

WellBeing International

WBI Studies Repository

2019

10 Years of Progress for Farm Animals

Lewis Bollard

Follow this and additional works at: https://www.wellbeingintlstudiesrepository.org/aw_farm_gen



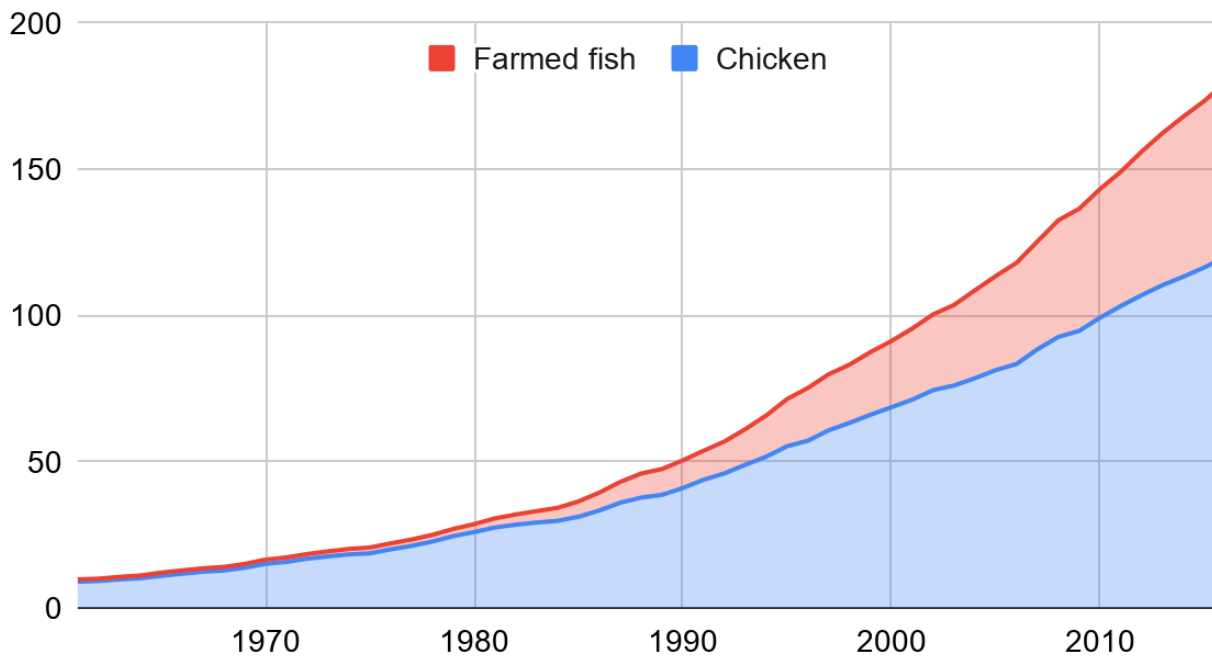
10 Years of Progress for Farm Animals

It's hard to be a farm animal advocate. Most of the world's problems — [poverty](#), [war](#), [disease](#) — are getting smaller, if always too slowly. But factory farming is getting bigger: the number of animals suffering in factory farms globally has more than doubled in the last two decades alone.

Worse, it often feels like we're not making progress. After decades of veg advocacy, just [5%](#) of Americans self-identify as vegetarian, while [86%](#) say they "actively try to include" chicken in their diet — two numbers that have barely changed in two decades of [Gallup polls](#). A 2019 [Eurogroup poll](#) of 7,000 people in the seven biggest EU nations found just 1% identified as vegan, and only half of the self-identified "vegans" said they never ate chicken.

Add in the rapid growth of factory farming around the world — on current trends, factory farms a decade from now will confine 4.2B more land animals and 18.5B more fish than they do today — and from a distance it can seem like there's little to celebrate.

Global Chicken & Farmed Fish Production (Million Tons)



The world's production of chicken and farmed fish has increased 18X since 1961 and is on track to keep increasing sharply. Note that this shows weight, not numbers alive at any time, because there's only reliable historic data for the former. There are more farmed fish than chickens alive at any time, due to fish's longer lifespans and smaller size. "Farmed fish" includes all finfish, crustaceans, and cephalopods, but not other mollusks or other aquatic life. Sources: [FAOStat](#), [FAO Aquaculture data](#).

10 Sets of Wins in 10 Years

But look closer: the farm animal advocacy movement has achieved more progress over the last decade than it did in the entire prior century:

1. **Corporate cage-free wins.** In the last 10 years, advocates have secured pledges from [1,363](#) corporations across 77 countries — including 18 of the world’s 20 largest food retailers — to stop selling eggs from caged hens. In Europe, where these campaigns began, the number of cage-free hens has risen from about [60M](#) in 2003, to [128M](#) in 2009, and [207M](#) last year. In the US, the number has risen from just 10M in 2009 to [70M](#) today. Counting the impact over the last 10 years, that’s already about 1.3B hens spared a year in a cage. And that’s only counting pledges already implemented; if future corporate pledges are implemented, another 300M+ hens/year globally should be out of cages in a decade’s time.
2. **Plant-based meat.** A decade ago, none of the US’ [50 largest](#) fast food chains sold plant-based meat; today nine of the top 50 fast food chains do, while the two biggest, McDonald’s and Subway, are trialing it. Back then, only a few of the world’s [20 largest food and beverage companies](#) made plant-based meats or milks (or owned brands that did); today 17 of them do, and some, like Nestle, Conagra, and Kellogg’s, are making major investments in the space. Of course, advocates don’t deserve all the credit for this, but they at least inspired many of the founders and early investors in the space, and helped promote plant-based meat’s rise.
3. **Legislative and litigation wins.** Decades of advocacy by European activists resulted in the EU implementing new bans on inhumane slaughter practices, gestation crates for most of the sow’s pregnancy, and battery cages (“enriched cages” are still allowed). US advocates won sweeping farm animal welfare ballot measures in MA and CA, enacted similar laws in MI, OR, and WA, and defeated the [King Amendment](#), which would have nullified these laws. And litigation brought by Indian advocates caused India’s government to issue [new rules](#) at livestock markets and the Delhi High Court to issue a [nationwide moratorium](#) on new battery cages — a move for which advocates also secured the support of the [Indian Law Commission](#).
4. **More corporate wins.** Advocates secured over 60 corporate pledges to eliminate crates for pregnant sows, including from three of the world’s [six largest](#) pork producers — [Smithfield Foods](#) (US), [BRF](#) (Brazil), and [CP Foods](#) (Thailand). And they secured pledges from [228](#) companies, including Burger King, Subway, Perdue, and KFC Europe, to improve the welfare of broiler chickens in their supply chains. If fully implemented, these pledges will reduce the suffering of over 500M animals/year.
5. **Attention to Fish.** A decade ago, few advocates spoke about the most numerous vertebrate animals killed for food: fish (and, when they did, they called them [sea kittens](#)). Since then, advocacy groups released the first undercover investigations at fish farms, and secured mainstream coverage for fish welfare in the [Washington Post](#), [Guardian](#), and [NPR](#). They secured the first corporate fish welfare policies, including from the two largest UK retailers, [Tesco](#) and [Sainsbury’s](#); spurred the development of new national fish welfare codes, for example in [Canada](#) and the [Netherlands](#); and sparked the first ever [debate on fish welfare](#) in the European Parliament.
6. **Growing meat.** In 2013, Dutch scientist Mark Post demonstrated the first cell-cultured hamburger to a London audience. Just six years later, [more than 30 startups](#) are racing to bring

the first grown meat or fish to market. It now seems likely that at least some restaurants will be serving this meat, if at a very high price point, within the next decade.

7. **Raising awareness.** Undercover investigators exposed conditions at over 200 factory farms globally, leading to thousands of media pieces on farm animal suffering. Filmmakers released at least 97 documentaries on factory farming, including most recently [The Game Changers](#), with the support of A-list celebrities like Arnold Schwarzenegger, Chris Paul, and Jackie Chan. The Economist proclaimed 2019 the “Year of the Vegan,” Yuval Noah Harari [called](#) factory farming “one of the worst crimes in history,” and at least eight of the world’s [100 highest paid celebrities](#) publicly advocated for veganism.
8. **Global policy and finance.** The 182 nations in the World Animal Health Organization endorsed (voluntary and basic) improvements to the Organization’s [global animal welfare standards](#), including [fish welfare standards](#). In 2014, a major European development bank [adopted](#) binding animal welfare requirements for funding agricultural projects, while the World Bank’s private financing arm adopted a voluntary [Good Practice Note](#) on animal welfare. The [Farm Animal Investment Risk and Return](#) initiative secured the support of 199 major investors, with \$20 trillion in assets under management, for its work highlighting the financial risks created by factory farming.
9. **Movement strength.** When I recently surveyed 27 long-time advocates — with 586 years of cumulative experience in the global farm animal advocacy movement — they reported big improvements over the last decade. Chief among them: the movement has become more professional and better organized; focused on large-scale change and the most numerous animals; and more data-driven. They also pointed to the movement’s globalization: a decade ago almost all activity was concentrated in the US and Northern Europe, whereas today the movement spans the Americas, Europe, and Asia.
10. **China.** A decade ago there was almost no mention of farm animal welfare in China. Since then, China’s largest chicken producing state issued [humane slaughter rules](#) (something the US still lacks for chickens); China’s Ministry of Education [added animal welfare](#) to the veterinary curriculum; China’s Vice Minister of Agriculture [endorsed](#) farm animal welfare; a Chinese deputy [spoke](#) for farm animal welfare in the People’s Congress; and a government-affiliated entity [issued](#) China’s first (voluntary) farm animal welfare standards. Compassion in World Farming awarded [99](#) Chinese pig, egg, and chicken farmers for improving the welfare of over [280M](#) Chinese animals, and two pork producers [committed](#) to phasing out crates after working with World Animal Protection.



If nothing above got you excited about donating to effective farm animal advocacy this giving season, hopefully this adorable piglet will. Photo: Christopher Carson.

Tired of Winning?

I'm incredibly grateful for the individuals — many of you on this email list — who drove this progress. Of course, much more progress is needed. But I hope that this holiday season you'll take a moment to appreciate the progress we've made so far — and then reflect on how you can help accelerate this progress in 2020 and beyond:

- If you have money, I hope you'll consider donating generously to an effective advocacy group, for instance through the [ACE recommended charity fund](#) or the [EA Animal Welfare Fund](#), which I co-manage with three other animal EAs. (If you already do, thank you!)
- If you have time, I hope you'll consider working or [volunteering](#) for an effective animal group or startup pursuing alternatives to animal products. (If you already are, thank you!)

Thank you for all you're doing to drive continued progress for farm animals!