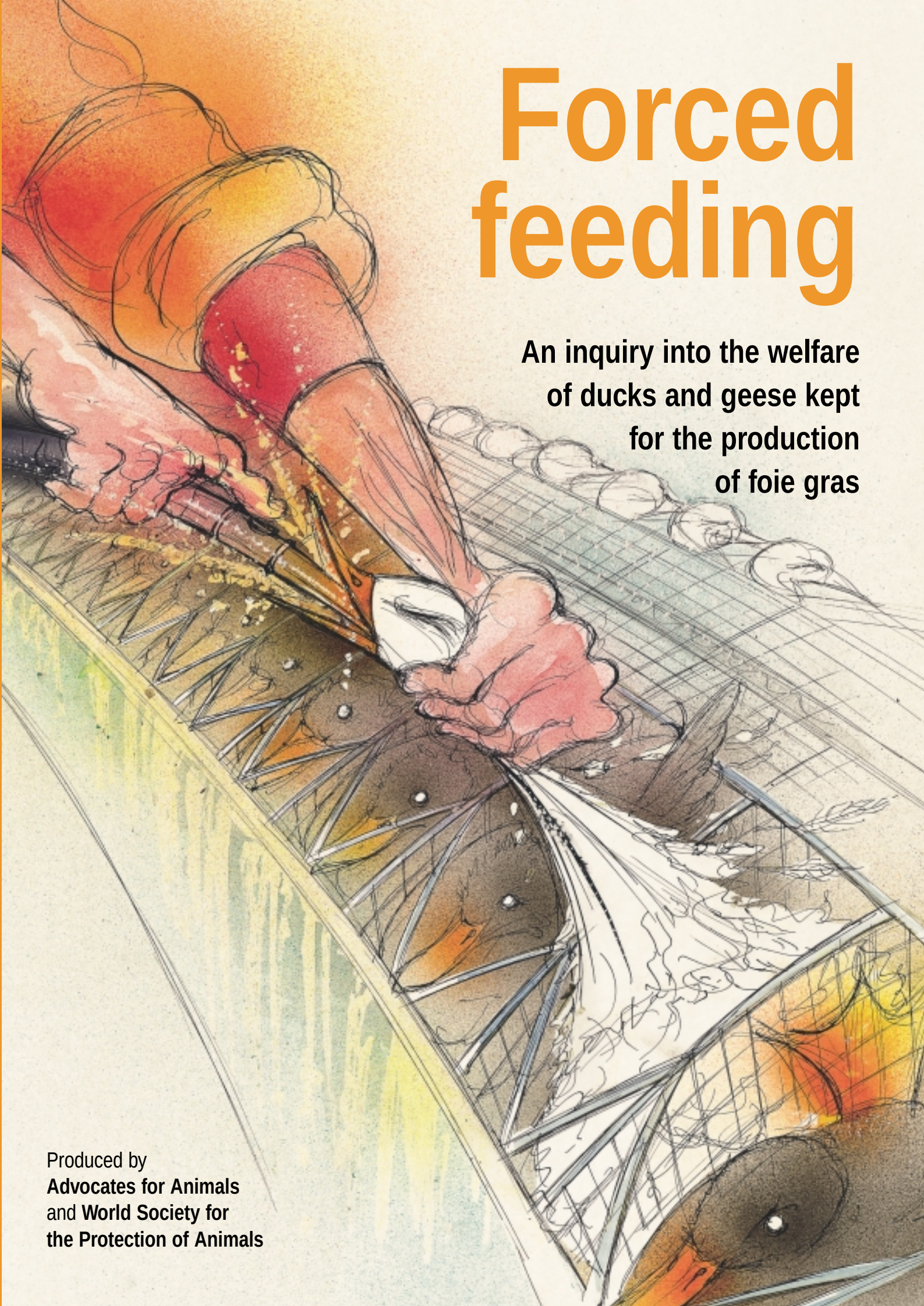

Forced feeding

An inquiry into the welfare of ducks and geese kept for the production of foie gras

Produced by
Advocates for Animals
and **World Society for the Protection of Animals**

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CIWF

An inquiry into the welfare of ducks and geese kept for the production of foie gras

by **Carol McKenna, Animal Welfare Consultant**

February 2000

SOURCES

The author is indebted to animal welfare experts and campaigners in many countries for their help, information and advice. The recent Report of the Scientific Committee on Animal Health and Animal Welfare of the European Commission, on 'Welfare Aspects of the Production of Foie Gras in Ducks and Geese', was an invaluable source of information as was the report of Dr. Yvan Beck, 'Cramming of Palmipeds and the Production of Foie Gras: A global approach to Society's Choice'.

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Carol McKenna is an animal welfare campaign consultant who has worked for several UK based animal protection organisations. She has seen the force feeding of geese in France.

Front cover illustration: Chris Burke

Advocates for Animals campaigns against all animal abuse. Its objects are the protection of animals from cruelty; the prevention of the infliction of suffering and the abolition of vivisection.

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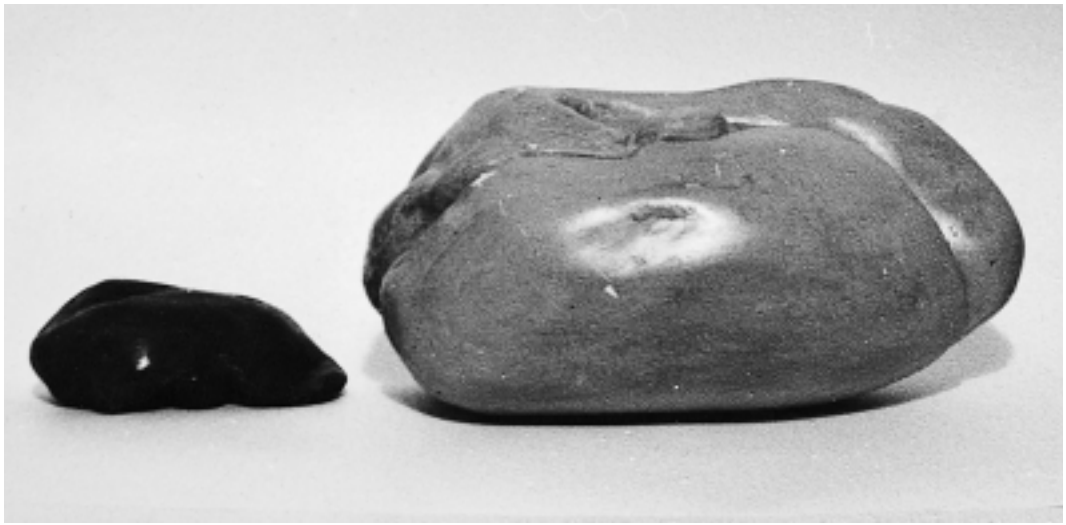
Geese are force fed three times a day with a mixture of maize, fat and salt

Pneumatic force feeding systems can cram up to half a kilo of feed down a duck's throat in three seconds.

GIAI

FORCED FEEDING



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A bird's liver swells to as much as ten times its natural size by the end of the force feeding period.

Geese, which are usually kept in small pens or cages, now account for less than five per cent of foie gras production in France.

Earthkind

Introduction

Foie gras means fat liver. It is a highly prized delicacy produced by closely confining ducks and geese for several weeks, thrusting a pipe down their throats and pumping food into them several times a day. This force feeding, cramming or "gavage" as it is known in France, causes their livers to swell grotesquely and become fatty. The resulting foie gras is eaten either in its natural state, combined with a variety of sauces or made into a paté. It is conspicuously expensive, typically selling for up to £180 a kilo.[1] Intensification in recent years has led to a drop in price and a rise in the amount of foie gras available. Between 1996 and 1998, world foie gras production increased by just over 23 per cent to 16,800 tonnes. Last year, French sales of ducklings intended for force feeding rose by a massive 24% to almost 30 million.[2]

Today, most foie gras on the market comes from ducks confined in battery conditions that cause considerable animal suffering. The birds are treated as no more than 'resources' and deprived of their freedom to pursue their most basic instincts. As pointed out in one French cookery text: "The bird itself is nothing, but the art of man has turned it into an instrument which produces marvellous results, a kind of living greenhouse in which the supreme fruit of gastronomy is grown".[3] The only reason for their suffering and deprivation is the desire of a minority for a liver with a taste described, by those who prize it, as providing "a sensual, almost voluptuous pleasure".[4]

Toussaint-Samat, author of the History of Food, says that it was the goose itself that invented cramming. The ancient Egyptians noted that when wild geese are about to migrate, and must travel many thousands of miles without feeding, they eat such large quantities of food that reserves of energy are stored in their livers as fat. "Geese trapped by the Egyptians just before the great migration provided a real feast. Someone had the idea of cramming the domestic ducks and geese," [5] – the history of foie gras had begun.

The centre of world foie gras production and consumption is France where its history dates back to the Middle Ages. It was the introduction of maize to the South West of France in the 16th century[6] that led to the development of the industry in which today geese are force fed a mixture of maize, fat and salt. Traditionally, the grandmother of the household would keep a goose in a box. She would feed it three or four times a day by pushing a funnel down its throat, pouring in warm cooked mash and packing it down with a wooden stick.[7]

Paté de foie gras was invented in France in the 18th century and is attributed to John Joseph Clause, pastry cook to the governor of Alsace, who later opened a shop in Strasbourg. To this day, the town, home to the European Parliament, remains one of the centres of the foie gras industry.

Whilst some consider foie gras to be at the apex of luxury food products, many countries have banned its production on animal protection grounds. More and more animal welfare and behaviour experts, veterinarians, pathologists and consumers have become appalled

that ducks and geese suffer confinement and force feeding simply to provide a taste sensation.

In December 1998, the European Commission's Scientific Committee on Animal Health and Animal Welfare said in its report 'Welfare Aspects of the Production of Foie Gras in Ducks and Geese' that the industrialisation of the production of foie gras had taken place "without paying attention to animal welfare considerations" [8] . In June 1999, the Council of Europe stated that 'certain practices in the production of foie gras do not meet the requirements of the European Convention for the Protection of Animals kept for Farming Purposes'.[9] Such animal welfare concerns were exhibited recently when the prestigious Smithsonian Institute bowed to international appeals and abandoned a planned foie gras tasting.

The aim of this report is to examine the foie gras industry, describe current production methods and discuss the effects of force feeding conditions on ducks and geese. A comparison of the natural behaviour of ducks and geese with life on the force feeding farm will show that conditions are not only irreconcilable with the needs of the species but induce disease and death. If force fed birds are fed too long or too much, they simply die.

Definition of Foie Gras

A duck's liver typically weighs around 50g, a goose's 120g. Force feeding causes these livers to swell to between six and 10 times these sizes. Indeed, to qualify as foie gras European and French regulations require the livers of force fed ducks to weigh an absolute minimum of 300g and those of force fed geese 400g.

Foie gras products range from foie gras 'entier' where the liver is sold complete – the most expensive – to 'produits au fois gras', products which must contain at least 20 per cent fat liver and which are considerably cheaper. French regulations define the different types of products made with foie gras and stipulate the amount to be included.

A 57g portion contains 262 calories and 85 per cent fat with 257mg of cholesterol.[10]

World foie gras production

In 1998, 16,800 tonnes of foie gras was produced worldwide.[11] As Table 1 shows, almost 80 per cent came from France – the hub of the international foie gras industry. The second largest producer was Hungary with 12.5 per cent followed by Bulgaria with 4.76 per cent, Israel with 1.78 per cent and other countries, mainly composed of Poland, Spain and Belgium, with just under three per cent.

Table 1 **World production of foie gras (tonnes)**

Main producers	**1996**	**1997**	**1998**
France	10,850	11,600	13,100
Hungary	1,700	2,000	2,100
Bulgaria	500	800	800
Israel	200	300	300
Poland	150	200	150
Spain			225
Belgium			60
Others	250	300	65
TOTAL	**13,650**	**15,200**	**16,800**

source: Comité National Interprofessionnel des Palmipèdes à Fois Gras (CIFOG)

The expansion of the French foie gras industry has been dramatic – doubling since 1990.[12] As well as being the world's leading producer and exporter, to nearly 100 countries - according to Madame Pé, General Secretary of CIFOG, France's foie gras industry body – France also imports more foie gras than any other nation. In 1998, it imported 2,362 tonnes from Hungary (1,557), Bulgaria (613), Poland (81) and Israel (73).[13] In fact, around 90 per cent of world production of foie gras is now processed and consumed by the French.[14]

France's principal customers for raw foie gras are Switzerland, Spain, Belgium and Luxembourg and the United Kingdom. As will be seen from Table 2, exports to these countries have been increasing annually and in some cases dramatically.

Table 2 **Exports of raw foie gras from France (tonnes)**

	TOTAL	Belg/Lux	Switz	UK	Germany	Japan	Neth.	Spain
1996	320	45	79	41	49	32	16	34.5
1997	471	69	113	58	28	44	21	78
1998	677	119	151.5	68	42	47	37	129
% increase between 1997 and 1998	+44%	+72%	+34%	+17%	+51%	+7%	+76%	+65%

source: CIFOG

Exports of preparations of foie gras containing more than 75 per cent foie gras have also been increasing with 456 tonnes exported from France in 1998 compared to 412 in 1997 and 399 the year before.[15]

South West France produces 80 per cent of the country's foie gras. In l998, the output of one region, L'Aquitaine, was a massive 6,551 tonnes while another region, the Midi-Pyrénées, produced 3,120 tonnes..[16] Production has also increased significantly in other regions. In Brittany output rose from just 49 tonnes in l990 to 630 in l998. In the Pays de la Loire it soared from 121 in 1990 to 2,032 in 1998.[17]

France has 15,000 foie gras producers, 90 per cent of which are located in the South West. They directly employ 19,000 people but if associated activities are taken into account – such as egg incubating, slaughtering and processing – the industry accounts for 30,000 employees, representing 10,500 full time jobs.[18]

The increase in foie gras production in France has taken place solely in the duck foie gras sector, with goose foie gras production tailing off as will be seen in Table 3. As the secretary general of the French foie gras industry writes: "The ease of producing duck foie gras has strongly contributed to the progressive neglect of that of the goose ... The continued growth of French foie gras production is essentially due to strong development of the production of duck foie gras".[19] Almost ninety six percent of French foie gras now comes from ducks: 24,270,000 were force fed in France in l998, compared to just 638,000 geese.[20]

Table 3 **French foie gras production (tonnes)**

Year	Goose	Duck	Total French Production
1990	628	5,252	5,880
1991	666	6,081	6,747
1992	637	7,171	7,808
1993	603	7,707	8,310
1994	601	9,083	9,684
1995	618	9,767	10,385
1996	—	—	10,850
1997	517	11,100	11,617
1998	493	12,554	13,047

source: CIFOG

In the EU, the two other foie gras producers are Belgium and Spain. Production has been increasing steadily in both these countries. Belgium consumption of foie gras is some 200 tonnes a year.

Outside the EU foie gras is mainly produced in eastern European nations, notably Hungary and Bulgaria. Goose foie gras is produced in Hungary and exported not only to France but also to Belgium, Luxembourg, Japan, Germany and Austria. Bulgaria produces foie gras almost exclusively from ducks and exports to France, Belgium, Luxembourg and Germany. The next largest producer after Hungary and Bulgaria is Israel. Small amounts of foie gras are also produced in other countries including Madagascar, China, Lithuania and the USA[21] where some 50,000 portions are sold a week.[22] Countries processing foie gras other than France include Hungary for its own internal consumption and since 1994, Greece for export to France.[23]

Foie gras consumption

Foie gras is eaten at least once a year by 40 per cent of French people and on average they consume it on approximately 10 occasions a year. Three regions stand out as the main consumers: the South West, the Paris region and the South East.[24]

Foie gras is very much a seasonal “treat” with two-thirds of the entire French annual consumption taking place over Christmas and New Year. The industry is encouraging people to eat foie gras on other festive occasions and 1998 saw an increase of 5 per cent in the number of people buying it at Easter.[25] Outside France, foie gras is an expensive delicacy for a very small minority.

Natural behaviour of ducks and geese

Experts believe it is important to consider the natural behaviour and biology of farm animals in order to be able to assess their welfare. At the heart of many animal welfare recommendations and laws is the requirement that farm animals should be free to express normal behaviour and that sufficient space, facilities and company of the animal's own kind should be available for them to do so.

As everyone knows ducks and geese are web-footed water birds. They are social, good swimmers, spend a large part of each day seeking food and much time scrupulously maintaining their plumage by bathing[26] and preening[27].

The ducks used in foie gras production are called mulards, a hybrid obtained by crossing a female domestic duck of a breed such as the Pekin duck with a male Muscovy duck. Only males are used for foie gras production. Mulards inherit a mixture of anatomical and behavioural traits from both species; for example, the birds have claws like muscovies but like domestic ducks rarely go into trees. One expert reported that mulards do not fly and that their general behaviour appears to be most similar to that of muscovies. However, they move more slowly and spend more time in water, traits that are most similar to domestic ducks.[28]

Domestic ducks originate from the mallard, the most widespread and well-known duck species in the Northern Hemisphere. It has been domesticated for over 2,000 years and many breeds are now kept for eggs or meat. Mallards fly fast, swim well and on land, walk and run easily. Much of their food is found on or near the surface of the water and includes seeds, other vegetable matter, insects and small shellfish.

Muscovies originate in Central and South America. Their natural habitat is streams, ponds and marshes in forested regions. They were domesticated by native peoples and introduced to Europe in the 16th century. They fly, swim and walk well and are mostly active at dawn and dusk when they forage for food. They usually spend the middle of the day and night roosting in trees near water. Their diet includes fish, insects, molluscs, reptiles, algae and land plants

Geese kept for force feeding are of specific strains, the Oie du Gers and the Oie Grise du Sud Ouest. The ancestor of most farmyard geese is the greylag goose that was probably domesticated more than 7,000 years ago. "Nevertheless" says the EU expert report, "their basic behaviour patterns have not been altered substantially just as in other domesticated species, as revealed by different behaviour studies". Greylag geese are widely spread over the northern hemisphere. They spend most of their time on water but move and forage extensively on land. They are very social birds, except when nesting, with flocks sometimes numbering many thousands. They swim well, fly strongly and move easily on land. Most of their time is spent in search of food.

Migration

Defenders of foie gras often argue that force feeding is merely replicating something wildfowl do naturally before migrating: they increase their food intake in order to lay down fat to fuel their long flights. In some birds an increase in weight will be a result of fat accumulation in the liver, in others fat accumulates elsewhere in the body.

Greylags migrate extensive distances from their northern breeding grounds to their southern winter areas, which in Europe range from central to southern parts of the continent. Some mallard populations are migratory because their summer quarters become frozen in winter, others are sedentary. However the muscovy duck is a tropical species that does not migrate.

The Scientific Animal Health and Animal Welfare Committee report concluded that: "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 potential for food."

Experts also stress that in cases where migrating birds store fat in the liver, the organ never increases by more than two times its initial volume.[29] As previously stated, force feeding for foie gras production causes the liver to increase by 6 – 10 times normal size. Dr. Yvan Beck, a veterinarian who has made a particular study of foie gras and given evidence to both the Council of Europe and the EU Scientific Animal Health and Welfare Committee, adds: "There is no comparison between what nature does...and the extreme which force feeding represents for the organism. At the end of this process the birds are, in any case, incapable of making the smallest effort, which is in total contradiction to the aim of the natural process".[30]

Life on the foie gras farm

Before force feeding

On arrival at the foie gras unit ducks and geese are kept in groups outside. They graze freely on grass, they roam at will and interact fully. Large flocks are often seen in South West France and make for a charming and traditional looking scene – indeed, the General Secretary of the French foie gras trade body hails them as a "particular asset for tourism".[31]

This idyllic farm life is just a brief prelude to a regimented routine of suffering and deprivation that few tourists ever see. There is a gradual and calculated process of reducing them simply to foie gras making "machines". The time they are allowed outside is progressively reduced, according to the EU expert report, "so as to condition them to the restraint associated with the force feeding period".[32]

For example, from the age of six weeks ducks are denied free access to food and instead provided with one meal a day that is available only for a short period (15 minutes or less according to the expert EU report). From the age of 10 weeks to 12 weeks, the amount of food available is increased each day. This encourages them to eat more and faster which helps enlarge each duck's oesophagus in readiness for force feeding. Force feeding begins at 12 weeks of age and slaughter takes place after approximately two weeks.

Housing during force feeding

The vast majority of birds kept for foie gras spend the force feeding period in what amounts to a factory. The EU Scientific Animal Health and Welfare Committee commented in its recent report:

"The traditional technique of force feeding has been substantially modified during the past thirty years to rationalise and industrialise the production of foie gras and increase profitability. This has impacted on the animal species that is submitted to the process, housing conditions, and food composition and delivery. These modifications have been introduced without paying attention to animal welfare considerations. There is evidence that not only has animal welfare not benefited from the change but that instead it has deteriorated".

Traditionally birds have been kept in small groups on slatted floors, although some sources refer to them as having been totally immobilised. For example, the encyclopaedia of French Food, Larousse Gastronomique, explains that the most delicate part of the goose "is, of course the liver, especially when intensive cramming coupled with total immobilisation have enlarged this organ to the state of complete fatty degeneration".[33]

In the past 10 years new factory-style housing systems have been developed for ducks that, as mentioned earlier, form the majority of birds kept for foie gras. Three types of rearing system are now used.

Individual cages

Ducks are force fed for about two weeks: 80 per cent of them spend this time confined individually in cages so small they can barely move.[34] They cannot stand up normally. They are unable to stretch.

The cages are made of wire mesh or plastic and are always of the flat deck type. They measure just 20-21 cm wide, 45-50 cm long and 27-33 cm high. The front and top are open to allow the ducks head to poke through for drinking and force feeding. Water is provided in a trough in the cage front. Originally flat floors were the norm. An open or trough shape is now often used in an attempt to reduce breast blisters. This is an injury common in caged foie gras birds as their weight presses them down onto the floor of the cage.[35]

Group cages

These are used to confine 0.5 per cent of ducks and 50 per cent of geese. Each cage holds 4 – 5 ducks or 3 geese, and is made of wire mesh, including the floor. Such cages typically have a floor area of one square metre and sides 80cm high. The front comprises metal bars allowing access to a water trough placed outside the cage. They have no roof and the birds are restrained one at a time for force feeding.[36]

Group pens

Some 19.5 per cent of ducks and 50 per cent of geese are kept in group pens. Each pen holds 12 – 15 ducks or 9 geese. They usually measure 1 x 3 m, have wire mesh walls and slatted floors. Water is available from a trough placed inside the pen.[37]

Force feeding

"My experience of the gavage...was utterly unalarming. Mrs. Farmer sat down, a goose waddled over, she stroked the food down its throat, it went away quite happily and another goose took its place. Nothing horrible about it at all." [38]

This is how one writer reported force feeding on a small "traditional" farm. But this cosy description does not apply to what happens in today's mechanised foie gras factory farms where the vast majority of birds are confined and force fed. Nor would animal welfare experts agree with the view that the ducks and geese are "quite happy".

Ducks are force-fed twice a day for between 12 and 15 days, geese three times a day for 15, 18 or even 21 days. Ducks are crammed with 190g of food at the first force feeding rising to about 450g before they are slaughtered.[39]

The average amount fed during each force feeding is considerably more than normal intake and is the same as that recorded as being voluntarily eaten by ducks after being

deprived of food for 24 hours. Force feeding, however, is repeated 2-3 times a day. Moreover, the quantity of energy rich food forced into the birds during the two or three weeks of gavage is far greater than that which they would eat voluntarily. If force feeding is stopped, the birds vastly reduce their food intake for several days.

The basic feed is boiled maize mixed with fat and salt. The maize is at least one year old so that the starch is more digestible. The fat acts as a lubricant helping the food to go down the birds' oesophagus and the salt facilitates digestion. This food is high in carbohydrates and deliberately deficient in nutrients in order to promote a fatty liver. Water is available at all times.

Birds need to be restrained and held in a certain position by the person responsible for force feeding them. This is made easier because they are in small pens or, in the case of ducks, in cages where the head protrudes through a hole in the front of the roof.

The food is delivered by force using a funnel fitted with a 20-30 cm long tube consisting of an auger or pneumatic system that forces the maize into the oesophagus. The auger is contained within the feeding tube and is moved either by hand or by an electric motor. In larger intensive units, pneumatic or hydraulic devices are used.

The process is simple. The feeder grabs a bird's neck or, if it is in a pen, draws it towards the feeding tube. The tube is thrust down the bird's gullet and the food is pumped in. When the required amount of food has been forced in, the tube is removed. The person feeding the birds tries to ensure that the tube's movements and the amount of food inserted do not tear or split the oesophagus, which would cause injury or death.

It would take around 5 minutes to force feed each bird by hand.[40] Using an electric motor it takes about 45-60 seconds to force in the food. Pneumatic systems enable the food to be forced into the birds in just 2 – 3 seconds.

About 30 per cent of birds kept for foie gras are force fed mechanically. The vast majority are fed pneumatically. On some farms the ducks or geese are kept in near darkness, apart from the times when they are being force fed. [41]

Animal welfare concerns

Deprivation of ethological needs

Ducks and geese kept for foie gras production are denied the freedom to express normal behaviour. Ducks in battery cages are unable to stand erect. They are barely able to move. They are unable to turn around or flap their wings. They are unable to preen, exercise or interact socially in any normal way. All force fed birds are unable to forage for food and are denied water in which to swim and clean their plumage, the most common activities for ducks and geese.

Animal welfare studies highlight the fact that animals farmed for food develop behavioural problems when kept in barren environments and deprived of natural feeding behaviours. For example, keeping hens in battery cages leads to feather pecking and cannibalism. The EU Scientific Animal Health and Animal Welfare Committee notes: "It seems to be a general rule that thwarted feeding activities cause different behavioural problems commonly associated with poor welfare… Abnormal pecking in birds is often interpreted as thwarted motivation for normal feeding behaviour".

While there is no scientific documentation of feather pecking and cannibalism in force fed ducks, members of the Scientific Committee's working party observed that on one French foie gras farm group-housed ducks had rings through their beaks. According to the staff this was to prevent feather pecking, which can occur before the force feeding period.

Observation of 6 week old Mulard ducks feeding showed that they spent less than 1 per cent of the time actually eating and a further 8 per cent of time sieving in the litter which is a type of feeding behaviour.[42] Force fed birds receive their food without being able to forage as they would naturally.

The importance of water to farmed ducks has been shown by a recent study of muscovy ducks. To gain access to either food or water, ducks had to lift varying weights. The results showed they were prepared to lift the heaviest load – almost their own body weight – to gain access to an adjacent pen with bathing water, even when drinking water was already available via a nipple drinker in their home pen. In fact bathing water was seen as more important than food. [43]

Avoidance behaviour

According to some experts hand fed ducks and geese respond positively to the person who feeds them. Members of the EU's Scientific Animal Health and Animal Welfare Committee visited a number of farms and witnessed force feeding but did not see such behaviour.

They said: "When ducks or geese were in a pen during the force feeding procedure, they kept away from the person who would force feed them, even though that person normally

supplied them with food. At the end of the force feeding procedure, the birds were less well able to move and were usually panting but they still moved away from or tried to move away from the person who had force fed them". Ducks individually confined in cages "had little opportunity to show avoidance but sometimes moved their heads away from the person who was about to force feed them".

There is no conclusive scientific evidence of the aversive nature of the force feeding process. However, one recent study compared responses of force fed and non force fed ducks to the feeding pen over a period of 15 days before the start of force feeding and for 10 days following force feeding.[44] The non force fed ducks went into the feeding pen willingly. The force fed ducks had to be driven. The EU experts concluded "since the feeding pen was attractive to the birds which were not force fed, the results indicate that the force feeding pen was not attractive to the force fed ducks and that the procedure might involve an aversive component".

Effects of force feeding on the liver

The liver is the organ that purifies the body, processing fats and rendering toxins harmless. To be able to work efficiently it needs an adequate supply of nutrients. Force feeding causes a fatty degeneration (or steatosis) in the cells of the liver, as Dr. Beck explains "by forcing down a food that is not suited to the nutritional needs of the birds".[45]

Dr. Guilmot, a veterinarian specialising in the care of captive wild birds, has compared the diets of birds kept in captivity in parks and zoos with that of birds kept for meat and for foie gras production. His scathing conclusion was that it was not possible to carry out an objective comparison. For "with respect to force feeding one cannot speak of a diet ...the food used for force feeding does not provide for the physiological needs of the animal".[46]

Nutritional deficiency ensures that the liver accumulates fats instead of breaking them down: this is what causes it to swell 6 – 10 times normal size. The chemical composition of the liver also changes considerably, with the levels of fat and protein increasing and the water content decreasing.

The EU's Scientific Animal Health and Welfare Committee observed: "The most obvious change is the increase in the number of large fat globules visible in the cells. A limited increase in the presence of fat globules in liver can occur in normal liver in certain conditions but no normal animal has steatosis of the liver to the extent that occurs in all force fed birds. During the force feeding period, liver function is impaired."

Dr. Guilmot noted that during his research on the diet of force fed birds, articles he read stressed the importance of "finding the best moment to stop force feeding the animals in order to avoid them dying from illness before slaughter". Feeding too great a quantity of food or continuing force feeding for too long has been found to lead to diseases such as fibrosis, liver haemorrhages and jaundice; to the production of poor quality livers or simply to the deaths of the birds.[47] Little wonder, care is taken to ensure that the birds are

slaughtered before the liver degeneration goes too far. Until the moment of slaughter the degenerative process is in full swing and continued feeding of birds would, according to the expert EU Scientific Animal Health and Animal Welfare Committee "almost certainly result in an earlier death".

Experiments have shown that the effects of force feeding on the liver are reversible. Foie gras apologists have therefore argued that the changes to the liver are not pathological, that is to say, caused by disease. Many experts disagree. Dr. Yvan Beck has contacted pathologists in several countries and states: "Foie gras is a steatosis of the liver and as such, has to be considered as a pathology. Whether the process is reversible does not matter. If the liver steatosis produced by force feeding continues, the process is non reversible as beyond a certain threshold the bird is condemned to die."[48]

Dr. Heimann, a veterinary pathologist, adds, "The liver steatosis caused by 'gavage' is a pathological process that shows itself first by a fatty degeneration of the hepatic cells and then by necrosis...The fatty liver cannot be seen as normal. It is a categorical sign of a state of illness with clinical symptoms".[49]

The EU Scientific Animal Health and Welfare Committee examined the various arguments and ruled that "this level of steatosis should be considered pathological" as the level of fatty degeneration at the end of force feeding would not be sustainable for many of the birds, also because normal liver function is seriously impaired in birds whose livers are the excessive size caused by force feeding.

Effects of diseased liver on the birds.

Dr. Eric Dunayer, a veterinarian stated that the disruption of normal liver function would "cause the animals to suffer from severe, debilitating metabolic diseases" because "... since the liver is the site of detoxification of … many substances, these chemicals will accumulate in the blood ..., cause an animal to feel sick, upset normal cell function, and can lead to coma and death."[50]

As force feeding proceeds, the swollen liver expands the abdomen. This makes walking and breathing difficult. Experts of the EU Scientific Animal Health and Animal Welfare Committee noted that "birds with enlarged livers had difficulty in standing and their natural gait and ability to walk were severely impaired". They commented that force fed birds seem to spend most of their time sitting rather than standing. They speculated that the abnormal diet forced into the birds may reduce their calcium intake, thus weakening their bones: "This would be consistent with birds spending more time sitting than their non force fed cohorts and with the high incidence of bone fractures seen at the abattoir". The committee pointed out that the widespread use of cages in which most birds cannot stand normally makes it hard to detect leg problems and any resulting pain.

Slaughterhouse examinations show lesions on the carcasses and frequent bone fractures, particularly on the wing bones. Between 30 per cent and 70 per cent of force fed mulard

ducks suffer such injuries, compared to less than 5 per cent of non-force fed muscovy ducks.[51]

Respiratory difficulties develop, as Dr. Heimann explains, because "the liver attains a significant size, distending the peritoneum and occupying the space normally reserved for other organs. This leads to respiratory difficulties – still not often detected as animals shut up in narrow cages do not make any muscular effort – and above all to problems with heat regulation. There is also a compression of blood vessels and the development of circulatory problems".[52]

Post mortems of force fed birds have shown dropsy of the abdomen, enlarged spleen, cardiac or renal failure and liver haemorrhage following rupture of the Glisson capsule – which surrounds the liver – through the effects of stress or jostling amongst the flock.[53] Comments by veterinarians on autopsy reports of foie gras ducks include the following:-

"Animals in this condition would experience constant pain ... I consider the production of foie gras to be inhumane as it deliberately harms the duck..."[54]

"Having seen firsthand the terrible suffering of ducks ... confirmed by autopsy reports .. I am forced to conclude that foie gras is produced at a terrible cost to the birds themselves. Foie gras, touted as a gourmet delicacy to entice the palate, is really only the diseased tissue of a tortured sick animal."[55]

Pain and injuries

Dr. Beck cites a variety of injuries that can occur during force feeding.[56] These include:

- injury from handling caused by the mouth of the force feeding funnel or by the pipe (when massaging the neck) or by too hot food
- inflammation of the neck resulting from too forcible an introduction of the pipe to the throat
- bruising or perforation of the oesophagus when the pipe is inserted
- asphyxia caused by accidentally forcing the food into the trachea.

Geese and ducks are physiologically adapted to perform a gag reflex in order to prevent fluids entering the trachea. Force feeding has to overcome this reflex and the EU Scientific Animal Health and Animal Welfare Committee commented "the birds may initially find this distressing and injury may result".

Geese and ducks do not have a crop (a pouch in the gullet) but the increasing amount of food given prior to force feeding and the force feeding itself causes the lower part of the oesophagus to expand. There is a greater risk of damage to stretched tissue than to normal tissue and "it seems likely that the birds have sufficient damage to oesophagus tissue, caused by the force feeding process to have been painful to them."[57]

Dr Mark Lerman, a US veterinarian commented on a pathology report of a foie gras duck as depicting "an animal in extremis" stating "the oesophagus is so thickened and inflamed

and infected from the force "feeding" that he could never eat on his own... The lesions seen in this duck and others like him, are unique. They are the result of a continuous, perverse and concerted effort to physically force these poor creatures to do something they weren't designed to do".[58]

Ducks confined in cages may lose feathers and suffer from lesions on the neck, throat, chest or wings as a result of rubbing against the wire mesh. Poor quality floors may also cause foot injuries. Lesions are also frequently seen on the sternum where the birds are pressed down on the wire mesh cage floors. These lesions are more common in force fed ducks, where the prevalence is between 40 and 70 per cent, compared to less than 6 per cent in Muscovy ducks reared for meat.[59]

Disease and Mortality

Force fed ducks and geese suffer from digestive upsets and have more fluid faeces. Dr. Beck cites acute enteritis of the small intestine as appearing generally at the end of the first week of force feeding. This is characterised by extreme thirst, immobility and diarrhoea. Another disease, enterotoxaemia of cramming attacks "a high proportion of geese and ducks", resulting in "a horrible death" unless treated with antibiotics.[60]

Another adverse health effect shows on the feathers of force fed birds. After a few days of force feeding the neck feathers of some birds become curved and sticky. This is called wet neck (cou mouillé) by farmers.

Not surprisingly the number of force fed ducks and geese that die before slaughter is higher than in normal forms of rearing. The EU Scientific Animal Health and Animal Welfare Committee reported that "For the two weeks before slaughter the mortality rate (of non force fed muscovy ducks) would be 0.2 per cent compared with 2 per cent to 4 per cent in the force fed mulard birds of about the same age."[61] In other words, the death rate among force fed birds is between 10 to 20 times higher. The precise causes of death have not been documented but are, said the Committee, "likely to include physical injury, heat stress and liver failure".

Conclusions of the Scientific Committee on Animal Health and Welfare of the European Union.

Research carried out by France's national agricultural research institute into force feeding was presented to the EU Scientific Animal Health and Animal Welfare Committee. This was said to indicate that there are no welfare problems. The research was examined by the Committee and details incorporated into its 1998 Report on Welfare Aspects of the Production of Foie Gras in Ducks and Geese.

The Committee concluded that "Force feeding as currently practiced is detrimental to the

welfare of the birds". It said that "there must be a ban on the techniques that cause avoidable suffering. The objectives are, by order of priority: to reduce mortality and morbidity rates; to decrease the amounts of pain and distress that are endured in the process and to allow the animals to engage in normal behavioural activities".

The Committee's specific recommendations included:

- No process should be used that results in an increase in liver size such that its function is significantly modified or that it directly or indirectly causes increased mortality, pain or distress to the animal.
- No feeding procedure should be used that results in substantial discomfort to the animals, shown by aversion to the feeding procedure or any other indicator of poor welfare in the birds. Automatic feeding devices should not be used unless proved to be safe for the birds.
- The use of small individual cages for housing these birds should be banned. Birds should be kept in social groups and receive adequate water and light sufficient for normal behaviour. Birds should be able to stretch their wings, preen themselves normally, walk and interact socially.

And crucially, it declared: "It is very important for the future of the further development of foie gras production to introduce alternative techniques that do not require force feeding".

Dr. D.J. Alexander, a member of the EU Expert Committee said in a Minority Opinion

"the only recommendation the Committee can properly make is that force feeding of ducks and geese should stop and this could be best achieved by the prohibition of the production, importation, distribution and sale of foie gras".

Alternative Production Methods

Little research has been carried out into methods of producing foie gras without force feeding. Unfortunately it is believed that no alternative method has been successful in producing fatty livers of similar size and fat content.

Leaving the birds to feed themselves produces a liver about twice normal size that contains fat but to a much lower degree than foie gras. Larger livers have only been produced using methods that are unacceptable on animal welfare grounds.

For example, researchers at France's National Institute for Agricultural Research (INRA) worked on destroying the brain centres regulating appetite in geese, situated in the hypothalamus. Two methods were used. In the first the geese were anaesthetised, trepanned and an electrode inserted into the base of their brains. An electric shock destroyed the zone in the hypothalamus. The geese became bulimic. However, the weight increases were lower than with force fed animals. In the second approach, the researchers injected chemicals into the birds' brain. The animals became obese and their livers swelled. However, the weight increases were again lower than in force fed animals.[62]

Legislation and force-feeding

Some countries, including Denmark, Germany, Norway and Poland, have legislation that specifically prohibits force feeding of animals. Others, including Switzerland and the United Kingdom, interpret this practice to be prohibited under general animal protection legislation that provides for animals to be kept in conditions which meet their physiological and ethological needs. Examples of such legislation are summarised below.

Many countries where foie gras production takes place, for example, Belgium, France and Spain have ratified a European Convention that calls for animals to be kept in accordance with their physiological and ethological needs but choose to continue to permit force feeding for foie gras production.

Recommendations of the Council of Europe

In June 1999, as has been mentioned, an animal welfare committee of the Council of Europe, adopted Recommendations relating to muscovy ducks and geese. The Committee acts under a European Convention which requires it to ensure that animals are cared for in a manner which meets their natural biological and behavioural needs.[63] Article 3 of this Convention states that "animals shall be housed and provided with food, water and care in a manner which – having regard to their species and to their degree of development, adaptation and domestication – is appropriate to their physiological and ethological needs in accordance with established experience and scientific knowledge".

Unfortunately, the fact that the Committee is composed of representatives from over 30 countries who agree animal welfare recommendations on the basis of unanimity means that recommendations adopted tend to present the lowest common denominator. Countries with a particular economic interest are therefore able to prevent the adoption of strong welfare measures.

Whilst many countries represented on the Committee do not permit force feeding, for example, Austria, Germany, Switzerland, UK, the new Recommendations have not called for an end to force feeding. Instead, they merely require research to be carried out into foie gras production methods that do not involve 'gavage' and for foie gras production to be restricted to areas where it is already current practice. Many leading animal protection organisations find this unacceptable and believe that a mockery has been made of the Convention under which the Committee operates.

The Recommendations stress the importance of preening, bathing, swimming and foraging for food and recommend housing systems that permit ducks and geese to stand with a normal posture; turn around without difficulty; defecate showing normal

movements; flap their wings; show normal preening movements; perform normal social interactions and carry out normal feeding and drinking movements. These are patently impossible in current foie gras production systems. However, the Recommendations simply acknowledge the fact that "certain practices in the production of foie gras do not meet the requirements of the Convention".

A step forward has been made in that the Recommendations state that the above conditions shall apply to all housing for ducks by 31 December 2010 and from 31 December 2004 to new accomodation and to housing that is being replaced. This should mean the end of the use of individual cages. It is not yet known whether foie gras producing countries that are party to the Convention will abide by the Recommendations. Should they decide to ignore them, there are no penalties and no means of enforcement.

Summary of Legislation Opposing Force Feeding

Austria Six of Austria's nine provinces have specific legislation stating that 'the force feeding of animals is forbidden unless it is necessary for health reasons'.

Czech Republic The Animal Protection Law 1992 defines force feeding as cruelty to animals.

Denmark The Danish Act on the Protection of Animals 1991 states that 'Animals shall not be forcibly fed unless this is required to treat the animals for disease'. (Part 1, section 5)

Finland Finnish animal protection legislation requires animals to be kept in accordance with their natural behaviour and to be protected from disease. Legislation to prohibit force feeding has therefore not been enacted but it is understood to be a practice that is not permissible.

Germany Germany has had legislation against force feeding since 1936. The current Animal Welfare Act, 1993 states that "it is prohibited to force feed an animal save for essential health reasons" (Article 3 No 9)

Luxembourg The Animal Welfare Act 1965 prohibits the forcible feeding of poultry by hand or machine

Norway The Norwegian Animal Welfare Act 1974 states that it is forbidden to force feed animals (Section 8. Indent 4)

Poland The Animal Protection Act of August 1997 recognises "the animal as a live creature, capable of suffering, is not a thing. The human being should respect, protect and provide care to it". Article 12.7 states "It is forbidden to fatten geese and ducks for the purposes of fatty degeneration of their livers". Upon introduction of this legislation

no new foie gras farms were permitted to be established and existing establishments were required to close by 1 January 1999. At that time Poland was a major exporter of foie gras.

Sweden The situation is identical to that of Finland and force feeding does not take place.

Switzerland The Protection of Animals Act 1978 is interpreted as prohibiting force feeding.

UK Foie gras is not produced in the UK and there are no specific laws regarding foie gras production or force feeding. However, successive Ministers of Agriculture have stated that anyone proposing to start foie gras production would be prevented from doing so.

Conclusion

The welfare concerns expressed in this report are overwhelming. The sole aim of the foie gras industry is to create an unnaturally swollen liver to be eaten on special occasions. It is so unnatural that it can be produced only by depriving ducks and geese of their most basic instincts and by inducing liver disease. Individual cages for ducks are so small that the animals are unable to stand properly, stretch their wings or care for their feathers. As force feeding progresses and the liver expands, it becomes difficult for ducks and geese to move or even breathe properly.

Treating animals as mere 'commodities' or as 'means to an end' is no longer regarded as ethical. The Treaty of Rome which lays the foundation for the European Union now recognises farm animals as 'sentient beings'. Member States of the European Union are required to pay full regard to animal welfare when formulating and implementing policy in agriculture, transport and research priorities. The Scientific Animal Health and Animal Welfare Committee of the European Union has studied foie gras production and called upon the industry to decrease the amounts of pain and distress that are endured in the process and to allow the animals to engage in normal behavioural activities. After examining research results presented by France in defence of force feeding, it said that the way ahead is to find alternative production methods that do not involve force feeding.

Defenders of foie gras make great play of the fact that its production is a traditional activity. While it is true that geese have been force fed for centuries, ducks have been used only during the past 30 years, with their confinement in battery cages taking place during the past decade. As we have seen France is the main producer of foie gras and most production nowadays involves a mechanized, factory system which has little to do with traditional farming methods.

It is disturbing to note that significant importers of foie gras such as Switzerland and the UK count amongst those countries where foie gras production would not be permitted by legislation aimed at protecting animals from cruelty. Unfortunately, international trade laws prevent countries from imposing import bans on foods which they find abhorrent on animal welfare grounds.

It is hoped this report will assist the campaign to make foie gras consumers aware of the origins of their imported delicacy. For, in the final analysis, the decision whether to consume or produce foie gras is one for society and the individual consumer. Society can choose to prohibit this cruel practice and until a ban is introduced individuals can choose not to buy or eat a product based on suffering.

Whether carried out by hand, mechanically or pneumatically, the suffering and distress caused to ducks and geese by force feeding cannot be justified by the desire of a minority for a taste sensation. At the beginning of the 21st century, it is time for consumers to realise that foie gras is not so much a matter of taste as a matter of conscience.

Recommendation

From the evidence produced in this report, the force feeding of ducks and geese and the production of foie gras clearly causes much suffering and distress to the birds involved. We recommend that steps be immediately taken by the European Union, the Council of Europe and National Governments to end the force feeding of ducks and geese in the production of foie gras. We also urge consumers and all those working in the food industry not to buy, eat, prepare or serve this cruelly produced food.

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WSPA
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Advocates for Animals