

“Cheap” chicken costing over \$2.4 billion a year in illnesses in the US

Compassion in World Farming is raising concerns after learning the results of a new study released by the University of Florida’s Emerging Pathogens Institute. The study has revealed that food illnesses related to poultry consumption are costing the United States over \$2.4 billion annually in estimated health costs, ranking highest among all food items. The study asks the question “which pathogens in which foods cause the greatest impact on public health?” Poultry is the only named meat that appears twice in the list of the top 10 food-pathogen items which cause the most significant disease burden. This is due to contamination with *Campylobacter* and *Salmonella*. The study is released amidst debates about reforming the American health care system and tackling the deficit.

“This study has put a price tag on what we have known for years – something is wrong with the way we are raising chickens for meat, the majority of whom are raised in inhumane factory farm settings where disease can emerge and spread easily,” said Leah Garcés, USA Director for Compassion in World Farming. “We cannot afford to ignore the \$2.4 billion in illnesses resulting from consumption of contaminated chicken each year. We must address the root of the problem, not just suggest better recommendations for cooking or preparation. We must ask why are these chickens so disease-ridden in the first place?”

The USA rears around 9 billion chickens a year, almost all of whom are in factory farms. In these intensive units, broiler chickens are often kept in overcrowded, stressful and dirty conditions where they are unable to express their natural behavior. Georgia is the largest producing state, rearing 15% of all US meat chickens. In 2006 the top 10 largest corporations controlled 76.6% of the chicken raised for meat in the USA and the top three companies controlled 53.1% of chicken production.

(http://www.agofthemiddle.org/papers/poultry_middle.pdf)

“This is an issue that affects everyone. A pathogen in a single farm can end up in refrigerators all over the country because of how consolidated the poultry industry is,” said Ms. Garcés. “If you want to make food safe, you can’t just look at the end product. You must look at the whole system. Our hope is that health agencies in the US will not ignore the burden that factory farming is having on the health of Americans.”

The study recommends that agencies should convene a national cross-agency initiative in collaboration with the Center for Disease Control and Prevention that looks across the entire food system to target opportunities for risk reduction. Compassion in World Farming has long held the view that there is a

need to reform the farming system to one that is humane, healthy and sustainable. Compassion hopes that this study will act as a wake-up call for reforming an industrial farming system costing Americans billions of dollars.

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For further information and interviews, please contact Leah Garcés on 404-313-7838 or Leah.Garces@ciwf.org

Notes to editors

Compassion in World Farming was founded over 40 years ago in 1967 by a British farmer who became horrified by the development of modern, intensive factory farming. Today the charity campaigns peacefully to end all cruel factory farming practices. Compassion believes that the biggest cause of animal cruelty on the planet deserves a focused, specialised approach – so only works on farm animal welfare. www.ciwf.org.uk