

The Facts About Foie Gras

Foie gras is the fatty liver of ducks and geese that have been force-fed 2-3 times a day.

Foie gras was traditionally produced using special breeds of geese. However, ducks are now used more commonly, mainly for economic reasons.

Each year, more than 20 million ducks and geese are raised worldwide in this manner for the production of foie gras.

In Canada, essentially all of the foie gras is produced in Quebec, but its continued production is supported across Canada every time a chef decides to offer it on a menu and every time you choose to order it.

How is Foie Gras Produced?

Beginning at about 12 weeks of age, the birds are confined in small group pens or individual cages for the duration of the two to three week force-feeding phase.

Two to three times a day, the handler grasps the bird by the neck and pulls back the beak to insert the long metal pipe down each bird's throat. Large quantities of fatty corn mash are delivered, engorging the bird's stomach.

By the end of the force-feeding phase, each bird's liver will be six to 10 times the size of a normal duck liver. The average weight of a liver in a force-fed duck is between 600 to 982 grams, with a fat content of 55.8 per cent. In comparison, the average weight of a liver of a properly fed duck is 76 grams, with a fat content of 6.6 per cent.

Production of this fatty organ meat has been intensified and mechanized to increase efficiency and profitability.

Today, a majority of foie gras farmers raise thousands of birds at a time, keeping the birds indoors in massive dimly lit barns that contain endless rows of barren individual cages or small group pens.

Production has become so automated that 400 ducks can be forcibly fed in one hour.



Photo Credit: Global Action Network

How We Know it Causes Suffering

Chefs and diners alike have been force-fed misinformation about how its production affects the welfare of the birds, but here are the scientific facts:

Confinement: The birds are kept in barren pens or cages that restrict their freedom of movement, cause painful injuries to their feet, and prevent them from enjoying any natural behaviours.

Stress and Pain: Insertion of the feeding pipe stresses the birds, as it overcomes their gag reflex and can cause painful injuries to the throat.

Death: During the force-feeding phase, mortality rates are three to 10 times as high as in flocks of non-force fed ducks of the same age. These high rates are due to the injuries to the throat, liver failure, and heat stress – all of which are directly linked to the force-feeding practice.

How You Can Help

Now that you have the facts, take these steps to help:

1. Stop ordering foie gras.
2. Start asking chefs to take it off their menus using the sample letter on our website: www.spca.bc.ca/foiegras.
3. Spread the word about foie gras by emailing your friends and family with a link to www.spca.bc.ca/foiegras.

Learn more!

www.spca.bc.ca/foiegras

