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This statement is being written in response to a video that was prepared by Mercy for Animals documenting conditions on a chicken egg-laying facility.

My background: I am a 2000 graduate of the Ross University School of Veterinary Medicine, having obtained my doctorate in veterinary medicine. I am employed as a small animal veterinarian in Newark, Delaware and my case load frequently includes exotic animals, including companion chickens. I am licensed to practice veterinary medicine in Delaware, Maryland, and Pennsylvania. I am also the executive director of Chenoa Manor, a non-profit animal sanctuary & youth-assistance facility, in southeastern Pennsylvania where we have several chicken residents.

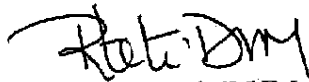
This particular video documents practices that are carried out and observations which demonstrate the laying hens enduring blatant cruelty and neglect. The points are made below:

- There are very clearly 5 to 6 hens in the laying enclosures. Although extremely social animals, chickens, like other birds, like to maintain a normal inter-animal distance when engaging in normal activities ranging from eating to roosting. The extremely close conditions the chickens endure at this facility are a detriment to their overall well-being. There are physical abnormalities that arise from this crowding that are obvious, for example, missing feathers. All of the hens videotaped were missing feathers along their back as well as on their wings and their cloacal area. Under normal conditions, chickens are well feathered. Feathers are important for birds to be able to thermoregulate, or regulate their body temperature. Without feathers, birds can become susceptible to subtle environmental changes; changes that would not bother them if they had feathers. The crowded conditions also lead to stress. Under normal circumstances a bird, or any animal, experiencing stress needs only to change its environmental situation to relieve itself of the stress. However, these chickens are unable to do so. Forced to live in a high stress environment has a direct negative impact on the health of the individual. A stressed body releases endogenous steroids (cortisol, for example). The steroids, especially when elevated for a consistent period of time, can directly suppress the individual's immune system thereby making them more susceptible to illness. Further, living in such a highly crowded and closed environment such as observed at this facility, illness can very easily spread from individual to individual.
- When the hens were handled by workers at this particular facility, they were handled inadequately. Many episodes are documented that show workers holding

a chicken by her neck and quickly spinning her around multiple times and subsequently dropping her to the floor. The birds proceed to writhe about on the ground until they are kicked out of sight. Chickens, like other birds and animals, have a highly developed nervous system capable of experiencing pain and reacting to it. There is no reason to doubt that the birds that were spun around while grasped by their neck and tossed to the floor were experiencing pain. This is not an acceptable way of neither handling a bird nor killing a bird.

- The laying hens were videotaped in enclosures that had floors made entirely of wire. This is not a natural substrate for chickens to be exposed to at all times. Normally, chickens would spend time scratching at the ground as well as perching off the ground. Continual exposure to this type of substrate not only produces the previously described stress but also can lead to foot problems such as pododermatitis, or inflammation/infection of the foot/toes. There is also evidence of holes in the wire flooring. These holes not only serve as potential places for the hens to become entrapped but also as areas where the hens may become injured by the wire itself. It appears that the only time the hens are given any sort of reprieve from the wire substrate is when they are forced to perch on the dead body of a cage-mate, or when they have been deliberately been tossed alive into a bin of dead chickens.
- Several hens are also videotaped in the midst of what appears to be agonal breathing. This occurs shortly before death when an animal, in this case a hen, is on their side, eyes practically closed, barely gasping for breath. The hens that are exhibiting this type of breathing appear to all be trapped somehow in their enclosures. Agonal breathing is associated with suffering just prior to expiring.

In my professional opinion, there appears to be well-documented evidence in the video of laying hens that endured neglect and cruelty, ultimately leading to their suffering unnecessarily. These conditions appear to be outside the boundaries of what would be considered acceptable for an agricultural animal to have to endure.



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