



14 May 2010

Members
Primary Production Select Committee

Inquiry into Factory Farming vs. Free Range Farming

The Primary Production Select Committee has been asked to conduct an inquiry into “Factory Farming vs. Free Range Farming”. This paper has been prepared to assist the Committee with its examination. Issues are identified and possible lines of inquiry are provided for the Committee to consider. The Committee may also wish to raise these matters with the witnesses who have been asked to appear before the Committee to give evidence on this inquiry.

Prior Consideration

It is relevant to note that during Youth Parliament 2004, Youth MPs discussed the topic of farming and animal cruelty and the following assertions were documented:

Free range farming must replace factory farming in New Zealand. Factory farming systems are “unjustified, unnecessary and disgustingly inhumane.” A nationwide petition from the school pupils in New Zealand was launched during Youth Parliament. The petition calls on the House of Representatives to ban the use of battery hen cages and sow crates in New Zealand, and to ensure that humane, free range farming systems replace factory farming.

When considering definitions it is important to note that for the purposes of this paper, the term ‘factory’ is used to describe a method of farming, not the overarching ideology of whether animals should be involved in a factory process of being raised, housed and processed in order to produce food products. The pros and cons of treating animals as consumables is a separate debate.

Definitions

The term ‘factory farming’ is a term often used by advocates of free range farming to describe the process of large-scale farming in which the animals are not free to roam. The farming industry prefers to use the term ‘intensive farming’. Factory/intensive farming is a process which often involves close confinement or confinement housing of the animals. Factory farms are often viewed as being on the ‘intensive’ (as opposed to ‘extensive’) scale in the farming of animals for their production value.

Taking this definition, chickens intended for meat (broiler/meat chickens), pigs, and layer (egg-laying) hens are taken as representative of the factory farming industry.

Free range literally means that animals are kept in a way that they are free to range (roam). It is often seen as being on the 'extensive' farming scale. Free range usually means that animals have access to the outdoors.

It is important to note that 'free range' has different definitions attached to it as a marketing tool. Some people associate free range with organic farming, though the term free range does not ensure that this is the case.

Factory farming and free range farming are on opposite ends of a large spectrum of farming methods. This means that there are many farms in New Zealand which employ both methods in their farming. An example of this would be a pig farm which allows pigs to be kept outside unless the animals are 'farrowing' (birthing), in which case they are kept in farrowing stalls which restricts their movement so they do not smother their piglets.

Another example is private standards of animal welfare, such as 'SPCA approved'. Barn-laid eggs are often SPCA approved, as the chickens are not confined to cages; however they are not completely free-range as they are housed indoors.

It is also important to note that food safety regulations are enforced regardless of the methods of farming and processing of food products. For instance, New Zealand Food Safety guidelines have banned the use of growth hormones in meat chickens and the poultry industry must regularly check for the presence in hormones in its poultry, as well as salmonella. However, antibiotics are commonly used in many intensive farms to help protect the animals from disease and thus help them to grow bigger and increase productivity.

What is the current situation in New Zealand?

The following list of farming practices in New Zealand is in no way exhaustive, but serves to give a general idea of different farming methods for common animal products.

Eggs

Hens producing eggs are known as 'layer hens'. Approximately 87% of eggs are produced from cage production systems. This is referred to as 'conventional' or 'battery' farming. Keeping hens in cages enables eggs to be produced on a large scale and reduces problems of animal health and cannibalism. Cage systems allow high hygiene standards to be met, through methods such as automatic removal of manure. Feed and water supplies are also constant, so that birds maintain excellent nutritional standards and hydration.

This method of farming attracts criticism relating to the restrictive nature of the housing, and the natural behaviour that may be impaired because of this. Examples of natural behaviour that cannot be guaranteed in cage production are: foraging, dust bathing, wing flapping, stretching, nesting and perching. Animal rights organisations often argue that these behaviours are more valuable to a hens' wellbeing than being kept in the clean environment of cage production.

About 13% of eggs are produced in non-cage or alternative systems. These include free range and barn systems. Typically, a large-scale free range unit would consist of a shed (or multiple sheds) in which the floor is slatted, holding up to 5,000 birds. The shed is fitted with nest boxes and perches.

The birds have access to outdoors through pop-holes in the walls. Commercial free range farms can range from having a few hundred birds to several thousand. In a barn system, birds

are kept in a large shed with a litter (wood shavings) floor. There are perches for the birds to sit and sleep on. Nest boxes are provided for the hens to lay their eggs in.

Both systems only use female chickens (hens) as male chickens can not lay eggs. The male chicks are usually killed in both production methods, as they are of no value to egg production.

Meat Chickens

The free range meat chicken industry in New Zealand is relatively small, but where free range farms do exist, the conditions are similar to those of a free range layer hen.

Generally meat chickens (which can be male or female) are raised on deep litter in a barn. They are not free to roam outside of the barn. Meat chickens in New Zealand are never kept in cages, and are often ‘vertically integrated’ – which means most meat chicken farms are run by larger companies which own several parts of the supply chain from farm to supermarket shelf.

There is a perception that corn fed meat chickens are free range and organic, however all that the term implies is that the chickens have only been fed corn, so they may have been kept in a barn the entire time. The packaging of the meat should indicate whether the chicken is free range as well as organic.

Pork

There are a combination of ways which pigs are raised for the production of meat in New Zealand.

Close confinement is a form of farming in which the pigs are kept in either farrowing (birthing) stalls, or sow (pregnancy) stalls for most of their lives (although there are legal limits on the amount of time they can spend in stalls). The pigs are confined while pregnant as they can become aggressive, injure themselves or other pigs and miscarry. They are kept in stalls during birthing and feeding to ensure that piglets are fed but not smothered under their mother’s weight. A pro-confinement argument is that pigs desire to be well fed and secure and confinement provides that. Opponents argue that the treatment is inhumane as the sows cannot turn around, and that the pigs display signs of distress and depression because of this.

Free range pigs have a combination of barn and outdoor living, though some farms may combine both methods of pork production – e.g. pigs are allowed outside unless they are feeding piglets.

Milk, Lamb and Beef

The majority of New Zealand beef, dairy and sheep farms allow for the animals to roam outside, however there are instances where cows are farmed intensively, such as ‘feed lot cattle’. In this method, thousands of cattle are kept in large outdoor pens where they mostly spend their time eating.

Dairy cow cubicles are another intensive farming method, where each cow has their own cubicle to stand, sit and sleep. The floor of the cubicle is a thick rubber pad and the cows are free to enter and leave the cubicles at will and wander around a shed to feed as they require. The cubicles often have clear roof panels to allow sun and light to enter. Additionally, on some farms the cows are free to wander out onto open air holding yards during fine weather

and stand or sit in the sun. According to Federated Farmers, benefits of cow cubicles include better management of effluent, more animal welfare consideration and better management of emissions.

Animal Welfare

The welfare of animals used in food production is important to many New Zealanders. The Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MAF) is the regulatory body on animal welfare in New Zealand. There is also the National Animal Welfare Advisory Committee (NAWAC) which develops codes of welfare for different animals. Currently, NAWAC is revising codes of welfare for pigs, meat chickens and layer hens.

Animal welfare can be defined in many, often contradictory ways such as:

- relating to animals needs
- whether an animal is “health and happy”
- whether the animal is coping with its environment
- avoiding or minimising pain, distress and suffering
- whether the animal has the ability for happiness and activity.

The law for animal welfare in New Zealand (the Animal Welfare Act 1999) is that people who own or are in charge of animals must meet their physical, health and behavioural needs. These needs are defined as follows:

1. Proper and sufficient food and water,
2. Adequate shelter,
3. Opportunity to display normal patterns of behaviour,
4. Physical handling in a manner which minimises the likelihood of unreasonable or unnecessary pain or distress, and
5. Protection from, and rapid diagnosis of, any significant injury or disease, as appropriate to the species, environment, and circumstances of the animal.

The animal rights group Save Animals From Exploitation (SAFE), feels that current farming practices in New Zealand are effectively breaking the law by not adhering to these standards. An example of this would be a sow stall, where the sow is not free to move enough to turn around, and thus cannot express normal behaviour. SAFE point out that some standards farm animals are kept in would be deemed ‘cruel and unacceptable’ if they involved a family pet such as a dog, yet the basic law does not differentiate between animals.

Broadly speaking, various methods of farming meet the needs of animals in different ways and to varying extents. For example, a method that allows behavioural freedom may not be the best for meeting health needs.

It is important to note that for the majority of production animals, most of the processes in its life are the same no matter how it is farmed. Animals are bred and kept until slaughter, breeding or sale. Everything except how it is ‘kept’ is the same.

Market Implications for Methods of Farming

According to the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry’s *Situation and Outlook for New Zealand Agriculture and Forestry 2009*, the New Zealand agricultural sector generated \$23,148 million in gross revenue for the year ended March 2009. Agricultural and horticultural exports earn around 56% of total merchandise exports. This dependence on

primary production for exports is unique by the Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) standards.

Broadly speaking, under World Trade Organisation rules, governments cannot make rules for trade on the basis of animal welfare (a means of production). However, individual countries can make arrangements between themselves, and companies can make their own arrangements and expectations of standards. "Private standards" is a term used for individually agreed standards applied to the production of something, e.g. SPCA approved, Freedom Farms, Freedom Foods, NZ Pork, various organic schemes, McDonalds animal welfare standards etc.

According to the accountancy firm KPMG, New Zealand agriculture (including meat and animal production) has as little as five years before large-scale intensive farming in South America, western China and central Asia erodes our cost advantage in producing bulk commodities. Because of this, KPMG spokespeople have said that New Zealand must start revising industry structures, practices and products to give New Zealand produce better value well in advance of large-volume commodities from these new suppliers (KPMG Agribusiness Agenda 2010).

Cost/Benefit Analysis

Supporters of organic and free-range farming argue that using methods focused purely on eliciting the most products from one animal is not an acceptable cost in terms of the quality of life for that animal, and the result are products which are of lower quality.

Proponents of intensive farming argue that having more animals producing more products (within regulations such as welfare and health & safety), is a way to ensure New Zealand is a leader in global meat and dairy exports and this is vital for our economy. Food produced from intensive farming produces cheaper products than free range farming. There are a lot of consumers in New Zealand for whom cost is the primary consideration. Some feel that a regulated move to free-range production systems could see New Zealanders struggle to afford adequate dietary intakes of protein, though those who adhere to vegetarian/vegan diets often disagree that animal products are needed for this.

Federated Farmers state that 80% of consumers say they would purchase free range products but in practice only 10% do because of price differentials. They usually do this only by buying free range eggs.

Report to the House

The Committee is required to report its findings on this inquiry to the House. The purpose of your report is first to inform the House and assist debate. In doing so your report should reflect both the oral and written evidence the Committee received, the issues the Committee considered in-depth, and the views of the members. From these the Committee should develop conclusions and recommendations to the Government.

Nicole Skews
Report Writer
Youth Parliament 2010
Ministry of Youth Development

Members may wish to ask:

- Which is more important, animal welfare or retaining our place in the international market with our bulk products?
- What methods of farming do you deem acceptable and not acceptable and why?
- Can we strike a 'happy medium' between the two extremes? If so, how do you propose to do so?
- Are the practices of factory or intensive farming inconsistent with our animal welfare laws? If so, do we change the practices or the laws?
- Should farming be about quantity or quality?
- Is free range farming a viable long-term investment for our economy?
- Should our economy be the primary focus when considering farming methods?
- Is it the government's place to put restrictions and regulations on farming methods?

Key References and Suggested Links

Egg industry –

<http://www.eggfarmers.org.nz/farming-types.asp>,

<http://www.eggs.co.nz/>

<http://www.eggfarmers.org.nz/>

Dairy –

<http://www.dairynz.co.nz/>

Poultry –

<http://www.pianz.org.nz/>

Pork –

<http://www.pork.co.nz/>

Free range and private labelling –

<http://rnzspca.org.nz/approved-eggs-home>

Free range eggs –

<http://www.frenzs.co.nz/>

Five Freedoms –

<http://www.fawc.org.uk/>

KPMG –

<http://www.kpmg.co.nz/pages/104607.html>

Animal Welfare in NZ (MAF) –

<http://www.biosecurity.govt.nz/legislation/animal-welfare-act/guide/index.htm>

A Comparison of Conventional Cage, Furnished Cage, and Non-cage (Barn and Outdoor/Free-range) Systems for Housing Laying Hens –

http://www.avma.org/issues/animal_welfare/cage_noncage_systems.asp

AWAC –

<http://www.biosecurity.govt.nz/legislation/animal-welfare-act/guide/index.htm>

Federated Farmers –

<http://www.fedfarm.org.nz/>

SAFE –

<http://www.safe.org.nz/>

SPCA NZ –

<http://rnzspca.org.nz/main/>

Suggested keywords and phrases for internet search engines

- Factory farm
- Intensive farm
- Free range
- Barn-raised
- Feed lot cattle
- Egg production / layer hens
- Broiler hens
- Animal rights
- Farming methods
- Conventional farming