Footage: Co-op Chickens Deformed, Dying And Collapsing In Agony

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Co-op faces a revolt over its animal welfare standards as activists film severely deformed, injured and dying 'frankenchickens' suffering on three intensive farms in Lincolnshire supplying the 'ethical' retailer.

One of the farms is proudly promoted by Co-op in an online video but has been slammed as a 'fairytale' following the undercover probe.

The footage fuels an intense conflict within Co-op over the sale of selectively bred fast growing chickens. 96% of Co-op's members democratically voted for an end to the practice over animal welfare concerns at its AGM in May but were refused by the board, with the Board Chair Allan Leighton commenting: *'it costs to do the right thing.'*

For Co-op member Aaron Browning, *"Watching the undercover footage, seeing the bins overflowing with dead chickens, looking at the birds' twisted legs and bleary eyes - it makes me ashamed to be a member."*

>**Photos.**
>Full investigation video.
>Raw footage.

Between August and November 2022, activists from Open Cages filmed on three intensive chicken farms in Lincolnshire supplying Co-op.

One of the sites - Sheffield Farm - has been identified as identical to a farm featured in a video produced and promoted by Co-op on its website and in the press. Hosted on Youtube with a Co-op logo, it shows healthy-looking chickens raised in clean, spacious conditions being cared for by a vigilant farm worker.

But the undercover filming, narrated in a video by Downton Abbey's Peter Egan, shows malformed 'frankenchickens' suffering in a horrendous state. A number of chickens can be seen flapping their wings in pain with severe deformities, illnesses and lameness.

Some birds were found near death, unable to eat or drink, with one showing visibly aged and untreated wounds. One dead bird was found black and blue and buried in litter in the later stages of decomposition

Hidden cameras show hundreds of dead chickens being tossed into bins by the workers. Footage from the other nearby farms linked with Co-op show identical scenes with workers dumping dead bodies into maggot infested bins as they laugh.

Animal welfare: a growing revolt within Co-op

The motion to stop selling frankenchickens was the only member-led motion at the supermarket's AGM this year and was supported by animal charity The Humane League UK. It was voted for by over 31,000 members. While Co-op's leadership has agreed to give its chickens more space, the decision to keep using fast-growing breeds has created conflict between Co-op members and leadership.

Co-op member Hannah Dickson said: "*The footage makes me appalled that our Co-op has decided to keep profiting from these sick and suffering animals. The membership voted to change the breed - while more space is good, it isn't good enough when these chickens are dropping dead of organ failure and struggle to walk. The cost of living crisis presents challenges, but these don't justify blatant animal cruelty. If the Co-op acts ethically only when it's convenient then they aren't an ethical supermarket at all."*

Co-op member Aaron Browning adds: *"Co-op is unique among supermarkets because of its democratic structure and the fact that millions of its members can have a say in its direction. Yet we told the leadership that we didn't want sick frankenchickens being sold in Co-op shelves, and they didn't listen. It makes me ashamed to be a member."*

Media:









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Fast-growing ‘Frankenchickens’ have been genetically selected over decades to prioritise fast growth and produce as much meat in the shortest possible time. Around 97% of the chicken sold in Co-op is produced this way.

As a result of their rapid growth they can suffer from a wide range of health and welfare issues including heart attacks, organ failure, lameness, bone deformities, muscle diseases and burns.

Crucially, much of the benefits of more space are limited without using slower growing breeds. As summarised by the European Food Safety Authority, *“the health and welfare status of [meat chickens] mainly depends on the genetics.”*

Over 350 businesses in the UK and EU have committed to the Better Chicken Commitment which prohibits the sale of frankenchickens including major food companies like KFC, Nando’s, Greggs, Marks and Spencer, and Waitrose.

Connor Jackson, CEO & Co-founder of Open Cages, comments: *“Co-op’s loyal members and customers are being fed a deceptive and misleading fairy tale. These images prove that behind the carefully polished, “ethical” image we all know, sick Frankenchickens are being condemned to lives of unnecessary pain, misery and stress on intensive mega farms. These birds simply grow too fast to lead any sort of decent life."*

"For years, we have tried to convince Co-op’s decision makers to address this and yet nothing has changed, whilst the most forward thinking retailers like M&S and Waitrose pledged to address this years ago."

End
>**Photos.**
>Full investigation video.
>Raw footage.
Please credit Open Cages.

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