

PETA: 25 Years of Fighting Cruelty to Animals

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People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA)

This year, People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA), the world's largest animal rights organization, is celebrating its 25th anniversary. Since its inception in 1980, PETA has propelled animal rights issues into the mainstream and reshaped the way the world views animals.

PETA operates under the simple principle that animals are not ours to eat, wear, experiment on, or use for entertainment. In the words of author and civil rights activist Alice Walker, "The animals of the world ... were not made for humans any more than black people were made for white, or women created for men."

PETA works through public education, cruelty investigations, research, animal rescue, legislation, special events, celebrity involvement, and direct action. While PETA's theatrical stunts have garnered widespread media coverage and prompted millions of people to think about the cruelty animals endure on factory farms and fur farms, and in laboratories and circuses, its hard-hitting behind-the-scenes work has resulted in precedent-setting animal cruelty charges and the closure of several inhumane operations.

Fighting Factory Farm Cruelty

In July 2004, PETA released the results of an investigation into a Pilgrim's Pride chicken slaughterhouse in Moorefield, W. Va., where workers were caught on tape stomping birds, kicking them, slamming them against floors and walls, ripping their beaks off, twisting their heads off, spitting tobacco into their eyes and mouths, spray-painting their faces, and tying their legs together "for laughs." Although the state prosecuting organization declared that criminal charges would not be filed "due to the fact that these were chickens in a slaughterhouse," millions of Americans saw just how these poor birds are treated before they reach their dinner tables. Dan Rather echoed the views of all kind people when he said on the *CBS Evening News*, "[T]here's no mistaking what [the video] depicts: cruelty to animals, chickens horribly mistreated before they're slaughtered for a fast-food chain."

Around the same time, another investigator from PETA went incognito at AgriProcessors, the world's largest glatt kosher slaughterhouse, and saw workers mutilating fully conscious cows, shocking them in the face, and slaughtering them in a way that allowed many to stand and attempt to escape, even minutes after their throats had been slit.

After going public with this investigation, PETA received countless letters of support from concerned people all over the world, and rabbis, scholars, animal welfare experts, and USDA inspectors denounced AgriProcessors cruel treatment of animals. The Orthodox Union asked the company to stop ripping the esophagi and tracheas out of fully conscious animals and to give rabbis a stun gun to knock animals unconscious after their throats have been slit.

Sadly, these cases are not isolated incidences. Throughout the years, PETA has repeatedly exposed wanton cruelty on factory farms and in slaughterhouses.

In 1984, for instance, PETA helped close down a Texas slaughterhouse operation where 30,000 horses were trucked in annually from all over the United States and left to starve in frozen fields without shelter.

In 1992, police conducted the first-ever raid on a factory farm after PETA's undercover investigators unearthed the cruel force-feeding of thousands of ducks at Commonwealth Enterprises, a now-defunct foie gras farm in upstate New York. The investigation prompted many restaurants, hotels, and airlines to stop serving foie gras.

Then, in 1994, after PETA protested hot-iron face-branding and spaying of cows without anesthetics—procedures mandated for cattle imported into the U.S. from Mexico—the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) stopped face-branding and ordered that pain killers be used for spay operations.

In 1999, PETA released hours of undercover footage showing shocking, systematic cruelty at Belcross Farm, a pig-breeding factory farm in North Carolina. The Camden County Superior Court later handed down the first-ever felony indictments for animal cruelty by farm workers.

Two years later, PETA investigators caught employees at Seaboard Farms, Inc., North America's third largest pork producer, on video, throwing, kicking, bludgeoning, and slamming pigs against concrete floors. As a result of PETA's investigation, the former manager of Seaboard Farms pleaded guilty to three counts of felony cruelty to animals—it was the first time in U.S. history that a farmer had pleaded guilty to felony cruelty to animals for injuring and killing animals raised for food.

These cases and their subsequent outcry represent a growing awareness for the suffering of animals on factory farms and serve as a clear reminder for the need for people to help alleviate such suffering by adopting a healthy, humane vegetarian diet.

Uncovering Animal Abuse in the Clothing Industry

PETA's investigations of fur farms have also made millions of people more aware of the suffering animals endure before they are crudely killed for their pelts.

No federal humane slaughter law protects animals on fur factory farms, and killing methods are quite gruesome. Small animals may be crammed into boxes and poisoned with hot, unfiltered engine exhaust from a truck. Because engine exhaust is not always lethal, animals sometimes wake up while being skinned. Larger animals have clamps or a rod applied to their mouths and rods inserted into their anuses, and they are painfully electrocuted. Other animals are poisoned with strychnine, which suffocates them by paralyzing their muscles in painful rigid cramps. Gassing, decompression chambers, and neck-snapping are other common fur-farm slaughter methods.

In 1994, California became the first state to file criminal charges against a furrier at V-R Chinchillas after PETA investigators filmed the furrier electrocuting chinchillas by clipping wires to the animals' genitals. The American Veterinary Medical Association has denounced this killing method, saying that it causes animals to experience the pain of a heart attack while fully conscious.

The next year, a district attorney filed charges against pelt supplier Frank Parsons of Salisbury, Md., for injecting a mixture of rubbing alcohol and weed-killer into the chests of minks. PETA undercover investigators had videotaped Parsons using the illegal pesticide, Blackleaf 40, to painfully kill the minks.

Then, in 1997, an Illinois fur farmer pleaded guilty to cruelty to animals after a PETA investigator documented foxes with painful, untreated injuries by anal electrocution.

Through the years, PETA has also helped stop some of the cruelty inflicted on animals by the leather industry. Investigators from PETA have even traveled to India where they witnessed routine cruelties when cows were marched long distances to slaughter on the black market. During the journey, cattle are denied food and water, and when the exhausted animals collapse, their tails are deliberately broken, and hot peppers and tobacco are rubbed into their eyes to force them to walk. At slaughter, animals are often still conscious while workers hack off their legs or skin them.

In 2000, Gap Inc., and other large clothing retailers, agreed to stop using leather from India as a result of PETA's campaign against Indian leather.

In addition to these and other investigations and campaigns against fur, leather, and wool, which is equally inhumane, PETA promotes animal-friendly alternatives and has compiled a shopping guide to cruelty-free clothing for caring consumers.

Exposing Inhumane Animal Experiments

PETA also encourages people to choose cruelty-free alternatives to animal experimentation. Every year, tens of millions of mice, rats, rabbits, guinea pigs, cats, dogs, primates, and other animals are tortured and killed in U.S. laboratories. They are kept in cages barely bigger than their bodies and are often subjected to painful experiments without any anesthetics.

Vivisectors commonly infect animals with diseases that they would normally never contract. They force-feed and inject them with toxic chemicals. They sever animals' spines, break their bones, and cement electrodes into their skulls.

The military sickens and wounds animals with radiation, chemical agents, and guns even though the effects of these weapons are already well documented. Some psychologists subject animals to maternal deprivation, drug and alcohol addiction, and other torments. Tobacco companies mutilate animals, pump them full of nicotine, and force them to inhale smoke. Many household product and cosmetics companies still pump their products into animals' stomachs, rub them onto their shaved, abraded skin, squirt them into their eyes, or force animals to inhale aerosols.

Fortunately, with the help of other caring individuals, PETA has been able to save countless animals from cruel laboratory tests. PETA's undercover investigation of a huge contract testing laboratory in Philadelphia led to Benetton's permanent ban on animal tests—a first for a major cosmetics company. Other leading companies, such as Avon, Revlon, and Estée Lauder, have since promised PETA that they won't test on animals, and well-known charities such as Easter Seals, Birth Defect Research for Children, the National Children's Cancer Society, and Miracle House, among others, have signed PETA's statement of assurance that they won't fund animal experimentation.

In 1981, PETA cofounder Alex Pacheco uncovered the abuse of animals in experiments at the Institute for Behavioral Research in Maryland, launching the historic Silver Spring monkeys case. PETA's subsequent efforts resulted in the first arrest and conviction of an animal experimenter in the U.S. on charges of cruelty to animals, the first confiscation of abused "laboratory animals," and the first U.S. Supreme Court victory for animals in laboratories.

Then, in 1983, PETA helped shut down a Department of Defense "wound lab" where the military had planned to fire high-velocity missiles into dogs, goats, and other animals. Pressure from PETA led to the first-ever permanent ban on the shooting of dogs and cats in wound labs.

The next year, PETA released more than 70 hours of graphic videotape footage from the University of Pennsylvania head-injury laboratory, documenting the cruel treatment of primates there. Protests by PETA led the secretary of health and human services to cut off all funding to the laboratory, and the experiments were stopped after a 14-year history of abuse.

In 1985, PETA uncovered gross mistreatment of dogs and other animals at the City of Hope laboratory in California. The government fined the center \$11,000 and suspended more than \$1,000,000 in federal funding to the lab. The next year, PETA was responsible for stopping the total-isolation of chimpanzees at a Maryland research laboratory called SEMA, and in 1987, PETA foiled a plan by Cedars-Sinai, California's largest hospital, to ship stray dogs from Mexico into Calif. for experiments.

PETA also exposed Ohio State University's plan to distribute a videotape to public schools showing guinea pigs being injected with powerful "street" drugs. Following PETA's expose, the U.S. Department of Education withdrew its support of the video.

After PETA uncovered cruel scabies experiments using dogs and rabbits at Wright State University in 1994, the school was charged with violating the Animal Welfare Act and forced to end the experiments.

That same year, the USDA cited the Buckshire Corporation, a laboratory animal breeding facility, with violations of the Animal Welfare Act after receiving a 38-page complaint from PETA documenting the abysmal conditions at the facility.

Then, in 1995, the U.S. government filed 41 charges of Animal Welfare Act violations against Hazelton Research Products, a Michigan company that breeds animals for pharmaceutical laboratories, after PETA investigators revealed that employees beat animals—sometimes to death.

Soon after, PETA found that more than \$3 million in tax money had been granted to experimenters at Omaha's Boys Town National Research Hospital to cut into kittens' heads and starve cats for deafness and vocal-tract experiments. PETA's protests prompted the government to launch an investigation, and Boys Town ended the irrelevant experiments soon after.

In 1996, PETA blew the whistle on Bion, a joint U.S./Russian/ French experiment in which monkeys were implanted with electric wires, restrained in straitjackets, and launched into space, and convinced the U.S. government to cancel the experiments.

While progress has obviously been made, countless cruel experiments are still taking place all around the country and PETA is continuing the fight against animal testing.

Ending Animal Exploitation

PETA has also made considerable progress in our fourth major area of focus, helping animals used for entertainment. For example, in 1990, PETA went public with video footage showing Las Vegas “entertainer” Bobby Berosini beating orangutans with a metal rod. As a result, the U.S. Department of the Interior revoked Berosini’s captive-bred wildlife permit, making it illegal for Berosini to buy or sell orangutans. An enraged Berosini sued PETA for defamation and won, but, in 1994, the Nevada Supreme Court unanimously ruled in PETA’s favor and overturned the Las Vegas jury’s \$3.2 million award. Berosini was eventually also forced to pay the legal costs PETA incurred during the lengthy lawsuit.

In 1992, PETA gave compelling testimony at the first-ever congressional hearing on the use of animals in circuses, rodeos, films, and other types of entertainment.

In 1998, PETA filed a complaint with the U.S. Department of Agriculture because Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus forced an endangered baby elephant named Kenny to perform even though they knew he was sick. He died just hours after his third appearance in the ring in one day, and Ringling was forced to pay \$20,000 to settle the case. The next year, Sears, Roebuck & Co. pulled its sponsorship of the circus after an outcry from PETA members.

In 2003, PETA helped secure the release of several skinny, lethargic, filthy, diseased polar bears who had been suffering for years in the tropical Suarez Bros. Circus. The bears had been denied adequate veterinary care and suffered from skin disease, lumps on the head, protruding hip bones, arthritis, and extreme stress. One emaciated polar bear had endured a prolonged and agonizing death in October 1998 after a severe case of heartworm went untreated for months. Fortunately, the surviving bears have received medical attention and now reside in more appropriate climates.

Through the years, PETA has also rescued several elephants and many other animals from miserable conditions in the entertainment industry and retired them to sanctuaries so they can live the remainder of their lives as naturally as possible.

Working Toward a More Compassionate World

Although cruelty to animals is still all too common in our society, PETA has accomplished a great deal in the 25 years since it was founded. The aforementioned cases represent just a few of PETA’s investigations, victories, and efforts to end cruelty to animals. Every day, PETA’s cruelty caseworkers work with sheriff’s offices and prosecutors to stop the abuse of domestic animals, report animal hoarders, shut down slipshod puppy mills, deliver free doghouses for dogs forced to live outdoors, and more. PETA’s wildlife specialists work tirelessly to prevent pigeons, geese, beavers, coyotes, and other wild animals from being poisoned, trapped, shot, or killed by other cruel methods. PETA’s humane educators work with parents and teachers to help them raise kind kids, and PETA’s affiliates in England, Germany, India, and the Netherlands fight cruelty to animals overseas.

PETA is a resource for anyone who wishes to help even one animal or change one old habit that hurts them. To learn how you can help end cruelty to animals, please pick up a copy of PETA President Ingrid E. Newkirk’s book, *Making Kind Choices: Everyday Ways to Enhance Your Life Through Earth- and Animal-Friendly Living* or visit PETA25.com. Please, the animals need your voice.