



Gentle Thanksgiving

Dear President Bush:

On behalf of 15 million vegetarians and other caring citizens, I urge you to pardon ALL turkeys slated to become White House dinners this holiday season. I ask you to follow in the footsteps of your father, who in 1989 started the tradition of officially pardoning the National Thanksgiving Turkey, and go one step further by hosting a turkey-free Thanksgiving meal.

At the 2007 National Thanksgiving Turkey Pardon, you stated, "It's hard to be anything but grateful when you live in a country full of compassionate and decent citizens". You also mentioned that "This Thanksgiving, we are grateful for a harvest big enough to feed us all -- and millions more. We're grateful for citizens who reach out to those who struggle, and for neighbors in need -- from neighbors in need to the strangers they've never met."

President Bush, this rhetoric of gratitude, compassion and decency you speak of should be extended to ALL sentient life and should recognize the global impacts that stem from animal agriculture (ranging from world hunger to global warming). When making reference to a harvest big enough to feed us all, you completely ignored the global food shortage. Animal agriculture is extremely wasteful, inherently cruel and unnecessary. Using animals for food is an inefficient use of crops, as they consume 19 million tons more protein a year than they produce. It takes 16 pounds of grain to produce 1 pound of meat. The harsh realities that turkeys endure do not demonstrate an ounce of compassion nor gratitude. According to the White House website, turkeys selected for the ceremony are "raised using the same techniques as other commercial birds." The industry standard for factory farmed turkeys is a process that is nothing short of tragic.

Factory farmed turkeys are forcefully inseminated and bred to gain enormous amounts of weight in a short time, causing heart attacks, broken limbs, lameness, and death. Factory farm conditions are so harsh that turkeys must be pumped full of antibiotics just to survive long enough to slaughter. Their snoods, parts of their toes, and their beaks are cut off without the use of painkillers.

Mr. President, these practices treat turkeys like machines, not with gratitude, decency or compassion.

And that's not all. Turkeys are forced to endure severe crowding, living in their own waste, and ravaging diseases. As many as 25,000 birds may be housed in a single shed. Conditions are so severe that of the 317 million turkeys killed this year, 28.5 million (or 9%) do not survive long enough to make it to the slaughterhouse. The slaughterhouse is another horror altogether.

President Bush, you have asked for "Americans to give thanks for a nation that Benjamin Franklin famously compared to a rising sun." Ironically you quoted Benjamin Franklin who was, in fact, vegetarian. He stated, "When a human being kills an animal for food, he is neglecting his own hunger for justice. Man prays for mercy, but is unwilling to extend it to others." We should learn from one of our founding fathers, and actually practice and embrace compassion, gratitude and decency for all life. Let the sun rise to a more compassionate world and take a cue from a man of great wisdom and knowledge like Mr. Franklin.

Please, Mr. President, make a statement against the cruelty and world hunger caused by animal agriculture by pardoning ALL the turkeys bound for the White House this Thanksgiving.

Thank you for your consideration,

Alex Hershafft

Alex Hershafft, PhD
President/Founder
Farm Animal Rights Movement (FARM)