



Undercover at New England's largest egg factory:

Inhumane treatment exposed at Maine producer supplying eggs to New England states

In spring of 2016, a Humane Society of the United States undercover investigator documented extreme cage confinement and food safety risks at New England's largest egg-producing factory farm. The factory farm supplies eggs to several New England states.

The facility—located in Turner, Maine—is a massive complex of almost 70 warehouses that confines roughly 4 million laying hens. It is operated by Pennsylvania-based Hillandale Farms and owned by [notorious egg magnate Jack DeCoster](#). DeCoster's filthy facilities in Iowa led to a 2010 *Salmonella* outbreak that was the largest in the industry's history, and that sickened tens of thousands of people, according to estimates from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. DeCoster was [sentenced last year to federal prison](#) for his role in the nation's largest egg recall.

In the ten-unit factory farm where the HSUS investigator worked, approximately 450,000 hens produce 420,000 eggs daily. Below is just some of what the investigator documented:

- Hens were confined in cages packed so tightly, the animals couldn't spread their wings.
- Hens were forced to share their cages with the decaying carcasses of their dead cage-mates. Some dead birds were mummified and stuck to the wire cage floor. A worker told the HSUS investigator that

when the birds are mummified like that, it means they've been in the cage (with living hens) "for months."

- Hens were found trapped by their necks, wings and feet in the rusty wire cages.
- Hens were found with bloody prolapses.
- Hens were found with horrendous facial abnormalities. The HSUS investigator was told by his supervisor not to do anything for one such hen. "As long as it's standing up and laying eggs, that's all that matters."
- Hens in bottom cages were covered in other birds' waste due to un-maintained cages.
- Equipment—including electrical outlets—was filthy and covered in thick cobwebs and chicken feathers. Many cages were coated in feces.
- The facility failed to effectively control rodent access. Poisoned rodents were found in hens' cages and were combined with chicken manure and sold for fertilizer.
- A high ammonia saturation was noted in the barns where the investigator worked.
- Chicken manure build-up in barns oozed out on to floors.



These beleaguered hens are not only filthy with other birds' waste but have been soaked with water by workers trying to soften the excess of hardened manure under the cages.



A hen lies trapped under the wires of her cage. Many birds become trapped by their wings, necks and legs and are unable to reach food or water.

Today, nearly all of America's largest food companies—McDonald's, Walmart, Costco [and over 100 more](#)—have committed to switching to 100% cage-free eggs. The horrendous findings from these investigations highlight the importance of those policies, and the need for further movement away from cage confinement in the egg industry.



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