



**PETA**

PEOPLE FOR THE ETHICAL  
TREATMENT OF ANIMALS

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February 13, 2007

The Right Reverend Stanislaus Gumula, OCSO  
Abbot of Mepkin Abbey

2 pages via fax: 843-761-6719

Dear Father Stan,

I am writing on behalf of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA), the world's largest animal rights group, with more than 1.6 million members and supporters. As a fellow Catholic, I was saddened to learn that Mepkin Abbey is operating an egg factory farm.

It is my understanding that Mepkin keeps 38,000 hens in small cages—roughly 13,000 hens in each of three barns. A portion of each hen's sensitive beak is cut off to prevent the birds from pecking at each other in the enormously stressful and unnatural conditions. Obviously, God didn't design hens with some flaw that requires this painful mutilation. According to Dr. Ian Duncan, North America's leading expert in poultry welfare, "It has been shown that ... the severed nerves grow back into the damaged stump and form neuromata (tiny neural tumors), which then send spontaneous pain signals back to the brain. ... It has also been found that behavioral changes suggestive of acute pain occur in the two days following surgery, and this is followed by changes indicating chronic pain, which last at least five or six weeks after surgery. This neural and behavioral evidence suggests that beak trimming reduces welfare through causing both acute and chronic pain."

It is our understanding that in your facility, cages are roughly 12 inches by 18 inches and that you confine up to four hens in each cage. First, this means that the animals never breathe fresh air, feel the sun on their backs, build nests, raise their young, or do anything else that God designed them to do. According to scientists, this results in "extreme frustration" and "a severe behavioral problem" for the hens. Furthermore, the animals' bones deteriorate from lack of use, causing bone breaks and chronic pain. As Brunel University animal housing expert Dr. Michael Baxter wrote, "[H]ens are restricted from exercising to such an extent that they are unable to maintain the strength of their bones." One study found that 89 percent of laying hens suffered from osteoporosis and that an estimated one in six hens suffer from broken bones.

Christ himself compared his desires for humankind to the desires of a hen to protect her children (Luke 13:34). Your cruel treatment of these poor animals, by the tens of thousands, would warrant felony cruelty-to-animals charges if dogs or cats were the victims. But chickens are intelligent animals who suffer and feel pain, just like dogs and cats do. Chickens understand sophisticated intellectual concepts, learn

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THE RIGHTS OF ALL ANIMALS

from watching each other, demonstrate self control, worry about the future, and even have cultural knowledge that is passed from generation to generation. Dr. Chris Evans, who studies animal behavior and communication at Macquarie University in Australia, says, “As a trick at conferences, I sometimes list these attributes, without mentioning chickens, and people think I’m talking about monkeys.”

Pope Benedict XVI explained in an interview some years back (before his elevation to Pope) that “Animals, too, are God’s creatures . . . Certainly, a sort of industrial use of creatures, so that geese are fed in such a way as to produce as large a liver as possible, *or hens live so packed together that they become just caricatures of birds*, this degrading of living creatures to a commodity seems to me in fact to contradict the relationship of mutuality that comes across in the Bible” (*emphasis added*).

And the Catechism teaches us that “[a]nimals are God’s creatures. He surrounds them with his providential care. By their mere existence they bless him and give him glory. Thus men owe them kindness. We should recall the gentleness with which saints like St. Francis of Assisi or St. Philip Neri treated animals.” Can you imagine St. Francis cramming hens into cages for their entire lives—denying them the opportunity to carry out even their most basic natural instincts—in such stark contrast to God’s love for these creatures who “bless him and give him glory”?

Please take proper care of the current flock of hens you have in the factory farm, and when their lives are over, please shut down this operation forever. It is an ugly stain on your otherwise blessed community. Instead of raising funds for your abbey by abusing animals, please consider solely making foodstuffs that don’t involve animals; as you know, other Trappist monasteries raise sufficient funds by producing fruit preserves, beer, and a variety of other non-exploitative products.

I would be happy to provide you with additional documentation related to the cruelty involved in keeping hens in cages. Please contact me at [BruceF@peta.org](mailto:BruceF@peta.org) or 757-943-7450 at your earliest convenience so that we can further discuss this matter.

Yours in Christ’s light,



Bruce Friedrich  
Vice President, International Grassroots Campaigns

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