-based individual exceptions, this means that, within the complete boundaries of the law, the owners of farming conglomerates are free to treat these ‘food animals’ in whatever way they deem to be the most efficient or profitable for their business. In most cases, this includes things such as the complete removal of an animal from their habitat, the breaking of natural behavioral patterns and reproductive patterns demanded by the animal’s instinctive place in their respective ecosystem, the complete lack of proper living conditions and the subjugation to inhuman procedures, such as debeaking, dehorning, castration, and hot-iron branding. (FFAC, 2022). While attempts to fix these issues have been introduced in the past, all of them have failed to appear than anything more than shallow, failing to cover the true extent of the problem. For example, the Humane Methods of Livestock Slaughter Act introduced in 1958 (amended in 1978) created guidelines regarding the standards of how a ‘food animal’ must be slaughtered for it to be considered humane. This act proposed stunning the animal first before killing it to minimize experienced pain. However, this act completely failed to cover animals such as chickens and turkeys, the slaughtering of which does not follow any preset guideline. (Animal Legal Defense Fund, 2020). Not only is the act itself flawed, but the enforcement of it is lacking as well; according to a report and survey overseen by the United States Government Accountability Office, the inspection and accountability standards enforced by the inspectors of the Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) when it comes to factory farms is incredibly inconsistent, with inspectors often basing their judgement on their own opinions rather than any set inspectional regulations, riddling it with bias and willful ignorance, removing another potential layer of protection for the animals

(The Human League, 2020). And yet, there are groups that demand to see real change. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) such as the Humane Society of the United States and the Animal Legal Defense Fund have been pushing for reform for many years. In the recent years, they have been able to achieve minor reform regarding the welfare of the animals on factory farms and the establishment of limits on the exploitation of farm animals for monetary gain in states such as Arizona, California, Colorado, Rhode Island, and Ohio. (Humane Society of the United States, 2020). However, even the reach of NGOs is limited. Without real change and reform pushed by the federal government, factory farming will remain as inhumane and brutal as it has always been, with no government to protect the animals that suffer.

The fur farming trade is an incredibly lucrative industry for prospective investors. As an industry that procures hundreds of millions of US dollars in profits a year, with consumers lining up to buy a new fur hat or jacket, it is clear to see why the owners of industrial giants tend to disregard the pain and suffering that goes into the fur trade, instead focusing on the pull of the money. And yet, no matter how ignorant people choose to be, fur farming remains an incredibly brutal industry in the US. About 95% of the world's fur supply comes from fur farms, harvesting the fur of minxes, foxes, and rabbits (PETA, 2019). Much like factory farming, fur farming employs the use of tight, small, metal cages to contain the animals, subjugating them to the complete lack of space and welfare issues. To put this into perspective, a fox's natural territory usually makes up about 10km², while the natural territory of a fox at a farm makes up about 1m². This complete lack of respect and empathy towards the animals leads to the occurrence of inter-species attacks, cannibalism, and untreated infected wounds. In a study conducted by the Fur Free Alliance and the European Parliament, several renowned veterinarians shared and

commented on the inadequate nature of international regulations of fur trading and the cruelty that often takes place at these farms. Bo Algiers, veterinarian, and professor at the Swedish University of Agriculture Sciences, went on record about the typical conditions of animals at fur farms, stating: "...infected wounds, missing limbs from biting incidents, eye infections, bent feet, mouth deformities, self-mutilation, cannibalism of dead siblings or offspring and other stress-related stereotypical behavior." (Algiers, 2020). Unsurprisingly, regulations concerning fur farming in the United States are virtually non-existent. As a result of total ignorance from the federal government and deeply rooted corruption within the United States Department of Agriculture, the fur farming industry in the United States lies entirely in the hands of the fur farm owners, most of whom, in the pursuit of higher profits, completely disregard how animals are treated at their farms. There is a bright spot in all of this; the diversity and strength of international laws greatly outweighs that of the United States. Countries such as the United Kingdom, Austria, and the Czech Republic, who previously topped the lists as the highest suppliers of fur to the international markets, have taken a strong stance on the issue of fur farming, creating extremely strict outlines as to what fur farms should look like, with the United Kingdom outlawing fur farms entirely. (Humane Society International, 2018). This only goes to show that fur farming is not a necessary evil: it is simply an evil that the governments around the world tolerate as a means of higher profits and reluctance to face corruption. By instilling stricter regulations, the millions of animals that will suffer unimaginable abuse, neglect and suffering in over 250 fur farms in the USA can be left in the wild, never having to face the brutal nature of unregulated, profit-hungry industry (Four Paws USA, 2020).

It is likely that every person uses products such as shampoo, lipstick, dish soap, or laundry detergent on a regular basis. While the necessity of these items in everyday life is inarguable, the impact that the testing and production of these items has on the animals involved is indescribable as well. According to PETA, over 100 million animals, including rats, mice, rabbits, and hamsters, die in the US each year as a result of chemical poisoning, physical injuries such as burns or mutilations, or shock as a result of tremendous pain. Despite this, the practice of animal testing for beauty products or household items is widely spread, with over 85% of the biggest beauty corporations funding animal testing. Government policies due little to protect these animals (PETA, 2020). The introduction of the Animal Welfare Act in 1966, meant to minimize the harm that befalls animals in research, might have been effective at the time. However, it does very little to protect animals in today's world, as 95% of the animals that are used in modern product testing are not included in the list of species protected by the Act, according to research done by PETA and Cruelty Free International, making it virtually pointless. (PETA, CFI, 2022). This is simply another testament to how little attention federal legislators pay to the welfare of animals in industry. Even though the Animal Welfare Act was established over 50 years ago, and has long become inadequate, the government chooses to close its eyes on reform and instead allows these animals to continue to be mistreated. While the government refuses to take a harsher stance on this cruelty, it has ruled that animal testing is not a necessary component to demonstrate that cosmetics are safe for human use following the Federal Food, Drug and Cosmetic Act of 1938. 85 years have passed since the introduction of this act, but the government remains idle, allowing cosmetic companies to have free reign over the activities in their product testing facilities. By taking a harsher stance and creating real

regulations for these companies, the government would enforce their own stance on this cruelty and would save countless amounts of animals from pointless, lethal testing.

Humans need animals to maintain their high standard of life. And yet, the cruelty and brutality that these animals are forced to endure do not stem from necessity, but instead from greed, corruption, and complete ignorance of those who can enact real change. No matter how important the industries of fur farming, meat farming and product testing are, there is no real excuse to force these animals to endure pointless torture, inhuman conditions, and complete ignorance from the governing bodies. If humans can bathe in the luxury of property protection rights, freedoms of speech and life, and a set list of universal basic rights, what gives humans the right to rid other living beings of those same rights? By creating tighter regulations regarding these animal-related industries, we can prevent cruelty, enforce true justice, and give wildlife the respect that it deserves without creating a real impact on our own lavish lifestyles.

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