

Hillside Investigations Report . . .

'FREEDOM FOOD' DUCKS' DAY OF DESPAIR



Which of these photos was taken on an RSPCA monitored Freedom Food Farm?
Answer is B



How long had this duck been left rotting during Kerry's 'thorough' inspections?

It was admitted that these ducks had never been attended to by a vet and the farm's own records show that on alternate weekends the birds were not checked at all.

On Christmas Day 2002 we began investigations into the horrendous conditions of ducks being reared on RSPCA 'monitored' Freedom Food approved farms. These investigations continued until 13th February 2003 when the RSPCA raided one farm. This was actually the FOURTH time that we have brought this duck producer to their attention. Although we began filming this same suffering three years previously, it was not until December 2002 that we discovered that these ducks were actually being reared under the Freedom Food flag.

We filmed shed after shed where literally THOUSANDS of ducks existed in unimaginable conditions.

The stench of ammonia enveloped hundreds of crippled, blind, injured and dying birds as they were left to linger on for days in the hope that they would draw breath long enough to make it to the slaughter line for that extra bit of profit.

After viewing our evidence the RSPCA agreed that our film showed disturbing scenes of suffering and neglect and immediately agreed to inspect one offending farm. However, inspectors are obliged to inform Freedom Food (which is wholly owned by the RSPCA) of any complaint made against a FF approved site and, within three hours of our confirming the farm's location, a clean-up operation had been organised - **the first we had witnessed in five weeks of filming!**

Our response to this was to advise the RSPCA that their planned inspection would be fruitless and their raid was aborted. However, just one week later we found that conditions were as bad as ever! On receiving this new evidence, the RSPCA agreed to raid again. Despite another 'clean up' attempt that resulted in around 300 ducks being culled (we filmed the fresh bodies dumped in skips outside), the RSPCA still found a number of suffering and dying ducks, and had to kill a further 100 on site. The duck producer was suspended from the Freedom Food scheme and 18 months later, on the 23rd August 2004, the RSPCA's prosecution of Kerry Foods Ltd began.

It was mentioned in court that on one day during the week before the RSPCA inspection on 13th February 2003, and again the day before the inspection, hundreds of ill ducks were culled on site. Little did the judge realise that on both occasions these massive culls had taken place the day before Kerrys expected a visit from the RSPCA!

Although, of course, we were extremely disappointed at the outcome of the trial, we were not at all surprised. We had predicted that any prosecution the RSPCA brought against a farm that they boasted they'd 'strictly monitored', would be destined to fail and, unfortunately, we were proved to be right.

Despite our previous exposure (some with BBC Watchdog) of Freedom Food pigs, chickens and turkeys being farmed in appalling conditions, Freedom Food continues to advocate that their scheme is one 'of the most highly audited schemes in the country'. If this is so, *please spare a thought for the millions of animals farmed in less monitored systems!!!*

This report is written by a veterinary surgeon who viewed just some of the evidence that we presented to the RSPCA:

Dear Hillside

Upon watching the video of ducks on a Freedom Food accredited farm there appears to be very many serious welfare considerations. Many of the ducks are deformed – especially leg deformities leading to lameness, and many can't seem able to walk at all – using their wings as crutches which will evidently lead to wing damage too. Other leg lesions and swellings in the limbs are also visible.

One duck is seen dragging a paralysed leg, which seems dislocated and possibly fractured. Other plumage and eye lesions are also visible. Many of the ducks also exhibit signs of nervous system problems: poor balance, can't right themselves from dorsal recumbancy, apparent blindness.

As for the housing there is some loose rope mesh in which one duck is seen entangled, unable to free itself.

Dead bodies are seen everywhere, also in the water trough: one body is in an advanced stage of decomposition. The filming was carried out over several successive evenings and it is obvious that the dead bodies have not been removed. This poses a serious health risk (especially the body in the water).

Amir Kashiv BA, BSc, MRCVS

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When our investigator, along with a reporter from a national newspaper, posed as an employee and worked undercover with a hidden camera in Kerry's slaughter and processing plant, further malpractices were revealed. Despite being an offence to transport them, ailing and dying ducks were being brought to the factory to be killed for entry into the human food chain, and a production line was deliberately slowed down for the benefit of a visiting Tesco representative. It was then speeded up again after he left!



On 24th August 2004 Kerry Foods were found NOT GUILTY of causing unnecessary suffering, pain and distress to ducks!



... dragging a broken leg



... hung in a rotted girder



... using his wings as crutches

Despite providing the RSPCA with footage taken on several different days over a period of six weeks, it was only the evidence gathered on the day of their raid, 13th February 2003, that was used in court. We felt the RSPCA presented a very weak case and some of their prosecution tactics were questionable:

1. The vet acting for the RSPCA during the inspection when they found dozens of dead and dying ducks, stated that he didn't carry out post-mortems on the decomposing birds as some had been dead for up to 24 hours and developing bacteria would confuse the results. In view of the fact that Kerrys were adamant that their 'experienced' staff carried out thorough inspections, how was it that decaying birds had been left, in the vet's opinion, lying in the sheds for 24 hours, and why wasn't this questioned by the prosecution's barrister?
2. Why was the judge shown the RSPCA's footage of Kerry's ducks at Wood Lane Corner, Little Ellingham in Norfolk which was filmed AFTER culling had taken place and therefore bore no resemblance to the scale of the suffering there beforehand?
3. Despite our investigator being asked by the RSPCA to attend and be prepared to give evidence, he was not asked to take the stand at all.
4. Neither the additional footage which we were asked to bring along or our evidence already in the RSPCA's possession was not shown or even referred to.
5. On day one of the two-day hearing the RSPCA issued a press release which was broadcast by the BBC, saying that this incident was an isolated one as Kerrys had a good welfare record. This was in spite of the copious evidence we had provided them with over the years, so much so that they eventually felt obliged to bring about a prosecution.
6. The fact that the farm had an accreditation under the RSPCA's Freedom Food scheme was not mentioned in court and was therefore omitted from all media reports.

It was admitted in court that the birds had been suffering from septicaemia and the whole case was based around the fact that Kerrys claimed the duck shed lights are switched off at 9pm so there wasn't time to perform a third routine inspection without disturbing the birds. The RSPCA and their vet said this check should have been carried out in order to avoid sick ducks lingering on for extra unnecessary hours. In court Mr Richard Charley, for Kerrys, told, under oath, that lights on all the 30 farms he managed, are turned off at 9pm until 3am the following day to allow the ducks sufficient time to rest, therefore not allowing time for a third daily inspection before 9pm. **Despite this testimony we have filmed evidence to show that it is common practice for the lights to be left on until 11pm, and even during a recent joint investigation with the BBC* when we visited Kerry sites on three different occasions, the sheds were still illuminated between 10pm and 11pm.** Even the RSPCA vet stated in court that he had written in his notes (probably from somebody's information at the time of the raid) that the lights in the duck sheds went out at 11pm.

We are providing the RSPCA, as the prosecuting body, with this evidence and await their action.

Despite all their legal wrangling over extra checks and lights-out times, the fact still remains that if Kerry's staff had thoroughly inspected the birds during their normal twice-daily checks and culled the ailing birds as they had claimed, we would not have been able to film the hundreds of ducks left in a state of prolonged suffering in the evenings just a few hours after their last 'inspection'! **Our footage consistently shows dying birds left to suffer for days and we filmed the farm's own records which clearly showed that on alternate weekends the birds were not checked at all! Kerry also admitted that they had not consulted their veterinary practice about the outbreak of disease which appears to be endemic on their farms.**

The ducks referred to in court were the second flock of birds that we had filmed at the Wood Lane Corner site between Christmas Day 2002 and 11th February 2003. After the RSPCA's raid when post-mortems confirmed that these birds had septicaemia, we followed the lorry taking those not culled to Kerry's slaughterhouse near Diss for entry into the human food chain. The first flock we filmed displaying similar worrying symptoms had also been taken for slaughter and although not thought to pose a health threat to the public, some consumers must almost certainly be eating birds that have been harbouring or incubating septicaemia - commonly known as blood poisoning. Ducks suffering from septicaemia face a slow death over a period of up to 48 hours. Septicaemia is often contracted as a direct result of being kept in stressful, unnatural conditions. Anyone who has watched our general investigation video, 'Factory Farming Today', will have seen footage, taken back in 2000, of Kerry Food ducks on another farm exhibiting similar symptoms to those we filmed suffering from septicaemia in this 2003 investigation.

District Judge Jennifer Edwards concluded "*I think there can be no doubt that this company did have the birds' welfare in their minds.*" Maybe if Judge Edwards had been presented with all the facts she might have 'thought' differently!

If you would like to see just some of the evidence that was withheld from the court, please request, free of charge, our video 'Ducks in Despair'. This video shows our footage of the Kerry ducks in question taken on 9th, 10th and 11th February 2003 just days before the RSPCA raid on the 13th February.

*To further expose the suffering of factory-farmed animals, we have been working with the BBC who have filmed ducks being reared on a different Kerry Food's site at Little Ellingham in Norfolk. This was shown on the investigation programme 'Inside Out' in September 2004. You can see this broadcast by ordering our **FREE** video or DVD, **Ducks in Despair**, from the Gift Shop page on this web site.

Hillside Investigation Video/DVD
Ducks in Despair
shows the conditions that ducks in this investigation had to endure just days before an RSPCA visit.

Please request your **FREE** copy from the Gift Shop on this website