



MEDIA RELEASE

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Welfare problems in ducks raised for foie gras production

Review identifies welfare concerns in all three stages of foie gras production and concludes that force feeding causes very poor welfare and should not be practised

A recent review into the welfare of ducks in France during foie gras production has highlighted a number of problems ranging from poor housing conditions to injuries received during handling and force feeding.

The review, published in UFAW's scientific journal *Animal Welfare*, considered all three stages of foie gras production from starting and growing through to pre force-feeding and, the final stage, force-feeding. During the final stage, from the age of 12 weeks and usually for 12 to 15 days, the ducks are force-fed twice a day with increasing amounts of energy-rich food.

Whilst the primary aim of the review was to highlight welfare problems in the last stage of foie gras production, welfare problems were also identified in the first two stages. These included lack of access to open water for bathing and a fear of humans. The review also found that the physical condition of the birds deteriorated as they progressed through the stages of foie gras production.

The review was carried out by Dr Irene Rochlitz and Professor Don Broom at the Animal Welfare Information Service, University of Cambridge and focussed on the scientific and other factual information available. Examination of duck welfare in foie gras production is timely, as there have been recent public calls for the practice to be banned. Force feeding is banned in a large number of European and other countries (including the UK), but many countries where production is banned continue to import it.

Foie gras is a luxury food product made of the liver of a duck or goose that has been specially fattened. EU Regulations state that, in order to be called foie gras, the minimum liver weight must be 300 g net in ducks and 400 g net in geese. These weights cannot be achieved without force-feeding but if they were reduced, it may be

SCIENCE IN THE SERVICE OF ANIMAL WELFARE

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possible to produce a fatty liver that is still acceptable to consumers without the force-feeding.

Researchers and farmers are keen to find a way of producing foie gras without the need to force feed. Dr Rochlitz concludes: *“Should foie gras production without force feeding become possible, duck livers should not reach a weight at which there are pathological effects. In order to prevent the accumulation of toxic substances and other adverse effects on welfare due to liver malfunction, maximum liver weights should be specified and based on scientific studies. To prevent poor welfare associated with inadequate housing and management, limits should be established for the occurrence of welfare indicators such as wing fractures, body lesions, gait abnormalities and contact dermatitis with the birds being checked prior to and/or after slaughter.”*

Further information

Subscribers to the Animal Welfare Journal will find this paper (*I Rochlitz and D M Broom “the welfare of ducks during foie gras production”*) in Volume 26 issue 2. The full abstract of the study can be read at UFAW’s website <http://www.ufaw.org.uk/the-ufaw-journal/animal-welfare>.

If you wish to read the full paper, you can visit [ingentaconnect.com](http://www.ingentaconnect.com) to access the paper for \$25 (US) plus taxes.

<http://www.ingentaconnect.com/contentone/ufaw/aw/2017/00000026/00000002/art00001>

Those purchasing the paper or choosing to subscribe to the Animal Welfare journal will be supporting UFAW’s work.

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Ends

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Note to editors:

The Universities Federation for Animal Welfare (UFAW) is an internationally recognised, independent scientific and educational animal welfare charity. It works to improve knowledge and understanding of animals’ needs in order to achieve high standards of welfare for farm, companion, research, captive wild animals and those with which we interact in the wild.

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