

The report on chicken: the dangerous transformation of america's favorite food

[Family](#)



Chickens This nonfiction book about the food industry begins, " I used to eat chicken without much thought about where it came from, or how and by whom it was raised and processed. Life was much easier then." The book covers a lot of detail about how food is produced in the United States today. We often spend too little time thinking about how food gets on our plate. This books seeks to change that fact. It takes us inside a disturbing world where living animals are considered objects, things without any feelings or senses. It tells us about the people who raise, kill, and package the chicken products, and why they do it. The whole system is on display in this fascinating and disturbing book. Striffler is an ethnographer par excellence, and in this book he truly brings his subject to life. The workers at a plant are described as follows: " Their motions are so rehearsed that each [live hang] worker is able to grab two frantic chickens (one in each hand), hang them on the line, smoke a cigarette (without their hands), and heckle the new recruits as they watch in amazement" (108). Throughout the book, the author uses descriptions like this to represent the poultry industry. I knew nothing about this industry before I read this book: my eye were truly opened. I had no idea that the workers were treated in this way. I felt sorry for the immigrants who had to go to work in these slaughterhouses day in and day out. They clearly lead difficult lives that I would not wish upon my worst enemy. Throughout the book, Striffler shows how so much of the industry is at the mercy of money. This is a business and the logic of capitalism makes the poultry industry operate the way it does. The cruelty is by design: it is more efficient than kindness. Even those who are inclined to treat chickens well have difficulties in situations where money is short. One company reports to

Striffler that they want to raise free range chickens but they were hostage to money concerns. The author writes: “ The chickens started getting hungry and needed food. We couldn’t afford to feed chickens we weren’t going to sell. You get the feed on credit from the company that buys the chicks. Besides, chickens aren’t pets. We’re not feeding 25, 000 chicks if we can’t sell them. This is a business. Oh, but these people from Washington [PETA] go nuts. They come down here and start picketing. They kept using this term. Damn. I can’t remember it. . . . They said we were being cruel to chickens. We’re raising them to be processed into nuggets so these people can eat them and they say we are being cruel” (88). It is important to remember that this is all a business Overall, this book made me feel bad. There was little or nothing in it that was pleasant. In fact, it made me somewhat sick to my stomach. I thought about all the chicken I had eaten in my life. I have always enjoyed fried chicken and chicken kiev. For me, it was a lean and tasty source of protein. But now, having read this book, it is hard for me to get many of the images of injured, sick, dirty, agonized chickens out of my mind. In some ways, I wish I had never read this book and learned how the poultry industry is organized. I will probably never eat chicken again. Reading this book has had a direct impact on my dietary habits. It has also affected my relationship to my family—who love chicken. I try to tell them about the poultry industry and this book, but they are not interested. They see my new opinions as a form of judgement and resent how frequently I bring up this subject. Whenever I see chicken in the supermarket I think of a live chicken and all its hopes and dreams. I think of how the poultry industry crushes those hopes and dreams. It all makes me sad, and a bit

sick. I also think of the immigrants working in the factories and how difficult their own lives are. It seems to be a cycle of capitalistic violence. We surely can do better. Food is one of the most important things in life. We need it to survive, but we also love the way it tastes. Chicken, for many people, is a food staple, and yet they spend very little time thinking about where it comes from and how it gets on their plate. Striffler, to his credit, has begun to change that. In this fascinating book he explains the real story behind the poultry industry.