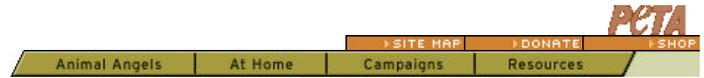


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On Feeding Our Pals

by Ingrid Newkirk

Alex Pacheco once told me of a trip he took through a Canadian slaughterhouse. He recounted, among other wretched things, the efforts of several pigs to free another pig whose head was wedged between two broken boards of a fence. In other areas, he found sick and injured livestock: a broken leg here, a maggot-infested face there, an old dairy cow too weak to stand, a downed sow in advanced pregnancy.

The same summer, I had driven to the biggest chicken slaughterhouse on Maryland's Eastern Shore. It was a day when the temperature topped 85 degrees in the late afternoon. On the loading dock in the baking sun, I found crates of chickens abandoned when the 4:30 p.m. shift had left for the day. Most were dead of heat prostration, but some were not. Packed in plastic crates too shallow to allow them to stand erect, the barely living chickens gasped for air, beaks open and dry, nostrils caked with dried mucus. They tried to drink melting ice from my cupped hand, but their heads were too heavy for them to hold upright.

All the animals I have described are among the millions relegated to the back of the slaughter lines. They are doomed to life without painkillers, veterinary treatment, anesthesia, or even a drink of water, sometimes for several days, sometimes in extreme heat or sub-zero temperatures, often without shade or shelter, until the Agriculture Department inspector arrives to tag them "Not Fit for Human Consumption."

Those who die waiting will be ground up for garden fertilizer. Those who do not will be slaughtered for "pet" food. Old cows transformed into "New Friskies," broken and gangrenous little bones mashed into slick, green cans of "Super Dinner."

Each time we go to the market, we vote with our consumer dollars. Many of us stopped voting at the butcher's counter long ago. But many of us also have animal refugees at home who still live at the expense of those animals who suffer most.

The "pet" food market is as consequential to the meat industry as the leather goods market. Anyone who has priced a pair of leather pumps or a month's supply of food for an 8-pound feline knows there is big money in these "byproducts." And a lot of shoes, bags, belts, jackets, and 4-ounce cans of chunky beef doggie stew can be squeezed out of one poor heifer. When we buy "pet" food, we continue to make it economically viable to allow these animals to lie mangled and ignored in their pens and on the slaughterhouse ramps.

Ms. Bea, the dog who lived with me that summer, became a vegan. She looked younger than her 17 years, although built a little like the grande dame in the Marx Brothers films. Her coat was shiny, her eyes danced, and she swam like a fish (as long as she could see me safely on the bank). There was no extra trouble or expense involved in her switch to veganism. She ate what I ate, and cooking for one more person was no extra effort. One night it was spaghetti with soy sausage and garlic toast; the next night a vegetable casserole with baked potatoes; other times we shared lentil soup with corn bread or perhaps a Chinese or Indian meal. Her digestion was excellent.

Most dogs do very well on a vegan "human" diet. A few need supplementary L-carnitine and taurine (amino acids). To be 100% sure, one should feed a dog commercial vegetarian dog food or homemade recipes supplemented with Vegedog powder (see PETA's "[Meatless Meals for Dogs and Cats](#)" factsheet for addresses). Cats can also be fed homemade vegan diets supplemented with Vegecat powder.

Many of us have made commitments to dogs and cats who might not be alive today if we had turned them away at our doors. But few of us feel comfortable keeping one animal alive at the expense of others. Our eyes will never meet those whose lives go into the cans and bags we have picked up at the supermarket, but we must not avoid making the ethical decision. It is wonderful to know that a rescued cat or dog can live in good health and enjoy his or her meals as a vegetarian. Meat is murder! On our plates *and* theirs.

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