Factory Farming: The Reality for Local Communities

Conservative Animal Welfare Foundation

What is factory farming?

Factory farming is an intensive method of raising livestock which aims to maximise production and minimise costs. Large numbers of animals are kept in small spaces indoors for nearly all of their lives, including chickens, pigs, cows and fish.

This method of production is a relatively recent development. It was only permitted by Government at the end of World War II to encourage production and reduce reliance on imports. However, this form of production has grown to the extent that 95% of the 1.2 billion animals slaughtered every year in the UK are raised on factory farms.[1]

Often applications to build factory farms claim to generate local jobs and income. However, the reality is a very different picture. Factory farms are not just harmful for the animals raised on them, but for local communities who are exposed to foul odour, air and water pollution, increased traffic, and damage to wildlife.

This resource by Conservative Animal Welfare Foundation is designed to educate policymakers, local councils, and the public at large about the dangers of factory farming and why they should oppose their developments.

1 The Humane League, 'Factory Farming: What is it and Why it's a Problem', 2021

Factory Farming...

...Outcompetes smaller, local farmers

Industrial animal agriculture outcompetes small-scale food producers, thereby undermining their livelihoods. In 2018 the then Director-General of the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) said that small-scale livestock farmers must not be "pushed aside by expanding large capital-intensive operations."[2] Intensive animal agriculture developments do just this.

...Has a detrimental effect on the environment

Industrial livestock's huge demand for cereals for feed has led to soil degradation, biodiversity loss, overuse and pollution of water, and air pollution.

Large scale intensive farming is also a key source of greenhouse gases. Long supply chains, extensive land use change, and nitrate pollution are inherent to the industrial nature of intensive farming. Although greenhouse gases are shorter-lived than carbon dioxide (CO2), they are about 28 times more potent at warming the atmosphere.[3]

Over the last five years, animals farmed for human consumption -mainly on large-scale industrial farms- have been responsible for 14.5% of greenhouse gas emissions internationally,[4] and around 10% of the UK's national emissions.[5] 63% of agriculture emissions are methane from animal agriculture specifically.[6]

Higher welfare farms where livestock can roam outside are undercut by factory farms

2 http://www.fao.org/news/story/en/item/1098231/icode/ Accessed 15 July 2020

3 Yvon-Durocher, G. Allen A. Bastviken, D. Conrad, R. Gudasz, C. St-Pierre, A. Thanh-Duc, N. Del Giorgio, P. (2014) 'Methane fluxes show consistent temperature dependence across microbial to ecosystem scales', Nature

4 Stoll-Kleemann, S. Schmidt, U.J. (2017) 'Reducing meat consumption in developed and transition countries to counter climate change and biodiversity loss: a review of influence factors', Regional Environmental Change

5 Climate Change Committee, (2020) 'Agriculture and Land Use'

6 Fitzpatrick, I. et al, (2019) 'The Hidden Cost of UK Food', Sustainable Food Trust.

...Does not create significant employment

Compared with other ventures, factory farms do not create significant employment. In the poultry sector, only one job is created for every 100,000 chickens farmed.[7]

...Increases antimicrobial resistance

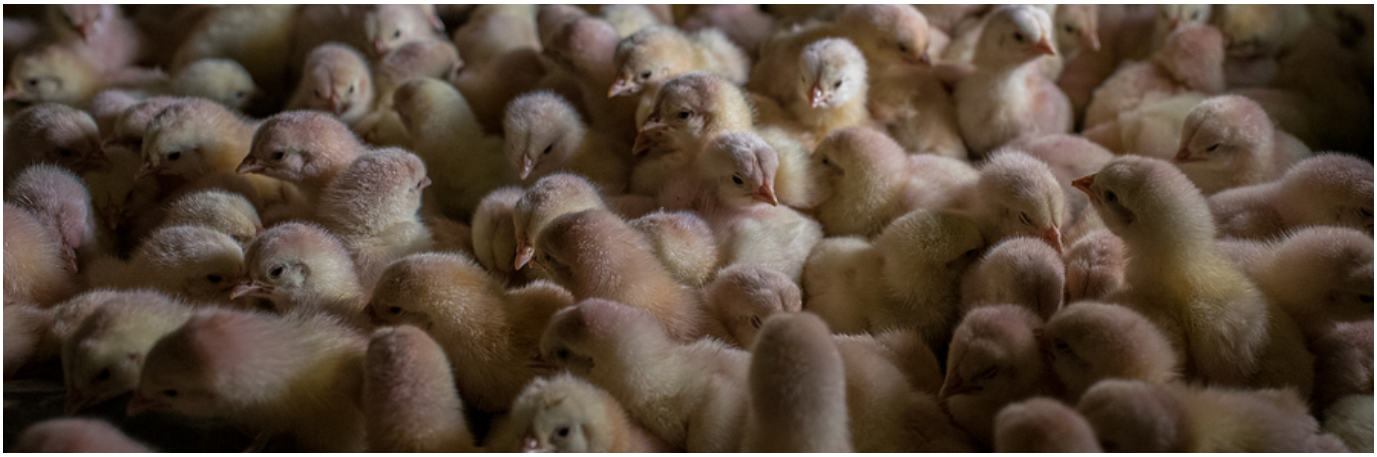
Globally, around 70% of all antimicrobials are used in farm animals, mainly to prevent disease and to promote growth.[8] They are used in industrial livestock systems to prevent the diseases that would otherwise be inevitable when animals are confined in poor conditions.[9]

Overuse of antimicrobials in industrial farming contributes significantly to antimicrobial resistance in animals which can then be transferred to people, so undermining the efficacy of antimicrobials in human medicine.[10]

...Can be breeding grounds for disease

The crowded, stressful conditions of industrial livestock production play an important part in the emergence, spread and amplification of pathogens, some of which are zoonotic.

The last pandemic before COVID-19 was the 2009 swine flu pandemic which started in Mexico just a few miles from a major concentration of industrial pig farms.[11]



7 'We need to talk about chicken', Eating Better, Feb, 2020, p.14

8 van Boeckel TP et al, 2019. Global trends in antimicrobial resistance in animals in low- and middle-income countries. Science 365, 1266 (2019)

9 O'Neill Review on antimicrobial resistance, 2015

10 World Health Organisation, 2011

11 US Centres for Disease Control and Prevention Accessed 12 April 2020

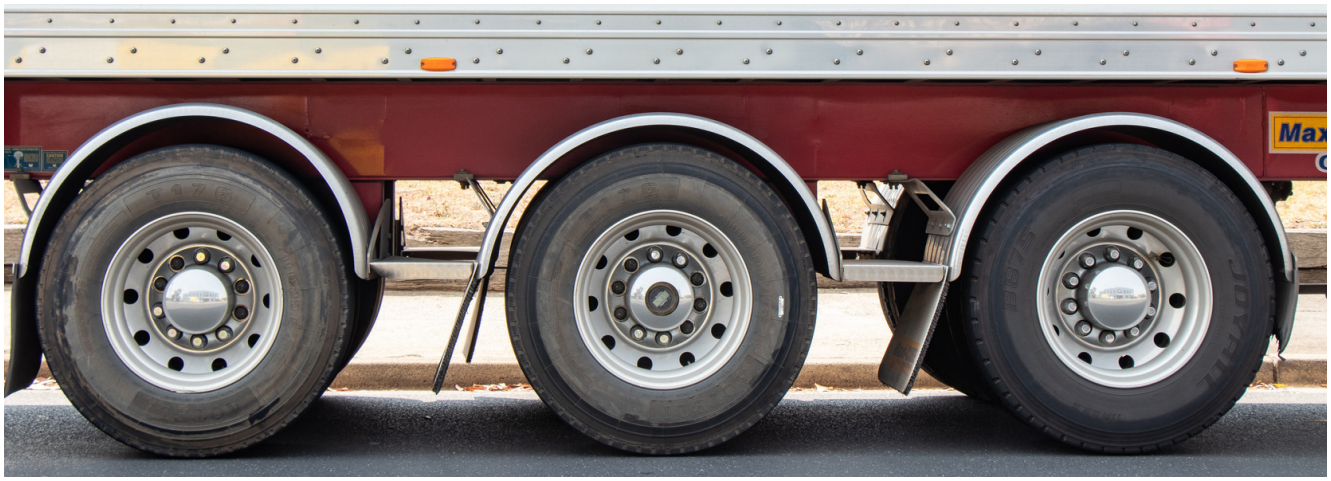
...Can have a negative impact on local communities

On many factory farms, animals are crowded into relatively small areas and their manure and urine are funnelled into massive waste lagoons. These can often leak, overflow or are sprayed onto surrounding land in quantities far greater than the land can absorb, resulting in contamination of drinking water resources and rural rivers, and foul odour.[12]

Noise disruption to nearby properties can occur through a constant high level of noise from high velocity roof exhaust fans.[13]

Intensive animal agriculture is the single largest contributor of ammonia pollution as well as emitter of other nitrogen compounds (nitrous oxides). Higher ammonia concentrations in the air are associated with acute deficits in lung function in adults and asthmatic children living close to factory farming operations.

Factory farms necessitate additional traffic, including Heavy Goods Vehicles (HGVs) which are often unsuitable for rural roads and infrastructure.[14]



12 'Health and environmental impacts of factory farming', World Animal Protection, 2022

13 'Guidance to objecting to planning applications', Animal Aid

14 Borlée, F., Yzermans, C. J., Aalders, B., Rooijackers, J., Krop, E., Maassen, C. B. M., ... Smit, L. A. M. 2017. Air pollution from livestock farms is associated with airway obstruction in neighboring residents. American Journal of Respiratory and Critical Care Medicine. Accessed 29th September 2021

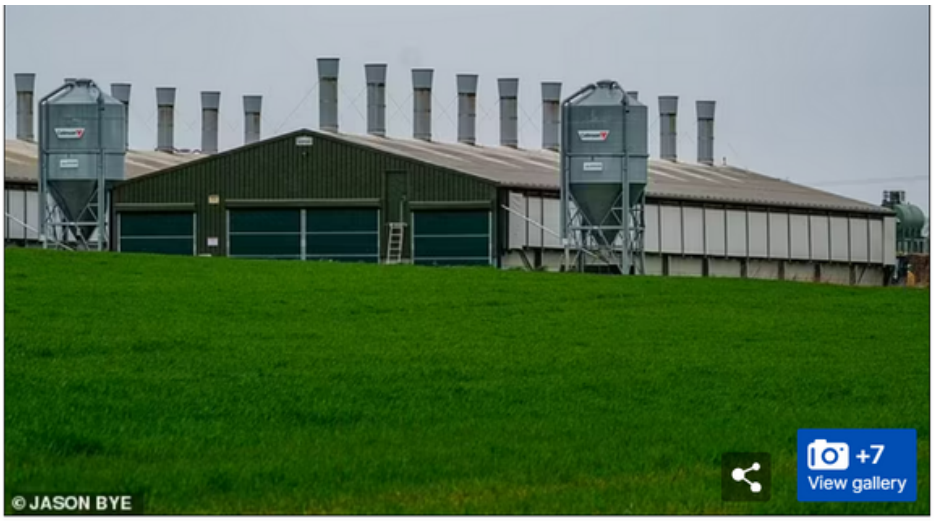
Case study 1: Stow Bedon, Norfolk

In April 2024 the *Daily Mail* published an article on claims from the local community of Stow Bedon in Norfolk in connection to the intensive pig farm which houses 7,000 pigs in barns.

The article documents the strong stench of ammonia from the factory farm which residents complained caused them nose bleeds, headaches, breathing problems and spoiled food, and said they were unable to sit in their gardens because the odour is so overpowering.

> **I get nose bleeds and it stings your nose and lungs. I also get headaches. It's quite stressful...If you eat outside the food can taste like pig excrement. Sometimes it can be so strong it's difficult to breathe when walking near the site.**
> *Health care professional Ann Cuthbert*

For local residents ammonia represents a particular problem especially in combination with fumes from cars and other industrial facilities. It has been linked to increased death rates, cardiovascular disease, respiratory problems, cognitive decline and low birth weights.



The intensive pig farm in Stow Bedon, Norfolk, housing 7,000 pigs since 2021

Image from Daily Mail (Jason Bye)

> **We live in a farming area and everyone knows you get smells occasionally but it wasn't particularly noticeable before. It's the industrialisation of it.**
> *Chair of Stow Bedon and Breckles Parish Council, Hannah Reed*

Full article: www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-13289175/Our-village-pig-farm-smells-bad-causing-nose-bleeds-spoiling-food.html

Case study 2: Westhall, Suffolk

In April 2024 the *Daily Mail* reported on the local villagers in Westhall in Suffolk who claim that they have suffered following the construction of an intensive chicken farm housing 40,000 birds.

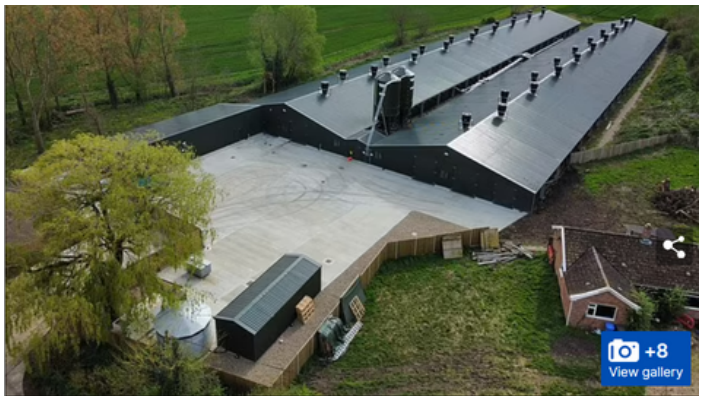
The article documents how every summer villagers claim they are engulfed by a 'plague of flies' are attracted to a huge new poultry unit nearby. According to the local community, the millions of flies force locals to sleep under nets and keep windows closed on hot days. Many also complained about smells and the constant noise of whirring ventilation fans, as well as from lorries travelling to and from the site.

> **We've had to put up with problems of smell and noise. But the worst thing is the millions of flies that have infested the area in the two summers since it began operating. The swarms are just horrendous...It makes life pretty intolerable and it is impossible to stop them coming into your house**
> *Local resident Alasdair Cameron*

A local resident blamed fumes from the farm for his rhinitis, making him sneeze and his eyes water. He further said that four different estate agents have told him that the value of his house had plummeted £ 50,000 to £300,000 because of the chicken unit over the road.

The intensive chicken farm in Westhall, Suffolk, housing 40,000 birds

Image from Daily Mail



> **The flies are affecting the mental health of people. People say flies are normal in the countryside – but this level is not normal.**
> *Beth Keys-Holloway, local Councillor for Halesworth and Blything*

Full article: www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-13310761/Poultry-farm-brought-plague-flies-homes-Outraged-villagers-claim-enormous-1-5million-chicken-unit-home-40-000-birds-created-invasion-insects-forcing-sleep-nets-cancel-dinner-parties-windows-closed.html

...Depletes human-edible cereals

Industrial livestock production is dependent on using human-edible cereals – wheat, maize, barley - as animal feed. Globally 40% of crop calories are used to feed animals. In countries where most livestock farming is industrial, the proportion is much higher.

Around two-thirds of EU and US cereals are used as animal feed. Most of this feed grain – 69% - is used in the pig and poultry sectors which in much of the world are highly industrialised.

...Causes extreme animal suffering

On factory farms animals like cattle, pigs and chickens live their short lives confined in their hundreds or thousands indoors, often without daylight or the ability to perform natural behaviours. Such cramped conditions are squalid, and result in a great deal of suffering.

Factory farming practices include beak trimming, a process by which chicks have their beaks mutilated at just a few days old; tail docking, a process by which piglets have their tails amputated without anaesthesia; farrowing crates, where sows are kept in cages for weeks at a time in a space so small they can't turn around; and much more.

On factory farms sows are kept in farrowing crates for weeks at a time, unable to interact with piglets or even turn around.

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