

Modern poultry production

Today's Poultry Industry: The Inside Story is a short booklet published by the Farm Animal Welfare Network (previously Chicken's Lib) and the National Society Against Factory Farming. The booklet contains chapters on: battery hens, broiler chickens, turkeys, ducks and ostriches. As well as discussing the traditional areas of egg or meat production and slaughter methods, it also includes the welfare of breeding stock – a group of animals not so often considered. Unfortunately one area omitted is that of religious slaughter.

Whilst this publication correctly raises a number of poignant issues, it is emotively worded eg 'baby birds' and 'Easter chicks'. Similarly the rhetorical question 'Could cancerous birds reach the consumer?' – (there is no answer given – the response should probably have been 'yes, but unlikely due to efficient hygiene/quality control inspection') – illustrates the angle taken. The booklet largely presents information criticizing the poultry industry. There are many things wrong with poultry production in the UK but there are some things that are right. Hardly any positive points are made and there is little attempt to suggest possible solutions to the many problems. Little is said for instance about alternative systems and the advantages (and dangers) of some of the less intensive methods.

This campaigning style booklet may help to change attitudes to many of the practices carried out in the mainstream intensive poultry industry; it would perhaps have a greater impact if a slightly more constructive approach had been taken at times.

Today's Poultry Industry: The Inside Story. Produced and published by The Farm Animal Welfare Network (FAWN) and The National Society Against Factory Farming (1995). 18pp. Paperback. Available from FAWN, PO Box 40, Holmfirth, Huddersfield HD7 1QY, UK. Price 25p each or £2 for 20.

The routine mutilation of farm livestock

Many farm animals are routinely tail-docked and/or castrated or debeaked. The numbers of these mutilation operations – especially the castrations – have dropped over the last decade or so. However, it still seems – or it is still believed – that some of the current systems of intensive husbandry, ie the fattening of pigs and the group-rearing of broiler poultry for the table, can only be carried out if the animals are tail-docked or debeaked.

A detailed and well argued booklet, produced by Compassion in World Farming Trust describes these various mutilating procedures, indicates the degree of suffering inflicted and strongly recommends that there should be a change to less intensive husbandry systems which do not require these operations.

Many farmers, agriculturalists and veterinary surgeons are now beginning to accept that these mutilations cause unnecessary suffering and unnecessary loss of production, and indeed should not be needed in well designed, well-run, husbandry enterprises. This booklet should help overcome the resistance to these ideas, that still exists in some parts of the animal farming industry.

"For Their Own Good": A Study of Farm Animal Mutilations. Peter Stevenson (1994). 23pp. Paperback. Obtainable from Compassion in World Farming Trust, Charles House, 5A Charles Street, Petersfield, Hants GU32 3EH, UK. Price £2.50.