

From: Chew on This  
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### **shocking**

In 2006, about 9 billion chickens will be raised in the United States, slaughtered, and then eaten. That works out to almost thirty chickens for every man, woman, and child in the country. Killing a chicken has never been pleasant. The old-fashioned method, used by farmers for centuries, is to chop off their heads with an ax. You've probably heard that a chicken can run around for a few moments without its head. That's true, although it's not something farmers like to see. The billions of chickens slaughtered every year to make McNuggets and KFC Crispy Strips don't get a chance to run around without their heads. They are killed at enormous slaughterhouses, hanging upside down, their legs shackled to a fast-moving chain that carries thousands of birds. Unlike the assembly lines at an automobile factory, where cars are put together, the production lines at a modern slaughterhouse are geared for disassembly, as one

animal after another is killed and then rapidly taken apart.

Fifteen miles from Norah's farm there's a slaughterhouse run by a company with an all-American name: Pilgrim's Pride. The name suggests a product that's wholesome and pure. Many of the farmers in Norah's neighborhood raise birds for Pilgrim's Pride, which sells chicken meat to KFC and other fast-food chains. The slaughterhouse is a white building with a chain-link fence around it. Little smokestacks rise from different parts of the roof, sending puffs of steam into the air. It doesn't look like a scary place full of death and dying. It looks like a factory that could be making chocolate bars, lawn chairs, or tennis shoes. You can tell it's a slaughterhouse when big trucks start pulling up, full of rustling and squawking chickens in cages, their white feathers visible behind metal bars.

When chickens arrive at the Pilgrim's Pride slaughterhouse, their cages are rolled onto conveyor belts and tipped over. The birds tumble down a ramp that resembles a playground slide. When they land at the bottom, workers grab their legs and attach them to a moving overhead chain. Sometimes chickens break their legs trying to wriggle free. The chain carries them upside down to a huge tank of water that's charged with electricity. When the birds are dunked into the water, the electricity is supposed to knock them unconscious. Chickens that have been properly shocked don't feel what happens next.

But some birds manage to avoid the water by twisting their bodies and flapping their wings or come out of the water still wide awake. Several years ago McDonald's admitted that one or two out of every one hundred chickens processed by the company's suppliers aren't knocked out by the "stun bath."

What happens next is painless for birds that are unconscious but cruel to those still awake. The moving chain carries the chickens to a sharp rotating blade that slits their throats. The blade reliably kills almost all the chickens. Every so often, however, a bird that's still awake moves its head out of the way and dodges the blade. Moments later that bird can suffer a painful death. The chain dunks the chickens into a tank of boiling water. Called the scald tank, it helps remove their feathers. It looks like a witch's brew of bubbling, bloody liquid. No chicken has ever been known to survive the scald tank. The birds that somehow live to this point are boiled to death.

The company motto at Pilgrim's Pride is "Fresh from the Farm . . . Every Day," and the company Web site features cartoons of happy, smiling chickens. Yet a 2004 videotape shot inside the slaughterhouse near Norah's farm reveals little to smile about. The video was made by an animal rights activist upset by how the chickens were being treated at the plant. On some days so many chickens would arrive there at once that workers didn't have enough time to shackle every bird's legs.



Pilgrim's Pride slaughterhouse, Moorefield, West Virginia

Instead of attaching them to the overhead chain, workers would throw leftover birds against the wall. Some of the chickens that hit the wall were knocked out, but others continued to squawk and flap around. The video shows frustrated workers jumping up and down on the birds or picking them up and throwing them against the wall again. According to the animal rights activist, one worker put three live chickens on the floor and jumped on each of them. "I like to hear the popping sound they make," said the worker.