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August 31, 2009

S. Robson Walton, Chairman
Walmart Supercenters
702 SW 8th St.
Bentonville, AR 72716

Sent via fax: 479-273-4053

Dear Mr. Walton:

I contact you today on behalf of Mercy For Animals (MFA), a national, non-profit animal protection organization working to prevent cruelty to farmed animals. MFA's recent undercover investigation into what is reportedly the world's largest egg industry hatchery, Hy-Line International (Hy-Line) in Spencer, Iowa, exposes one of the industry's best kept secrets – that the egg industry tears male chicks' bodies apart in grinding machines while they are still alive. Consumers deserve truthful and accurate information so that they can make informed decisions, and MFA asks that Walmart Supercenters require that all eggs sold in its stores bear the label below reading, "Warning: Male chicks are ground-up alive by the egg industry."

MFA's investigator covertly filmed the standard operating procedures at Hy-Line while employed at the facility, exposing the cruel and violent start, and for the 50% of chicks who happen to be male, the abrupt and painful deaths, of egg-laying chickens in the United States. Newly hatched chicks often endured severe injury and death on their journeys through the "separator," a machine that separates chicks from their eggshells. Baskets holding dozens of chicks traveled on a rapidly moving conveyor to a point at which a rotating arm tipped the baskets, spilling the chicks onto another conveyor several inches down. The chicks tumbled onto their faces, fell onto their backs and landed on top of each other in piles. This second conveyor dropped off at the end, spilling the chicks onto yet another conveyor, which transported them away from the separator. Chicks sometimes became trapped in the machinery, however, to be mangled or carried through the separator's scalding wash cycle.



Male chicks do not produce eggs, and the egg-laying breeds of chickens used by the industry do not grow large or fast enough to be raised for their flesh, making the male chicks trash to the egg industry. Workers separate male chicks from females by grabbing the birds as they pass in front on a conveyor, check their wing tips to determine their sex, then throw them into one of two dark chutes. The females landed on a conveyor that transported them to the de-beaking stations, where their beaks are seared off to save the industry money, while the males landed on a conveyor that

transported them to a “macerator,” a machine with blades that slashed the live, fully conscious chicks to bits.

According to their own data, Hy-Line grinds over 150,000 male chicks to death on an average day at the Spencer facility alone. In fact, each year over 30 million male chicks are ground-up alive at this one Hy-Line facility. Over 200 million male chicks are killed by the egg industry each year within the first few days of their lives. A sample of the egg industry’s horrific treatment of newly hatched chicks as documented at Hy-Line can be viewed at www.MercyForAnimals.org/Hatchery.

The violence that you will see is standard and acceptable within the egg industry, and consumers have a right to know about this cruelty so that they can make informed and compassionate purchasing decisions. Industrial hatcheries cause stress, fear, and pain to chicks – who would naturally be raised under the nurturing and protective watch of their mothers. These young chicks are fully capable of feeling pain and stress, and deserve protection from abuse. Chickens’ cognitive abilities have been compared to those of mammals, including primates. Given that chickens’ nervous systems are fully developed at the time of hatching, as a fact of neurophysiology, the young chicks are likely suffering extreme pain as they are being cut up alive by the grinder blades. Yet, the public has been kept in the dark by the egg industry about its painful disposal of male chicks. If egg producers threw, mutilated, and ground up puppies or kittens in the manner that they do baby chicks, they could be prosecuted for cruelty to animals.

The egg industry is infamous for misleading consumers about such cruel practices. The United Egg Producers (UEP), the egg industry trade group representing 90% of producers, paid over \$100,000 to 16 state attorneys general to settle claims of misleading consumers with their use of the “Animal Care Certified” label that they placed on egg cartons from factory-farmed hens who were forced to live in crowded wire cages so small they couldn’t spread their wings or walk. The egg industry’s sordid history continues by misleading consumers through images of hens and roosters roaming freely in the countryside on cartons of eggs produced by hens crammed in cages and hatched at facilities that violently kill male chicks. Egg producers have gone to great lengths to hide their cruel practices from the public.

This past November, California voters overwhelmingly passed the Prevention of Farm Animal Cruelty Act, commonly known as “Proposition 2,” an animal welfare measure that will make some of the worst abuses in animal agribusiness illegal in the state, showing again that the treatment of animals is extremely important to consumers, even when those animals are being bred and used for food. A 2007 report by Oklahoma State University’s Department of Agricultural Economics found that 95% of respondents believed that farmed animal care is important and 89% stated that companies that “require farmers to treat their animals better are doing the right thing.” Similarly, a 2004 study conducted by Ohio State University found that 92% of respondents felt that it was important for animals on farms to be well-cared for. Zogby America found in 2000 that 80% of respondents were willing “to pay more for eggs from hens treated humanely.” Without a doubt, knowing that male chicks are ground-up alive by the egg industry would influence the purchases that the public makes.

Hacking up fully conscious chicks, as MFA documented at Hy-Line, is one of the most common killing methods. The egg industry kills hundreds of millions of male chicks each year by gassing, slamming them into metal plates, suffocation, and tearing their bodies apart in grinding machines

while they are still alive. Consumers deserve to be provided with true and accurate information about egg production methods so that they can make informed purchasing choices. As such, if an egg producer gasses, smashes or suffocates male chicks, we believe labels on those egg cartons should bare those descriptions.

The current labeling of shell eggs in the U.S. conceals the male chicks' violent deaths and other hatchery horrors. This is another cruel side of the egg industry that few consumers know about. Throwing, mutilating by searing off beaks, and grinding-up live animals are all standard and acceptable practices at this hatchery, and this cruelty as documented is inherent in industrial hatcheries, where chicks are treated as disposable commodities rather than animals who feel pain and deserve protection from abuse. There are currently no laws to require such truth in labeling, which is why we are asking you to voluntarily require that all eggs sold in your stores bear the label reading "Warning: Male chicks are ground-up alive by the egg industry" to ensure that your customers are given truthful and accurate information about how buying eggs means that they are paying companies to grind-up male chicks – while they are still alive and suffering.

Thank you for your time and attention to this important matter. Please feel free to contact me directly at 937-470-9454 or via email at NathanR@MercyForAnimals.org. I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Nathan Runkle". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name being more prominent.

Nathan Runkle
Executive Director