

# Raided

## Shameful farms where chickens suffer in secret

### EXCLUSIVE

By police writer  
RHETT WATSON

PARTS of the poultry industry are breeding deformed chickens fully grown at six weeks and so heavy they are unable to carry their own weight.

A raid by Animal Liberationists on farms which grow chickens for Australia's largest producer, Inghams, found evidence of deformed chickens.

Many of the birds were unable to stand, forced to live in cramped conditions in windowless sheds.

Animal Liberation rescued 15 birds from a central coast chicken farm during the raids last Sunday and on Friday night.

While it is illegal to use growth hormones to make the chickens bigger, experts say the industry is breeding oversized birds.

Bird expert and veterinarian Mark Simpson, who examined 11 of the birds, said only two could walk and all had to be put down.

"They are more a factory item than a living thing. They push these birds to the very limit and a lot don't cope."

Video filmed by Animal Liberation during the raid was provided to NSW Agriculture Minister Ian Macdonald, whose spokeswoman said "matters of interest" in the video would be forwarded to the department for review.

The department told *The Sunday Telegraph* it relied on the RSPCA to investigate complaints of cruelty.

The RSPCA has called for the end to self regulation in the industry.

"It's well and good to have a code of practice but if it's not regulated it doesn't give bodies like ours much leverage," RSPCA deputy chief executive officer Steve Coleman said.

Video footage and photographs taken inside two broiler sheds showed chickens unable to hold their own body weight lying in manure suffering ammonia burns.

Some who were helped to their feet only to topple over.

Others flapped as they dragged themselves around the floor. Many could be seen with their legs splayed; their young joints unable to take the weight of their huge bodies.

Growers argue intensive farming methods are the result of pressure from processors and consumers for cheaper chicken meat.

NSW Contract Poultry Group chairman Shaun Rodger denied farmers mistreated their livestock and said a 25 per cent cut in the number of chickens held in a shed would mean the end of the industry.

Farmers can legally hold up to 13 chickens per square metre, with some sheds able to hold up to 40,000 birds.

"We lose 5 per cent of our birds but that is no different to grazing cattle or sheep," Mr Rodger said.

Animal Liberation NSW spokesman Mark Pearson said taking good care of chickens would have little effect on the industry and called for a tougher code of practice.

It used to take the industry 20 weeks to grow a chicken. Now producers can grow a bird in six weeks. Growers concede fast growth meant



Suffering: Chicken with oversized feet



Raider: Animal liberationist



Rescued: Birds from the farm



Overcrowded: Many of these chickens can't support their own weight

there was a risk chickens might not be able to hold their own weight.

Poultry expert Dr Raf Preire, who worked for the US and British agriculture department and is on a fellowship with the University of New England, said it was "foolish to think the practice is ideal".

However, he said it would not change while farmers received such a small part of the profits generated by the industry and consumers wanted cheap chicken. Growers are paid an average 50c a bird.

Inghams did not return calls.