The foie gras industry exposed

Animal rights organisation Animal Equality presents a shocking new undercover investigation into the foie gras industry in the EU. Animal Equality investigators visited 4 ‘traditional’ farms located in the south west of France and 5 farms in Catalunya, Spain. One of the farms investigated is owned by the President of the Spanish foie gras industry (Interpalm).

In Europe, foie gras is produced in only five countries: France, Bulgaria, Spain, Hungary and Belgium. These countries have formed the European Foie Gras Federation since 2008.

Ducks and geese exploited to produce foie gras are subjected to the agony of routine force-feeding so that farmers can obtain from them diseased, fatty livers (hepatic lipoidosis).

Dozens of hours of video and audio, and more than 500 photographs obtained by Animal Equality document the shocking reality of life for ducks and geese confined and force-fed for foie gras production in France and Spain.

- Animals confined to small cages in which the animals could not even turn around
- Animals with clear signs of stress and depression
- Evidence of trauma and inflammation of the esophagus - recognised by blood stains on force feeding tubes
- Animals with obvious respiratory problems
- Weak ducks left to die without veterinary care
- Ducks, who appeared fully aware of their situation at the time of slaughter. These animals were flapping, kicking, and bleeding incessantly
- Workers roughly handling animals
- Ducks moving with difficulty due to the size of their livers

France is the largest producer and exporter of foie gras. Over 20,000 tons are produced and approximately 700,000 geese and 37 million ducks are slaughtered by the French foie gras industry each year.

Over 4,200 tons are consumed in Spain, and 850 tons are produced. Over 1,150,000 ducks are slaughtered by the Spanish foie gras industry each year.

Foie gras bans in different countries

Building on the results of this research by Animal Equality, we ask for the immediate closure of all foie gras farms in France, and the prohibition of the production, supply and sale of foie gras in the EU.

- **Luxembourg**  
  1965 Luxembourg bans animal force-feeding, unless an animal's health specifically requires it.

- **Germany**  
  July, 1972 Germany bans force-feeding.

- **Norway**  
  December, 1974: Norway bans force-feeding.

- **Denmark**  

- **Czech Republic**  

- **Finland**  
  April, 1996: Finland bans force-feeding “for fattening purposes.”

- **Poland**  
  August, 1997: Poland bans force-feeding “for the purposes of the fatty degeneration of livers.”

- **Europe Union**  
  December, 1998: The EU’s Scientific Committee on Animal Health and Animal Welfare publishes an influential, 89-page report on foie gras production that helps form the EU’s policy.

  June, 1999: The EU prohibits foie gras production in member states (effective from 2004, except where it is already “in current practice”), and calls for research into alternative techniques for its production that do not require force-feeding.

- **United Kingdom**  
  August, 2000: The UK effectively bans foie gras production under an interpretation of its farmed animal welfare regulations.
December, 2011: While the UK has banned the production of foie gras, foie gras can still be served in restaurants. Most supermarkets, however, prohibit the sale. Celebrity butcher Jack O’Shea was escorted out of Selfridges supermarket for illegally selling foie gras to customers who knew his secret password. Two months later he was fired from his post.

- Italy
  March, 2001: Italy issues a legislative decree to ban foie gras production in 2004, calling force-feeding “torture” and “barbaric.”

- Argentina
  August, 2003: Argentina bans foie gras production, saying “force feeding must be considered mistreatment or an act of cruelty to animals, in this case to geese or ducks.”

- Israel
  August, 2003: Israel prohibits the production of foie gras, commencing from 2005. Unlike other countries, where the bans were decided legislatively, anti-foie activists ultimately earned a ruling from Israel’s Supreme Court which concluded that force-feeding violated animal cruelty laws. In 2003, Israel had the third largest foie gras industry in the world (after France and Hungary).

- United States
  September, 2004: California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger signs into law a ban on the sale and production of foie gras commencing in 2012. “This bill provides seven and a half years for agricultural husbandry practices to evolve and perfect a humane way for a duck to consume grain to increase the size of its liver through natural processes,” he said in his signing statement. “If agricultural producers are successful in this endeavor, the ban on foie gras sales and production in California will not occur.”

April, 2006: After a campaign by animal rights groups, the city of Chicago bans the sale of foie gras by a vote of 48 to 1, making it the first city in the U.S. to do so. The measure, enforced only through citizen complaints, fines restaurants $250, then $500 per offence after an initial warning. Upset with being told what they could and could not serve, in acts of civil disobedience a day after the ban, chefs who didn’t typically have foie gras on their menus served it in various forms.

May, 2008: Mayor Richard M. Daley, who called Chicago’s ban the “silliest ordinance the city had ever passed, puts forward a bill to repeal it. The City Council votes to overturn Chicago’s foie gras ban by a vote of 37-6.
May, 2012: Brandishing a less common strategy in the fight to ban foie gras, leading animal rights groups file a lawsuit against the USDA claiming that foie gras is inherently the product of diseased birds, due to their oversized livers, and therefore is illegal under existing USDA regulations.

July, 2012: California’s foie gras ban takes effect. Violators risk fines of up to $1,000. The sole producer of foie gras in California, Sonoma-Artisan, ceased operations on July 1st.

What is foie gras?

The foie gras is the fatty liver that is obtained from wading birds (geese and ducks usually) subjected to forced feeding. Force feeding is a process whereby a metal funnel filled with corn is regularly and painfully forced down the throat of the farmed birds. It is otherwise known as the ‘gavage process’. As a result, the size of the liver of these animals rapidly increases – reaching up to ten times the standard size, and acquiring a yellow-coloured, rounded and pasty consistency.

According to current EU Legislation, for a bird’s liver to be considered “foie gras”, it must meet the following requirements:

• The liver must weigh a minimum of 250 grams in the case of ducks, and 400 grams in geese.
• Birds must have been fattened by force-feeding process.
Main producers

In Europe foie gras is produced only in five countries: France, Bulgaria, Spain, Hungary and Belgium. These countries form part of the European Foie Gras Federation since 2008.

France is by far the largest producer (and consumer) of foie gras, producing 78.5%\(^2\) of the world's production. Foie gras is also produced and consumed in other countries around the world, particularly in Europe, the United States, and China\(^3\).

Bulgaria is the world's second-largest foie gras (libamăj) producer, with 10.2%\(^3\) of world production followed by Hungary 8.2%\(^4\). France is the biggest market for Bulgarian foie gras, importing 1,700 tons a year. It is followed by Spain, Belgium and the Netherlands, which jointly account for 800 tons.

In Spain over 4,200 tons are consumed, and 850 tons are produced. France, Bulgaria and Hungary are the main importers of foie gras.

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Slaughter

After the force feeding process has concluded, the liver of these animals have reached between 500 and 600 g in weight. The total weight of a duck subjected to forced feeding is usually around 7 kg.

At this stage, the birds are removed from the cages where had been fattening to be slaughtered. In the slaughter room, ducks are usually stunned by electric shock, then stabbed with a knife and hung upside down for bleeding-out. Thereafter, the animals are lifted into the scalding tank, which has temperatures of 45°C to 65°C, to facilitate the plucking of feathers.

The fatty liver is then removed, and the bodies of the ducks are refrigerated to be processed.
FOIE GRAS

How much cruelty can you swallow?

An investigation by animalEQUALITY