

Why We Work for Policy Change

The goal of Mercy For Animals is to promote compassionate food choices and policies, and thereby reduce as much animal suffering as we can. Our [vision](#) for the future is a world where animals are not raised and killed for food.

With individual consumers, our focus is encouraging them to cut out animal products. We carry this out through large-scale online advertising campaigns; viral videos, social media memes, and blogs; printed leaflets and guides; media coverage; informative websites and emails; and other means. In fact, Mercy



While this is great work, it is not all that we can or should do for animals. We want to prevent as much animal suffering as possible, and if we only tried to help animals through asking individuals to change their diets, we would miss huge opportunities to reduce animal suffering and achieve progress for farmed animals. This is especially the case with large corporations and governments, which hold such vast power over the fate of animals.

There are some who think the ethical argument for leaving animals off our plates is so weak that it can be undermined by improvements in farmed animal welfare; they suggest that even though we have the power to free animals from the worst forms of factory farming abuse, we should leave them to suffer torturous conditions because only then will the public see the value of eating vegan.

That is not what Mercy For Animals is about. We think that the ethical argument for leaving animal products off our plates is a powerful one, so powerful (and logical and compassionate) that it does not dissipate when animals are treated less cruelly.

Further, Mercy For Animals will not fight with our hands tied behind our backs. We will not ignore the power we have to spare billions of animals from the worst forms of suffering now. Instead, we will use every means available to reduce animal suffering while working toward our ideal of a world where animals are not raised and killed for food.



So, in addition to asking individuals to change their diets, we make asks of large companies and governments; for example, we ask governments to act to reduce animal suffering by strengthening animal protection laws—for instance, by banning particularly cruel practices or enacting improvements to animal transport regulations. We ask large food companies to reduce animal suffering by prohibiting their suppliers from using the worst confinement systems, such as battery cages, veal crates, and gestation crates; and inflicting other egregious cruelties, such as tail docking and castration without anesthesia.

Additionally, we ask large producers of animal products to reduce animal suffering by eliminating the most abusive practices from their farms and slaughterhouses.

to eliminate their use of animal products in the foreseeable future. So, we have three options for dealing with companies and governments: First, we can do nothing. Second, we can ask for something we have no chance of getting—for example, a grocery store to stop selling eggs altogether. Or third, we can ask for something that reduces animal suffering but is less than we ultimately want.

It would be easy to do nothing with corporations or governments. It would also be easy to philosophically grandstand by making demands of them that we know will never be met, and pretend (as some do) that if we fail enough times in our demands, the citizenry will somehow bring about animal liberation in response to corporate inaction. Neither of these approaches brings about any real-world improvements for farmed animals. Neither will reduce the suffering of animals, nor meaningfully advance their interests and protection.

The Value Of Policy Change

Mercy For Animals does engage with corporations and governments, and we successfully push them to change their policies in ways that reduce animal suffering. In the process, we generate more public support for the idea that farmed animals' lives, preferences, and suffering matter and should be protected under the law and in corporate policies.

One way we engage with corporations and governments to reduce animal suffering is to identify and present opportunities to reduce the *number* of animals raised and killed for food. For example, our food policy specialists work with school systems and other institutions to persuade them to reduce the amount of meat they buy and serve. Mercy For Animals also helped launch [The Good Food Institute](#) to speed the progress and commercial success of plant-based and "clean" meat products (i.e., meat, milk, or eggs grown from cells without animal slaughter).

The other way we do this is to identify and present opportunities for corporations and governments to reduce the *degree of suffering* caused to the animals still raised and killed for food. For example, we have supported successful efforts to ban battery cages, veal crates, and gestation crates in a number of U.S. states. We, along with a few other organizations, have also helped convince the majority of the food industry in the



decade. We are now bringing those efforts to Mexico, Brazil, and other parts of the world. Additionally, we have persuaded two of the largest meat producers in North America to commit to ceasing their use of a particularly torturous method of slaughter known as live-shackle slaughter.

These legislative measures and corporate policy changes will significantly reduce the suffering of more than 1 billion animals every single year. And for the *first time in history*, we are getting the largest food companies, producers, and governmental bodies to acknowledge something incredibly important: Farmed animals matter. Their lives, their interests, and their suffering need to be taken into consideration.

Take a moment to reflect on the historical importance of this. Ninety-nine percent of the animals raised and killed by humans are farmed animals. Yet until recently, major corporations and governments had acted with virtually no consideration whatsoever for the lives, interests, and suffering of farmed animals. Now, they are starting to take those interests into consideration. They are making tangible improvements that significantly reduce the suffering of hundreds of millions of animals. And they are acknowledging, both in their actions and in their words, that farmed animals matter, that their suffering matters, and that their interests and preferences (such as hens' [demonstrated preference not to live packed together in battery cages](#)) matter.

We understand that some of our supporters are concerned that the large reductions in suffering caused by these improvements may have a downside. They are concerned that such improvements may lead the public to continue eating meat when they would otherwise have gone vegan (perceiving that animals are now raised and killed "humanely"), or that they may lead the public to think it's OK to raise and kill animals when they would otherwise have not (perceiving that animal protection groups like Mercy For Animals have legitimized raising and killing animals if done "humanely" by working to end the worst abuses).



First, it is worth emphasizing that ending the worst cruelties to farmed animals does significantly reduce their suffering. For example, [independent research on egg-laying systems](#) found that on a welfare scale of zero to 10—with zero being the worst possible system and 10 being an ideal pasture-raised system—battery cage facilities scored a zero and cage-free facilities scored a 5 or above.

birds from having their throats sliced open while they are fully conscious, but also spare **hundreds of thousands of**

birds from being scalded to death in hot water tanks. Similarly, significant reductions in suffering come about from removing pigs from gestation crates, improving the breed and environment of broiler chickens, and so on.

Secondly, and importantly: The evidence that does exist suggests that when companies and governments change their policies in ways that reduce the suffering of farmed animals, it actually increases public concern for farmed animals and belief that their lives and interests matter, and it decreases consumption of animal products.

How Policies Impact Consumer Demand

The demand for specific products will go up or down depending on the price. While the demand of some products, including meat, eggs, and dairy, are less affected by price than other products, **they are still significantly affected by price**. When prices go down, demand goes up. When prices go up, demand goes down.

It's no secret that the vast majority of animal welfare improvements have a cost increase attached to them, which is why companies have not already adopted those improvements. Cage-free eggs, for example, cost a bit more to produce than eggs from hens raised in battery cages. The improvements for "broiler" (meat) chickens that Mercy For Animals and other organizations are now promoting also require an increase in production costs. So, as Mercy For Animals and others work to bring about corporate and legislative policy change in order to significantly reduce the suffering of huge numbers of farmed animals, one possible byproduct is a slight increase in prices and a consequent slight decrease in demand—which can lead to fewer animals being raised and killed.

Data from the European Union suggests that EU countries that banned battery cages (before the blanket EU ban came into force) saw, on average, decreases in egg consumption rates after the ban went into effect at the same time as egg consumption was increasing in EU countries that had not banned battery cages. And a team of agricultural economists in the U.S. estimated that



or about 8 million hens.

Data from California suggests that they're right. As soon as that state's bans on the use of battery cages and the importation of shell eggs from battery cages came into effect in January of 2015, egg usage in California—which had been relatively flat for the previous three years—[began steadily dropping](#), and that drop continued at least through mid-2016. This steady protracted drop in egg usage did not happen elsewhere in the US; it was unique to California. (In the [rest of the US](#), egg usage dipped from March to June 2015 due to an avian flu outbreak, then quickly increased back to previous levels.)

But it's not cost increase alone that leads these legislative and corporate policy improvements to decrease the consumption of animal products. Because of the public attention these campaigns are able to generate, more people learn about the ways farmed animals are mistreated, more people begin to care about the lives and interests of farmed animals, and as a result, demand for animal products decreases due to changing consumer preferences.

A pair of agricultural economists in the United States conducted a review of 10 years of grocery store purchasing data to see how grocery purchases were affected by media stories on farmed animal welfare issues (including stories on investigations of welfare problems and stories on legislation to ban certain confinement systems). They found that the media attention to farmed animal welfare issues [decreased consumption of chicken and pork](#) and moved that consumption to other (non-animal) food products. Based on the data, they concluded that pork purchases would have been 2.5% higher, and poultry purchases 5% higher, had it not been for the media coverage of animal welfare issues. That difference suggests nearly 1 billion animals were spared from suffering on factory farms over the 10-year period as a direct result of media coverage of farmed animal welfare campaigns.



Along the same lines, a [study carried out by Mercy For Animals](#) found that when people were shown news articles about companies enacting cage-free or crate-free policies, or news articles about governments banning battery cages or gestation crates, they became more interested in reducing their consumption of eggs and pork. A [similar study](#) carried out by a researcher in the EU found that when people read about a welfare improvement to fish slaughter, overall it

improvements to farmed animal welfare, it improved their overall “attitude toward animals” score (a score that included attitudes around eating meat and how much meat participants intended to eat in the future).

Furthermore, in the European Union, the countries that have the most progressive corporate policies and governmental protections for farmed animal welfare (for example, Austria, Switzerland, Germany, Sweden, and the UK) also [tend to have higher rates of vegetarianism](#) than comparable EU countries with less progressive policies (for example, France, Belgium, Spain, Ireland, Finland, and Norway). In the U.S., a [survey by Faunalytics](#) found that those who are willing to pay more for “higher welfare” animal products are much more likely to be interested in becoming vegetarian and more likely to be vegetarian than the general public. And in the Netherlands, [another study](#) found that those who eat “higher welfare” meat also eat less meat than the general public. While none of these correlations implies causation, what they suggest is that increasing attention to and improvements in how animals are treated on farms can and do go hand in hand with increases in vegetarian and vegan eating and decreases in meat consumption.

Our Vision

In summary, while encouraging individuals to move toward vegan eating has always been and will continue to be a cornerstone of Mercy For Animals’ work, we believe that it is also crucial to engage with and win changes from food companies, producers, and governments. The evidence is clear that the improved policies we are winning not only significantly reduce the suffering of billions of animals raised for food, but also decrease demand for animal products, decrease the number of animals raised for food, and increase public support for the idea that farmed animals' lives, interests, and suffering matter.



evolutionary forces that shape us, counter to our countries' cultural and food traditions, counter to social norms and family traditions, counter to habit, counter to the agendas of nearly all major political parties, and counter to the interests of many of the world's wealthiest and most powerful industries. That does not mean we cannot succeed. But it does mean that complete change is not going to happen overnight, and that victories along the path—changes that reduce the number of animals suffering, or that meaningfully reduce how much suffering is endured by the animals raised for food—should be celebrated.

In the absence of some sweeping technological innovation (for example, if clean meat, milk, and eggs were to take over nearly the entire animal products sector), widespread change for animals will only be possible if we move each of the major sectors of society—individuals, companies, and governments—step-by-step through progressively increasing levels of concern for the lives, interests, and suffering of farmed animals, and progressively increasing protection of those animals' interests through policy and law.

Our vision and hope is that this process, which has gathered significant steam over the past decade, will continue in coming years as corporate policies and governmental legislation are increasingly strengthened to reduce, further reduce, and reduce further still the suffering caused to farmed animals.



Meanwhile, the idea that farmed animals' lives, interests, and suffering matter will become more deeply engrained in our culture and in our laws, both through the influence of policy change and through direct education work. As this idea spreads, a greater and greater number of people will begin to act to help farmed animals, both through choosing to leave animal products off their plates and through supporting policies that protect farmed animals.

At the same time, the spread of plant-based and clean meat, egg, and dairy products (those produced from cells

without animal slaughter) will take progressively larger shares of the animal protein market as technology advances and these products eventually begin to outcompete conventional meat on price, taste, and convenience. Large companies and politicians will gradually realign their support toward non-animal food industries as these industries increase in market share,



At some point in the future, all of these trends will hopefully converge to a place where the economic value and power of animal agriculture has shrunk enough, the economic value of competing non-animal product industries has grown enough, and the political and cultural will of the public to protect the lives and interests of farmed animals has increased enough that much more significant changes in law become politically viable, and society as a whole chooses to shift more explicitly and fully away from animal agriculture through legislative or corporate policy changes. After this point, there will still be a great deal of work to be done, gradually reducing the remaining uses of animals for food at home, and in spreading this change to other countries around the globe; but as a society we will have reached a landmark point in our relationship with farmed animals.

Change is hard. The world is filled with animal suffering, and the reality is [it will continue to be](#) even if the entire world goes vegan. Hard-fought policy and legislative victories that significantly reduce the suffering of millions or billions of individuals—individuals similar in kind and in value to each one of us, who are suffering right now and who desperately want to suffer less—while increasing general awareness and concern for farmed animals and decreasing animal product consumption are monumental victories in the movement toward a more peaceful world.

Mercy For Animals could not be more proud to be one of the organizations bringing about these landmark changes, nor could we be more grateful to our supporters for working with us to bring about these and so many other positive advancements for farmed animals.

