74% of Lidl's whole chickens burned by their own excrement, shocking report claims

Thursday 29 February, 2024

- **Birds are kept in filthy conditions and are bred to grow unnaturally fast**
- **As a result 3 in 4 of the whole chickens sold in Lidl are plagued by 'revolting' ulcers from the birds laying in their own waste - almost 4x higher than levels reported by rival Aldi**
- **94% of the discounter's breast meat is afflicted by a muscle disease that makes the typically lean food 224% higher in fat content**
- **Diseased meat poses health risks and questions over food quality**

Today - a shocking new animal welfare survey investigates the prevalence of a skin disease caused by chickens being forced to lay in their own faeces and urine.

Analysing 1,964 chicken products from 40 Lidl stores in 21 UK cities from September to November 2023, the charity Open Cages has detected 'hock burn' on 74% of the whole birds examined. These painful chemical burns can be seen with the naked eye as a brown ulcer on the back of the leg.

Photos from the survey can be accessed here.

Andrew Knight, Veterinary Professor of Animal Welfare explains: *"Fast-growing chicken breeds and overcrowded conditions are used by some supermarkets in an attempt to maximise profits, but chickens can suffer as a result. This is indicated by meat characteristics such as hock burns and white striping disease, which consumers can see with their own eyes, as shown in this report… The hocks (ankles) of chickens suffer chemical burns when chickens are forced to rest on urine and faeces-soaked flooring, for weeks on end."*

Why do chickens get hock burns?

Lidl typically sources chickens from heavily crowded factory farms in which the birds' waste drops to the floor and is not cleaned until after slaughter. Chickens can be chemically burned by the ammonia in the excrement, causing a skin ulcer which can still be seen on the meat when purchased in the supermarket in the form of a dark brown lesion.

Health risks

The charity also detected **'white striping disease' in 94% of Lidl's chicken breast meat packages.** This muscle disorder is characterised by white lines across the breast meat. It is a disease that chickens develop in intensive conditions as a result of being bred to reach slaughter weight in just 6 weeks.

Breast meat affected by white striping disease can be up to 224% higher in fat content and lower in protein levels. There is no information available to consumers on the risks of eating meat afflicted by hock burns.

Professor Knight continues: *"This report reveals how highly prevalent these conditions are, within UK meat chickens sold in Lidl. The results are chronic suffering for many millions of chickens, and poorer meat quality. The solution is to use slower-growing chicken breeds with more space, as advocated by the Better Chicken Commitment."*

The Better Chicken Commitment

Open Cages, alongside leading animal welfare charities, is calling on Lidl to sign up to the Better Chicken Commitment (BCC.) The BCC is a set of RSPCA-backed improved welfare standards signed by hundreds of food businesses across the world.

Chickens raised to the standards of the BCC suffer significantly fewer health issues like hock burns and muscle diseases because they are more active, can grow at a more natural pace and live in more spacious and hygienic conditions.

Open Cages founder Connor Jackson comments: *"Despite Lidl's big claims on transparency and the*

Media:











quality of its food, this report reveals that its chicken meat is in fact riddled with revolting diseases caused by filthy farming conditions and poor welfare. It's not only animals who are paying the price, but we as consumers too. I hope our report arms consumers with knowledge and helps them make more informed choices about where they shop. Hundreds of companies - from high end retailers to discounters - have signed the Better Chicken Commitment and in doing so have responded to the many problems associated with intensive chicken farming. But Lidl has refused to act, despite half a million people signing the petition. As the largest retailer in Europe, Lidl has a uniquely influential voice and should be leading the way on this. Because with great power comes great responsibility."

600+ companies such as Marks and Spencer, Waitrose, KFC, Lidl France and Lidl Denmark have signed up to the BCC or parts of it. Every French supermarket has signed up, and every Dutch supermarket will stop selling fast growing chickens by the end of the year.

Morrisons, Sainsbury's and Co-op have committed to adopt improved space requirements for chickens, helping to reduce levels of hock burn.

Lidl has not signed up or taken any meaningful steps to improve the lives of chickens in the UK. Half a million people have signed petitions calling on Lidl to adopt the BCC Europe-wide.

End

Photos from the report can be accessed here.

The full report can be accessed here.

Photos from UK intensive chicken farms can be accessed here.

Please credit Open Cages for all.

About Andrew Knight:

Andrew Knight is a veterinary Professor of Animal Welfare, affiliated with the School of Environment and Science at Griffith University, Queensland, where he is an Adjunct Professor. Prof. Knight is also affiliated with the University of Winchester, where he established and directed its Centre for Animal Welfare from 2015 – 2023.

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