

FARM ANIMALS



Farm animals have unique personalities. They're fascinating creatures with the ability to love, form friendships, mourn, get angry and show a variety of other emotions. They are deserving of our respect and our compassion.

The consolidation of farms in recent years has radically altered the face of farming. Today more animals are being raised on less land, with profound effects on the animals, rural communities and the environment. This shift in farming has been termed "industrial agriculture" or "factory farming," as thousands, or even hundreds of thousands of animals, are crowded into huge buildings with no access to the outdoors. These animals may spend their entire lives on slatted floors, under



which their manure collects until it is pumped into football-field-sized lagoons.

The problems with factory farming are numerous. Animals have no outlet for natural behaviors—in some cases, they're not even allowed to turn around. They are separated from their mothers at only a day or two old, are subjected to painful procedures without anesthesia and may be undernour-

ished or overfed. To control disease, industrial farmers feed antibiotics to the animals, resulting in the growth of disease-resistant bacteria that are harder to treat in both animals and humans.

FASCINATING FARM ANIMAL FACTS

COWS & CATTLE

Cattle, as individuals or as a herd, possess many unique traits, the most distinctive being their social disposition. They are extremely social animals and rely heavily on "safety in numbers"—herds can form with up to 300 animals. Each animal can recognize more than 100 individuals and will closely bond to some herd members, while carefully avoiding others. While the bond between mothers and daughters is particularly strong, calves also maintain lifelong friendship with other herd members.

It is thought that cattle were first domesticated in 6,500 B.C. from wild cattle in Europe and the Near East. Only in the past two centuries have cattle been differentiated into breeds raised for beef or milk. Some cattle still exist as "dual purpose" breeds.

People often refer to all cattle as "cows." Technically, cows are actually adult females who have, usually through having babies, developed adult physical characteristics. Heifers are young females who have not yet had babies or developed the mature characteristics of a cow. Male cattle can be divided into three groups: bullocks, steers and bulls. A bullock is a young, uncastrated male who has begun to display secondary sexual characteristics. A steer is a castrated male, whereas a bull is a mature, uncastrated male.

Cows are sturdy yet gentle animals. They are social animals and form strong bonds with their families and friends that can last



their entire lives. The bond between a cow and her calf is especially powerful. If a mother cow is caught on the opposite side of a fence from her calf, she will become alarmed, agitated and call frantically. If they remain separated, she will stay by the fence through blizzards, hunger, and thirst, waiting to be reunited with her baby. This bond continues even after the calf is fully grown.

Cows "moo" to each other fairly frequently, allowing them to maintain contact even when they cannot see each other. But when they can see each other, they also communicate through a series of different body positions and facial expressions.

Cattle usually stand between 4 feet, 9 inches and 5 feet, 6 inches, and “beef cattle” range from 850 to 2,500 pounds depending on breed and gender. In non-commercial herds, cows have been observed nursing their male calves for up to three years.

Cattle have almost panoramic vision, which allows them to watch for predators or humans. They can see in color, except for red. They have an amazing sense of smell, and can detect scents more than six miles away.

Cattle are ruminant herbivores and will swallow vegetation whole, then later masticate their "cud" (chew their partially digested food).

The scientific name for the cattle group is "bos taurus," a subfamily of the bovidae family, which includes other hollow-horned animals. Interestingly, bulls are much less likely to use their horns than cows. However, the level of aggression can be influenced by the degree of confinement.

Cattle will learn from each other's mistakes: If an individual is shocked by an electric fence, others in the herd will become alarmed and avoid it. If a herd is confined by an electric fence, only 30% will ever be shocked.

Cattle enjoy swimming and running in the moonlight, as they have been shown to remain active for a longer period between their two sleep sessions when the moon is full.

The lifespan of cattle averages 20 to 25 years. However, the lifespan of cattle raised for beef is significantly shortened. These animals are typically weaned at 6 to 10 months, live 3 to 5 months on range, spend 4 to 5 months being fattened in a feedlot, and are typically slaughtered at 15 to 20 months.

DUCKS & GEESE

Swimming gracefully across a pond or waddling comically across the land, ducks are a common feature of the landscape of most of America.

There are statues devoted to them in a park in Boston, and every year that city holds a parade for the Bostonian ducklings. Walt Disney created the sputtering Donald Duck, and Warner Brothers followed with a less feisty, yet still speech-impaired, Daffy Duck.

Ducks are very social animals. Males and females sometimes live in pairs or together with their ducklings. They communicate both vocally and with body language. At other times ducks spend much of their time—during both day and night—in larger groups. The domestic duck has a normal life span of ten years. By contrast, a pair of geese will get together to raise a family and, for the most part, will stay together the rest of their lives (up to 25 years), raising new families each year.

One of the most distinguishing characteristics of geese is that they form a giant "V" across the sky. This amazing trick actually helps each bird fly further than if flying alone. When a goose falls out



of formation, she will feel the drag and move quickly back into formation to take advantage of the lifting power of the bird in front of her. When the lead goose gets tired, he rotates back into formation leaving another goose in the front position. They even honk to encourage those up front to keep up their speed.

Geese have very strong affections for others in their group (known as a gaggle). If one in the gaggle gets sick, wounded, or shot, a couple of others may drop out of formation and follow the ailing goose down to help and protect him. They try to stay with the disabled goose until he dies or is able to fly again, then they catch up with the group or launch out with another formation.

Much of a goose's time is spent foraging for food, most of which is obtained by grazing. They honk loudly and can stretch their long necks out to great length when scared or threatened.

SHEEP & GOATS

When people think of goats, they often think of a clothesline munching vagrant. Goats and sheep, however, are more often the

source of clothing than the consumers of it. The fibers that become textiles—wool and cashmere, among many other types—are shorn from these animals.

Sheep and goats, like cows, are ruminant animals. They have a four-chambered stomach, using the first chamber to store food (cud) which they then bring back into their mouths to chew again before fully digesting it. These grazing animals often prefer noxious weeds and plants, which makes them great environmentalists.

Goats are shy at first, but will show adoration and devotion once you have gained their trust. They're frolicsome and have a gentle disposition, but when angered, they can retaliate quickly with a strong head-butt.

Goats are also clever animals who have been known to use their horns to open gates and feed bins, create and enlarge holes in fences, and batter down boards in confined areas. They also use their horns as back scratchers. Goats are most comfortable in groups, which are known as "tribes."

Like goats, sheep like to stick close to one another for comfort and security. Either black or white, these animals are incredibly gentle. Lambs form strong bonds with their mothers, but they have also been known to bond closely with humans. If a person hangs a piece of clothing outside, a goat who has bonded with that person will run to it for safety when frightened.

Goats and sheep deserve the same love and compassion from humans that they show to each other.





PIGS

Despite their reputation, pigs have many positive attributes including cleanliness, intelligence and a social nature. Pigs are indeed clean animals. Yes, they do roll in mud, but only because they can't sweat like people do; the mud (or water) actually keeps them cool. If available, pigs, who are excellent swimmers, prefer water to mud. Pigs also carefully keep their sleeping area clean, and will designate a spot as far from this area as possible for waste. Even piglets only a few hours old will leave the nest to relieve themselves.

Those who know pigs can't help but be charmed by their intelligent, highly social and sensitive nature. Pigs are actually more intelligent than any breed of dog. Like dogs, piglets learn their names by two to three weeks of age and respond when called. They are also very discriminating eaters, and are particular about their living space. Pigs enjoy novelty and are extremely active and inquisitive.

When free to roam, pigs spend much of their day enthusiastically smelling, nibbling, manipulating objects with their snouts and rooting ("nosing") about in the soil for tidbits. Rooting is so essential to a pig that some animal scientists say that "a rooting pig is a happy pig." Their powerful but sensitive snout is a highly developed sense organ. A pig's sense of smell is so keen that the animal is trained in France to unearth truffles. Using their snouts as shovels, pigs toss clumps of soil and twigs high into the air, searching for the rare and delicious fungus that grows underground near the roots of oak trees. They are also used by police to help search for drugs.

Few species are more social than pigs; they form close bonds with each other and other species, including humans. They are quite gregarious and cooperate with, and defend, one another. Adults in the entire social group will protect a piglet, leaving their own litters if necessary to defend an endangered youngster. If one pig starts to dig out tree roots, others invariably join in.

Touch and bodily contact are especially important to pigs. They seek out and enjoy close contact, and will lie close together when resting. They also enjoy close contact with people familiar to them; they like being scratched behind the ears and shoulders, and, at the touch of your hand, will grunt contentedly and roll over for a belly rub.

Pigs are vocal and communicate constantly with one another. More than 20 of their vocalizations have been identified. Pigs most often say "gronk" (more commonly known as "oink"), and will say "baawrp" when happy. They have an elaborate courtship ritual, including a song between males and females. Newborn piglets learn to run to their mother's voice, and the mother pig sings to her young while nursing. After nursing, a piglet will sometimes run to her mother's face to rub snouts and grunt. Pigs also enjoy music.

When she is ready to give birth, a sow selects a clean, dry area apart from the group, sometimes walking several miles to search for a good nest site and to gather preferred bedding materials. She hollows out a depression in the ground and lines it with grass, straw or other materials. For several days after her babies are born, she defends the nest against intruders. When her babies are five to ten days old, she encourages them to leave the nest to socialize with the other pigs.

Weaning occurs naturally at three months of age, but young pigs continue to live with their mothers in a close family group. Two or more sows and their piglets usually join together in an extended family, with particularly close friendships developing between sows. Young piglets play with great enthusiasm, play-fighting and moving or throwing objects into the air. Pigs appear to have a good sense of direction, too, as they have found their way home over great distances. Adults can run at speeds around 11 miles an hour, and can trot for relatively long distances.

Yet many pigs do not lead such noble lives; the hog industry confines many female pigs to farrowing crates, claiming these are necessary to protect piglets from being crushed by their careless mothers. Yet when given more room, sows are very gentle with their piglets. Before a mother pig lies down in a bed of straw, she roots around to make sure all the piglets are out, a safeguard against accidentally harming one of them.

CHICKENS

Chickens form strong family ties. A mother hen begins bonding with her chicks before they are even born. She will turn her eggs as many as five times an hour and softly cluck to her unborn chicks, who will chirp back to her and to one another. After they are hatched, the devoted mother dotes over her brood, teaching them what to eat, how to drink, where to roost, and how to avoid enemies. Male chickens (called roosters) are most famous for greeting each sunrise with loud crows, often acting as alarm clocks for farmers.

Chickens are fascinating creatures. They have more bones in their necks than giraffes, yet they have no teeth. They swallow their food whole and use a part of their stomach called the gizzard.



zard to grind it up. Chickens actually have many similarities to humans: the majority are right-footed (just as most humans are right-handed), they see a similar color range, and they love to watch television. Many also enjoy classical music, preferring the faster symphonies to the slower ones.

Having a private nest in which to lay eggs is extremely important to hens. The desire is so strong, in fact, that a hen will often go without food and water, if necessary, to use a nest. The nest building process is fascinating. A hen will first scratch a shallow hole in the ground, then reach out to pick up twigs and leaves, which she drops onto her back. After she has gathered some material, she'll settle back in the hole and let the material fall off around the rim. She will continue to do this until her nest is completed.

As highly social animals, chickens can bond very closely to other animals, including humans. They will fight to protect their family and will mourn when a loved one is lost. When they have bonded with a human, chickens will often jump into his or her lap to get a massage that they enjoy fully with their eyes closed, giving every indication of being in ecstasy.

"It's just a chicken" is a retort heard often when concern for the welfare of chickens is exhibited. This comment reflects just how misunderstood these animals are. Chickens are just as deserving of our respect and compassion as are all other animals.

TURKEYS

A bald eagle, as the nation's official bird, adorns the Great Seal of the United States of America. But if Benjamin Franklin had had his way, a turkey, not a bald eagle, might have famously gripped those 13 arrows and an olive branch as part of the seal. Franklin knew, like others who have spent time around this large bird, that it would have been an honor for the turkey to represent the U.S.

Originating from the Mexican wild turkey, the turkey was domesticated by Native Americans in prehistoric times and introduced to Europe by Spanish explorers in the 1500s. Early American settlers brought descendants of the Mexican wild turkey to the U.S. and crossed them with another subspecies of wild turkey indigenous to eastern North America to produce the forerunner of the modern domestic turkey.

Turkeys are usually characterized by large tail feathers that spread into a fan when they are courting or alarmed. Turkeys also have several oddly named appendages: the caruncle, snood, wattle and beard. A caruncle is a red fleshy growth on the head and upper neck of the turkey. A snood is the red fleshy growth from the base of the beak which hangs over the side of the beak. A wattle is the red, loose appendage at the turkey's neck. A beard is the black lock of hairy feathers found on a male turkey's chest.



Most turkeys raised for food have been genetically selected to have large breast meat, and they are unable to fly or reproduce without artificial insemination. They are fed a mix of corn and soybeans during their short life. Millions of turkeys are slaughtered for food each year, most at about 14–18 weeks of age. Commercial, domestic hens (or female turkeys) weigh 15–18 pounds by 14–16 weeks of age, and heavy toms (or male turkeys) weigh 25–32 pounds by 16–18 weeks.

Five subspecies of wild turkeys still inhabit much of the United States, with a population estimated at 6.5 million. The most prevalent bird is the Eastern wild turkey, whose forest territory ranges from Maine to parts of Kansas and Oklahoma. Wild turkeys are smaller in size than their domestic counterparts, with a longer neck and body. They have a rich, brown-shaded plumage with a metallic or iridescent sheen, and white and black bars on their primary wing feathers. Toms can stand up to 4 feet tall and weigh more than 20 pounds, while hens are about half that size and weight. Wild turkeys eat nuts, greens, insects, seeds, and fruit, and can live 3–4 years. Their predators include human hunters and animals who disturb their nests, such as crows, raccoons, skunks, snakes and opossums.

Hens begin nesting in late March or early April, laying one egg a day until the clutch reaches 10–12 eggs. They nest on the ground, in a hidden area in the forest or fields of tall grass. Incubation lasts for 28 days, and hatching occurs over a 24–36 hour period in late May or early June. Poults, or baby turkeys, stay near the nest until they are about 4 weeks old and can fly 25–50 feet. This allows them to escape predators by roosting in trees for the night, usually near their mother. By three months of age, turkey groups will begin to form a social hierarchy, and an established pecking order is set by five months of age, at which time groups

show subdivision by gender. As full-grown adults, wild turkeys can fly at 55 mph and run at 25 mph.

Hens are protective of their young. They will hiss and ruffle their feathers to scare away trespassers, and will only abandon the nest as a last option. Hatching begins with pipping, where the baby rotates inside the egg, breaking the shell in a circular pattern with its egg tooth (a sharp spike on its beak). Hens cluck as they check the eggs, beginning the critical imprinting process. Social cohesion among the babies is evident the first day after hatching, as is attachment to the mom. Vocal and visual signals are used to maintain close contact. This facilitates the learning of certain important activities, particularly feeding. Turkeys are social animals who prefer to live and feed together in flocks.

Wild turkeys are not protected by legislation. Commercial turkeys are not even included in the Humane Methods of Slaughter Act, although poultry make up over 95% of the animals killed for food in America. They are raised in crowded factory farms where they are not able to nest or feed like their wild cousins.