



Eighteen nations have outlawed this barbarism. Why is the AVMA still embracing it?

Argentina, Austria, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Luxembourg, Norway, Poland, Sweden, Switzerland, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom have all banned the cruel force feeding of ducks and geese. Here in the US, California and Chicago have done the same. Yet the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) continues to condone this animal abuse.

It's a Disease, Stupid

Foie Gras, which means fat liver, is obtained by force feeding ducks or geese. A plastic or metal pipe is pushed down their throats in order to feed them a high carbohydrate mush of maize. The result is a liver enlarged 6 to 10 times what it would be in a duck raised normally. Poultry welfare expert Dr. Ian Duncan writes: "Force feeding quickly results in birds that are obese and in a pathological state, called hepatic lipidosis or fatty liver disease. There is no doubt," he concludes, "that in this pathological state, the birds will feel very ill."

The European Union Scientific Committee on Animal Health and Animal Welfare also concluded that force feeding is detrimental to the welfare of the birds. In its eighty-nine page report, the committee noted that animal death rates increase by a factor of ten to twenty during the last two weeks of forced feeding. It also found that the level of steatosis (an indicator of abnormally large quantities of fat within liver cells) should be considered pathological. Extending force feeding by even a few days results in very high death rates among the birds and foie gras producers are careful to stop just before this occurs.

Liver enlargement leads to dyspnea or respiratory distress caused by the compression of the air sacs—the avian equivalent of lungs. Birds in the second half of the force feeding cycle breathe with open mouths and a rapid, shallow respiratory pattern—a completely abnormal panting.

They may also become unable to walk as the liver (and hence the abdomen) become too distended for the legs to stand with normal alignment under the body leading the birds to drag themselves with their wings, scrabbling with their feet.

Other complications include hepatic encephalopathy—a condition where the liver goes into failure and cannot remove toxins from the blood. The brain cannot function in such an environment and produces seizures, semi-comatose states, stereotypic behavior, and opisthotonus (a condition where the head arches backward over the body).

AVMA defeated a resolution to disallow force feeding last year based on comments from three of their members who had participated in visits to Hudson Valley Foie Gras to observe force feeding. This plant has been giving tours to dozens of people in the last 18 months as the controversy of foie gras production becomes public. They have perfected a display which minimizes the trauma to the birds.

Instead of the usual fifteen or so handlers rushing through their allotted 350 birds each shift, visitors were shown two to four feeders (women touted as "their best feeders") who proceeded at such a slow pace that, instead of producing 6000 birds per week, the plant would only be able to produce a few hundred. The birds who were part of this staged exhibition were not in the final stages of the feeding process and showed only early signs of suffering. Since most of these veterinary visitors were not avian experts, they did not recognize the respiratory distress they were already exhibiting—abnormally rapid and shallow panting due to their enlarged liver size.

Yet the AVMA, which professes to "protect animal health and relieve animal suffering", hypocritically chooses to ignore all the scientific evidence (not to mention the outlawing of force feeding by eighteen nations) and instead endorses the practice

of deliberately making animals sick for commercial gain.

This is not the only instance in which the AVMA routinely betrays animals. AVMA also endorses the deliberate inducement of anemia in veal calves to produce so called "gourmet" white meat and the use of gestation stalls that lead to intense suffering and countless medical complications among breeding sows.

Time for AVMA to Join the Civilized world

It's time for the AVMA to stop pandering to the agribusiness corporations who have no interest in animal welfare and care only for the bottom line. Vets are not supposed to be willing aiders and abettors in making animals sick for profit.

The AVMA is light years behind the civilized world that has not only outlawed the force feeding of ducks and geese but has banned sowstalls and veal calf crating as well. The greater public clearly disapproves of animal cruelty and, where ballot initiatives have offered ordinary people that choice, they have resoundingly rejected these practices. The AVMA's backward thinking is a shameful tragedy for American animals.

Not unexpectedly, AVMA is not considered an expert on animal welfare by many individuals and organizations who must look to more enlightened institutions like the Humane Society of the United States for assistance. It is to be hoped that this year's conference starting Saturday in Honolulu will result in some ethical rehabilitation.

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