

# The chicken factory farms

– A three-year investigation of Sweden's  
largest chicken slaughterhouses



Project 1882.

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# Table of contents

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<b>Introduction</b>	<b>3</b>
Urgent political measures	4
Urgent measures for companies	4
<b>The slaughterhouse investigation</b>	<b>6</b>
Summary	6
Kronfågel (Scandi Standard)	8
Guldfågeln	11
Atria	14
<b>The animal welfare breaches</b>	<b>17</b>
Footpad dermatitis	17
Crammed crates	18
Crush injuries and wounds	19
Hunger and thirst	20
High mortality	21
Live scalding	22
<b>High confidentiality</b>	<b>24</b>
About the legislation	25
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>References</b>	<b>29</b>

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## Introduction

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Every year, more than 100 million chickens are transported and slaughtered in Sweden.<sup>1</sup> More chickens than any other species of land animals are bred and killed for meat and, as evidence shows, they also live under the worst conditions. For three years in row, Project 1882 has requested access to all authority inspection reports made at the four largest chicken slaughterhouses in Sweden. In total, more than 450 inspection reports concerning animal welfare have been analyzed. What has been revealed is not compatible with a sustainable society. In this report, we present what we have learned and what the necessary course of action must be.

In response to Project 1882's previous investigations of chicken slaughterhouses and other media scandals, Kronfågel (Scandi Standard), Atria and the Swedish chicken industry association Svensk Fågel, among others, claim to have implemented new initiatives for animal welfare. According to them, these initiatives have made an impact. Kronfågel presented a ten-point program in 2022, but its focus was more on environmental issues rather than animal welfare.<sup>2</sup> Project 1882 described the initiative as "like extinguishing a fire with a small watering can". At the same time, Atria has invested in better computer systems which primarily measure whether feed, and consequently the cost, is being wasted.<sup>3</sup> Svensk Fågel claims that they have implemented extensive training efforts to lower the risk of scalding animals alive and to reduce the amount of wing injuries and crushing incidences. At the same time, they describe how the reported animal welfare breaches show that the authorities' supervision works, and that the meat from affected animals does not reach the consumers.<sup>4</sup> They have also introduced so-called "animal welfare programs" which focus more on increased internal control of compliance with legislation,<sup>5</sup> rather than actual improvements in animal welfare.

Looking at the current Swedish government's animal welfare work (2022-2026), it also does not look well.<sup>6</sup> Their work has mainly resulted in efforts being made towards an inquiry into animal industry competitiveness. Many of the conclusions in the inquiry are highly problematic from an animal welfare perspective, suggesting a continued industrialisation of meat production rather than a necessary dismantling of factory farms. Project 1882 believes that overcrowding in chicken factory farms must be significantly reduced, at the same time as a shift from Franken chickens to slower-growing and healthier breeds needs to be implemented. The investigator argues, on the contrary, that the ongoing work on new EU animal welfare legislation should emphasize that Swedish experiences show how it is possible to maintain sufficient animal welfare at higher levels of stocking density, if the space requirement is regulated through, for example, control programs.<sup>7</sup> Researchers in animal welfare do not share the investigator's conclusion. Their conclusion is that both crowding, and growth are issues that need to be addressed in EU chicken factory farms, including in Sweden.<sup>8</sup>

This report on Swedish chicken factory farms shows that continuing to raise chickens in the same manner as today would have devastating consequences for animal welfare. What is more, politicians, authorities and the industry urgently need to take the research results on animal welfare into consideration.

The final chapter of the report addresses the increasing difficulty in gaining insight into animal welfare violations that occur in slaughterhouses. Between 2022 and 2024, authorities have increased the confidentiality of inspection reports with reference to new interpretations of the Swedish legislation. Reduced transparency poses a threat to democracy. Project 1882 has therefore developed proposals that will facilitate the crucial investigative work that is carried out by journalists and nonprofit organisations.

### **Urgent political measures**

1. Prohibit breeding of Frankenchickens and promote breeding of healthier chicken hybrids. This will be achieved through a clarification in animal welfare legislation, like what has already been implemented for the Belgian Blue cattle in Sweden.
2. Reduce stocking density to 11 kg per square metre by 2030, with a transitional period where 30 kg per square metre will set the new minimum level from 2026.
3. Encourage the revision of more progressive EU legislation on animal transport,
4. regarding the space in transport crates, individual suitability checks for transport, and shortened transport times.
5. Set an end date for the use of electrical water bath stunning and promote the improvement of other stunning techniques, preferably by 2027.
6. Clarify the legislation by making exceptions from confidentiality in animal welfare cases that are of interest to consumers.

### **Urgent measures for companies – European Chicken Commitment**

By 2026\*, we will require our suppliers to meet the following requirements for 100 % of the [fresh, frozen, and processed] chicken in our supply chain:

1. Comply with all EU animal welfare laws and regulations, regardless of the country of production.
2. Implement a maximum stocking density of 30kg/m<sup>2</sup> or less. Thinning is discouraged and if practiced must be limited to one thin per flock.
3. Adopt breeds that demonstrate higher welfare outcomes: either the following breeds, Hubbard Redbro (indoor use only); Hubbard Norfolk Black, JA757, JACY57, 787, 957, or 987, Rambler Ranger, Ranger Classic, Rustic Gold (indoor use only) and Ranger Gold, or other breeds that meet the criteria of the RSPCA Broiler Breed Welfare Assessment Protocol.
4. Meet improved environmental standards including:
  - a. At least 50 lux of light, including natural light.
  - b. At least two meters of usable perch space, and two pecking substrates, per 1,000 birds.

- c. On air quality, the maximum requirements of Annex 2.3 of the EU broiler directive, regardless of stocking density.
  - d. No cages or multi-tier systems.
5. Adopt controlled atmospheric stunning using inert gas or multi-phase systems, or effective electrical stunning without live inversion.
6. Demonstrate compliance with the above standards via third-party auditing and annual public reporting on progress towards this commitment.\*\*
7. At least 20 % of the chickens must have access to suitable outdoor space with a minimum of 1 m<sup>2</sup> per bird. Efforts should be actively made to ensure that the chickens can be outside for most of the year, depending on weather conditions.\*\*\*



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\* For companies committing after December 31, 2023, a longer timeline may be set, provided the timeline is in agreement with an NGO signatory of the ECC, has progress milestones, and a public deadline for 100 % compliance.

\*\* Can for example be integrated into the company's sustainability report or annual report.

\*\*\* This is an additional criterion for ECC in countries with strong public opinion for improved animal welfare, including Sweden and France. Without at least 20 % outdoor access, it is not considered a full commitment in these markets.

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## The slaughterhouse investigation

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For three years in a row, Project 1882 has requested inspection reports on animal welfare for chickens from the Swedish National Food Agency (Livsmedelsverket) and the county administrative boards in the counties where the four largest chicken slaughterhouses are located: Södermanland, Halland, Blekinge and Kalmar. The inspection reports have been reviewed by an expert at the Swedish part of Project 1882, and a calculation of the proportion of welfare breaches has been made based on the inspection reports provided by the authorities each year for the four largest chicken slaughterhouses: Kronfågel AB, Torsåsen Fågelprodukter AB (Guldfågeln), Atria Sverige AB (Lagerbergs and Lönneberga) and Guldfågeln AB. Only inspections related to animal welfare have been included. Additional animal welfare inspections at facilities other than slaughterhouses, in other regions, may have occurred but were not noted in this investigation.

The inspection reports are primarily issued by the Swedish National Food Agency, as they are responsible for official animal welfare inspections of living animals before, during, and after slaughter. The remaining inspection reports are provided by the four county administrative boards, as they have the overall responsibility for animal welfare inspections on farms, during transport, and at slaughterhouses in the regions where these are located. A total of 471 inspection reports have been analyzed.

### Summary

The survey shows that Frankenchickens across the country have been subjected to suffering. Out of 471 inspection reports produced over three years, a total of 399 (86 percent) reveal animal welfare violations. These breaches to legislation also have recurred repeatedly over the years, which indicates that the chicken industry is systematically violating the Animal Welfare Act without facing any significant consequences.

Figure 1 shows the number of inspection reports reviewed, and the proportion of animal welfare breaches detected. The highest proportion of violations was recorded in 2021. The reason is probably that Project 1882 did not receive any inspection reports without remarks from the Swedish Food Agency, unlike in subsequent years. Most inspections took place in 2021 and 2023. This can presumably be due to Kronfågel's slaughterhouse having recurring problems with scalding chickens alive. Read more about this in the section on Kronfågel. In 2022, fewer inspection reports were issued, compared to other years.

Since 2021, the proportion of animal welfare violations has decreased, but the previous levels have been extremely high. To some extent, the reduction may be due to more inspection reports being issued by the Swedish Food Agency in connection to additional animal welfare inspections, where fewer violations generally are found.

Due to strict confidentiality, it is not possible to determine what the Swedish Food Agency's official veterinarians have outlined as the specific cause of the violations in 2023. Based on the information available, Project 1882 has categorized the violations as either slaughter- or transport related.

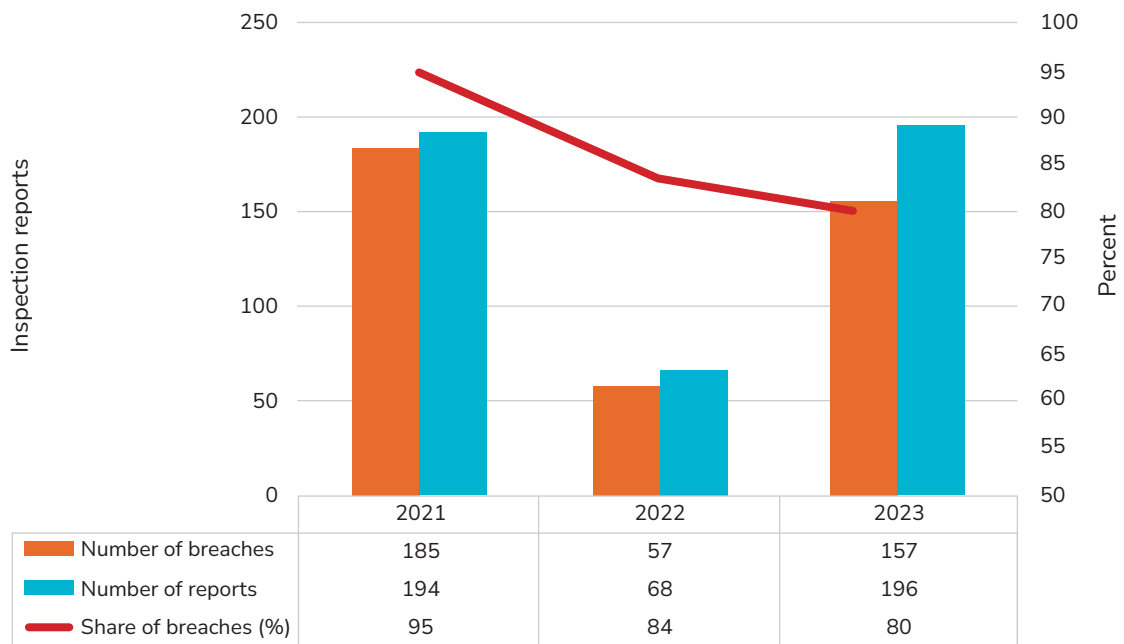


Figure 1. The graph shows the number of inspection reports reviewed and the proportion of animal welfare breaches detected between 2021 and 2023. The yearly average was 133 breaches of 153 inspection reports, at an 86 % violation rate.

In addition to the inevitable suffering caused by farming, transport, and slaughter, at least 450,000 chickens have been subjected to additional suffering so severe that it could be classified as criminal, and it has therefore been reported since 2021. However, the actual number is most likely much higher. The discovered animal welfare breaches either concern previous events in the chicken's life – but are only identified after the chicken's death – or during transport, or at the slaughterhouse. Read more about how the animal welfare breaches affect the chickens in the next chapter of the report.

**Violations related to breeding and rearing:**

- Footpad dermatitis
- High mortality

**Violations related to transport to the slaughterhouse:**

- Crush injuries and wounds
- Crowded transport crates
- Hunger and thirst
- High mortality

**Violations related to the slaughterhouses:**

- Hunger and thirst
- Live scalding

## Kronfågel (Scandi Standard)

Sweden's largest slaughterhouse, measured in numbers of animals slaughtered every year, is Kronfågel AB. This facility is in Valla, Södermanland County, and the company is owned by the international corporation Scandi Standard. Approximately 55 million chickens are transported to and slaughtered at Kronfågel's slaughterhouse each year.<sup>9</sup> This corresponds to approximately two chickens per second, if slaughtering was to continue around the clock.

Year after year, the large-scale nature of Kronfågel's slaughterhouse has led to numerous animal welfare violations. The reason behind these frequent violations appears to be improper stunning procedures, which in both 2021 and 2023 resulted in additional inspections where further issues were uncovered. When reviewing all slaughterhouses over the years, Kronfågel consistently emerged as the slaughterhouse raising the average number of animal welfare violations. The lowest proportion of violations was recorded in 2022, at a violation rate of 85 %. See Figure 2.

The violations affecting most individuals have been related to mortality during transport and issues associated with stunning. During the three years of the survey, an estimated 45,000 chickens have been subjected to suffering so severe that it could be classified as criminal. The highest number of individuals were affected in 2022, as more chickens died during transport or suffered from footpad dermatitis that year, compared to other years.

The slaughterhouse in Valla exclusively handles Franken chickens and uses carbon dioxide stunning directly in the transport crates. Kronfågel AB states on their own website, translated from Swedish: "*Chickens are the heart of Kronfågel's business. Our principle is that all chickens should thrive, from hatching to slaughter.*" The name Kronfågel can be translated to 'crowned bird'.

The picture was taken at a different location on a different occasion.  
Credit: Djurens Rätt.





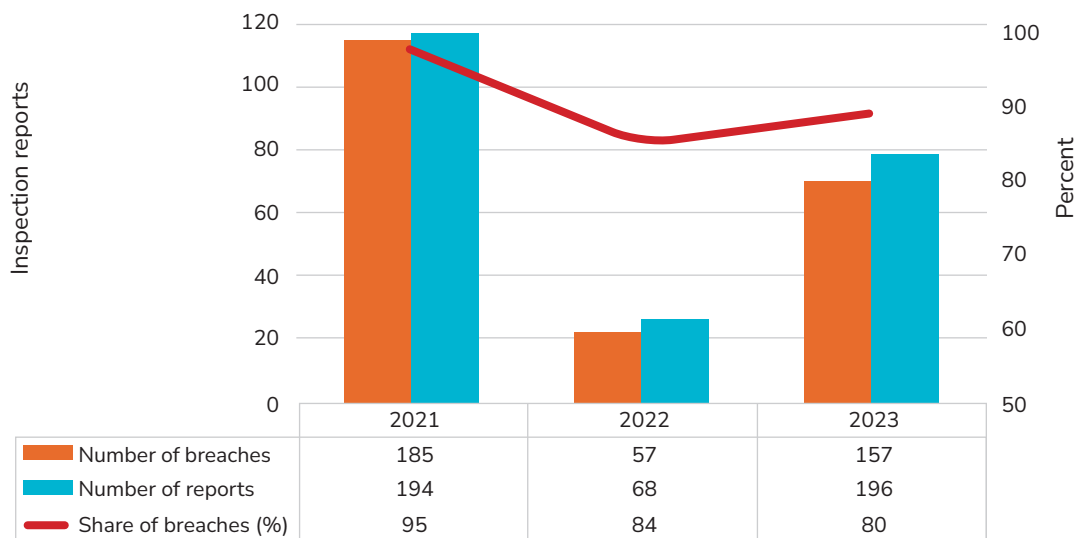


Figure 2. The graph shows the number of inspection reports reviewed and the proportion of animal welfare breaches detected between 2021 and 2023. The yearly average was 69 breaches of 74 inspection reports, at an 91 % violation rate.

## VIOLATIONS IN 2021

- On several occasions, chickens were found without having been properly euthanized, therefore subjected to the risk of being scalded alive. A total of over 200 individuals.
- Nine chickens were transported with their heads trapped in transport crates, resulting in death.
- Seven chickens were discovered with their wings trapped in the transport.
- On eight occasions, "unusually" high mortality rates were reported during transport to the slaughterhouse. Thousands of chickens died prematurely due to factors such as heat stress or lack of oxygen, and countless numbers of individuals suffered from improper temperatures during the transport.
- On one occasion, the County Administrative Board discovered that the stunning process could not be monitored since the camera was too dirty. During the same incident, the remaining chickens in the transport crates were exposed to strong winds because the crates were placed too close to the fans.

**"In my assessment, all broiler chickens suffered from stasis in their liver and lungs, yellow fluid in the pericardium, and a pale musculature. Diagnosis: Suffocated from oxygen deprivation."**

– The Swedish Food Agency on Kronfågel AB, 18th June 2021

## VIOLATIONS IN 2022

- Six chickens were transported with their heads trapped in the transport crate. One was still alive when found, but with such injuries that it needed to be culled immediately.
- Four chickens were discovered with a wing trapped in the transport.
- On seven occasions, "unusually" high mortality rates were reported during transport to the slaughterhouse. Thousands of chickens died prematurely from factors such as heat stress or lack of oxygen, and countless numbers of other individuals suffered from improper temperatures during the transport. On several occasions, all surviving chickens were wet and frozen.
- On one occasion, a chicken was found with its skin peeled off, exposing the muscles.
- On two occasions, nearly all examined chickens had footpad lesions.
- On one occasion, two chickens had escaped from a broken transport crate and were at risk of being run over at the slaughterhouse.

**"During the autopsy of 10 deceased broiler chickens, no pathological findings could explain the increased mortality. My conclusion is that the chickens have been subjected to unnecessary suffering. Diagnosis: Oxygen deprivation."**

*– The Swedish Food Agency on Kronfågel AB, 19th October 2022*

## VIOLATIONS IN 2023

- On 13 occasions, slaughter violations were detected. In at least five of these cases, the violations were related to the killing process, indicating that the chickens were at risk of being scalded alive.
- On 57 occasions, transport violations were identified, and chicken body parts were found crushed in transport crates. In other cases, an "unusually high number" of chickens were reported dead or sick in the transport vehicle, affecting thousands of individuals.

Due to strict confidentiality, it is not possible to determine what the Swedish Food Agency outlined as the specific cause of the violations in 2023.

## Guldfågeln

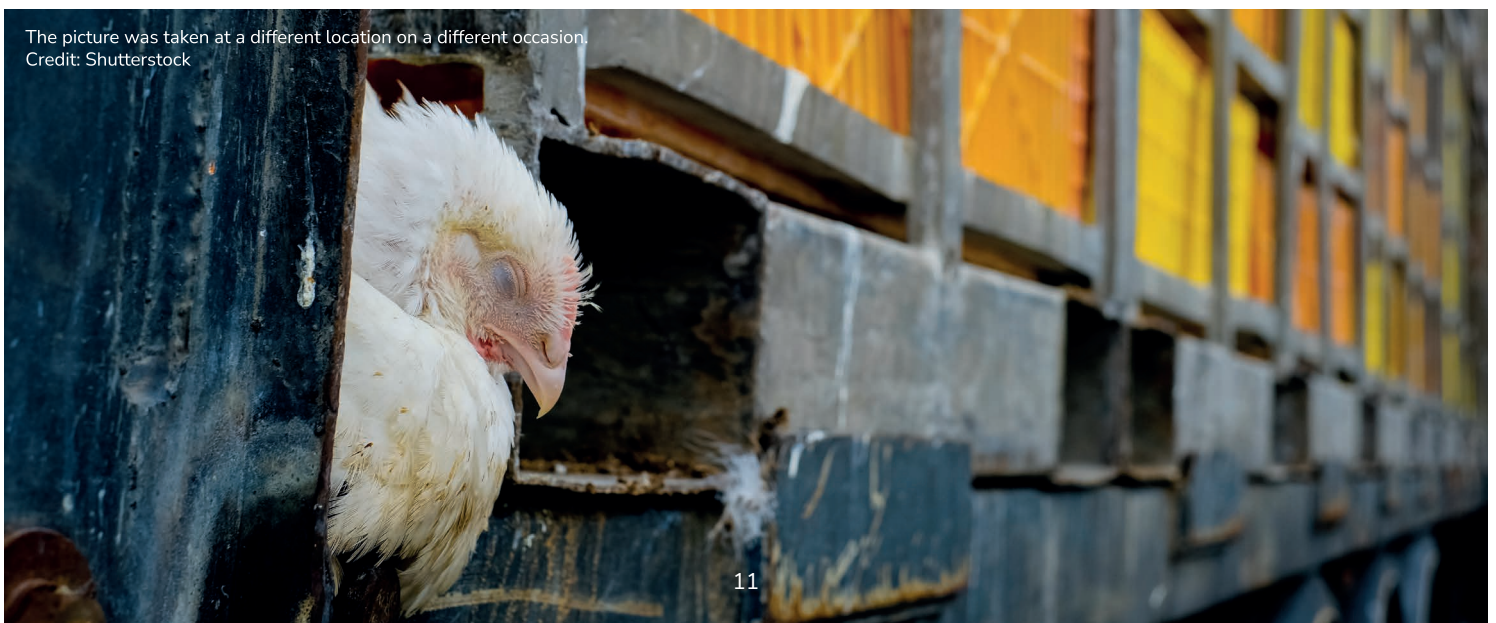
After Kronfågel, Guldfågeln is the second largest chicken brand in Sweden. For three years in a row, the investigation of Guldfågeln has focused on the two slaughterhouses on Öland and in Falkenberg, which are owned by Guldfågeln AB and Torsåsen Fågelprodukter AB. About 40 million chickens are transported to and slaughtered at these facilities every year.

Every year, serious animal welfare violations have been identified at the slaughterhouses. However, the percentage of violations has decreased from the high level of 92 percent in 2021, to 74 percent in 2023. See Figure 3. The most common breaches appear to have been transport-related, where wings or heads were crushed in the transport crates, causing injury or death. However, in terms of the number of chickens, the most extensive violations have concerned footpad dermatitis. This is related to the breeding environment and is common among Frankenchickens. During the three years of the survey, an estimated 230,000 chickens have been subjected to suffering so severe that it could be classified as criminal. The highest number of individuals were affected in 2022, as the mortality during transport was high and more chickens experienced footpad dermatitis compared to in other years.

Guldfågeln's slaughterhouses primarily slaughter Frankenchickens and use electrical water bath stunning. This stunning method has been widely criticized by the scientific community, as the chickens run the risk of being subjected to shocks before they lose consciousness, or risk failed stunning. Read more about this in the section on Live scalding.

In 2023, Torsåsen Fågelprodukter informed the County Administrative Board of Halland that they plan to convert to gas stunning by 2026. However, the inspection revealed several animal welfare violations, which have been classified as confidential by the authority.<sup>10</sup> If this has impacted reconstruction is currently unclear.

Guldfågeln states on their website: *"Throughout the chickens' upbringing, their well-being is our top priority in the entire value chain."* The name Guldfågeln could be translated to 'golden bird'.



The picture was taken at a different location on a different occasion.  
Credit: Shutterstock

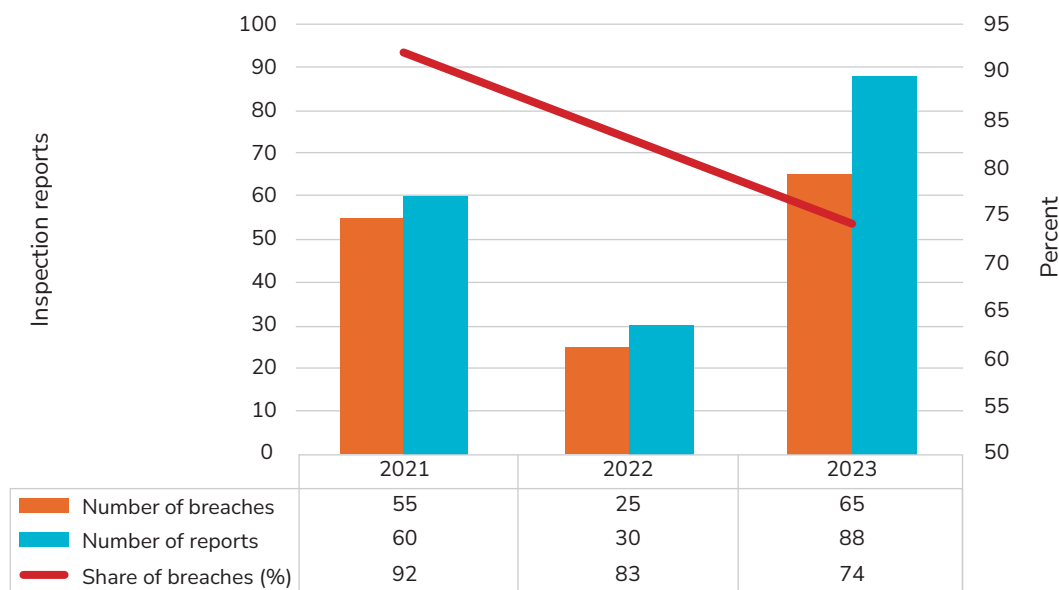


Figure 3. The graph shows the number of inspection reports reviewed and the proportion of breaches detected between 2021 and 2023, recorded for two Guldfågeln slaughterhouses. The yearly average was 48 breaches of 59 inspection reports, at an 83% violation rate.

## VIOLATIONS IN 2021

- 27 chickens were found with a wing trapped in the transport crate.
- Six chickens were transported with their heads trapped in the transport crate. One was still alive when found.
- On five occasions, nearly all inspected chickens had footpad dermatitis. A total of about 100,000 individuals appeared to have been affected.
- On one occasion, 1,654 chickens were found with ammonia burns from manure.
- On three occasions, chickens were found with their skin peeled off, exposing the muscles. Two of the chickens were still alive when found.
- On 15 occasions, the mortality rate after transport was "unusually" high. It was determined that the chickens had frozen to death, suffocated from oxygen deprivation, or died from heat stress. This incident involved a total of approximately 3,000 individuals who had died before slaughter in connection to the transport, and countless thousands of chickens also suffered from improper temperatures during the transport.
- On one occasion, a transport crate broke, and five chickens died due to the fall. Four of them died immediately, and one was seriously injured before dying.
- During another occasion, 30 chickens were packed too tightly in their transport crates, called overcrowding.

**“During an inspection of living birds on 2021-02-12, an official veterinarian discovered a bird with damaged skin. Such injuries involve a part of the skin being removed from the underlying tissue, exposing the muscle. When the bird was found, it was still alive”**

– The Swedish Food Agency on Guldfågeln AB, 12th February 2021

## VIOLATIONS IN 2022

- Three chickens were found with a wing trapped in the transport crate.
- Two chickens were transported with their heads trapped in the transport crates and died as a result.
- On nine occasions, it was discovered that nearly all the inspected chickens had footpad dermatitis, or foot injuries. In total, at least 100,000 individuals are believed to have been affected.
- On four occasions, chickens were found with their skin peeled off and with injuries deep enough to expose the muscles, in one case so severe that the intestines were exposed. When found, they were alive.
- On six occasions, the mortality rate after transport was “unusually” high. It was determined that the chickens had died from freezing or heat stress. In total, countless thousands of chickens were exposed to inappropriate temperatures during transport, but they survived until slaughter.
- On one occasion, chickens died from pericarditis or peritonitis during the transport, while many of those who survived were “discarded” after slaughter. The carrier had been informed about the chickens’ illness beforehand, but despite this proceeded with the transportation.

**"During the slaughter of birds on November 16th, 2022, an official veterinarian observed a high rate of foot injuries in the flocks [...] Foot injuries cause pain among the affected animals, which is an animal welfare issue."**

*– The Swedish Food Agency on Guldfågeln AB, 16th November 2022*

## VIOLATIONS IN 2023

- On at least three occasions, an "unusually high number" of chickens with footpad dermatitis were discovered, indicating that tens of thousands of chickens have suffered.
- On 34 occasions, transport violations were discovered. A body part of the chickens had either been crushed in transport crates, or "unusually high numbers" of chickens were found dead or sick in the transport vehicle. On at least seven of these occasions, transport-related mortality was "abnormal", which affected thousands of individuals.
- On one occasion, the transport vehicle was overcrowded with too many chickens.
- On 20 occasions, violations were discovered at the slaughterhouse. Notably, chickens were left without food for longer than what is legal and normal, due to a production halt. On another occasion, a chicken was found still alive among waste and dead chickens. The personnel had repeatedly failed to detect injured chickens during their inspection, and at least one chicken was suspected to have been scalded alive.

Due to strict confidentiality, it is not possible to exactly determine what the Swedish National Food Agency outlined as the specific cause of the violations in 2023.

## Atria

The chicken slaughterhouse in Sölvesborg, owned by Atria Sverige AB, slaughters chickens that will be sold by the Lagerbergs and Lönneberga brands. Up to 20 million chickens are transported to and slaughtered at this facility every year and the company is owned by Finnish Atria OY.

Every year, serious animal welfare violations have been identified at the slaughterhouse, but the proportion of violations has decreased somewhat from the high level of 88 percent in 2021, to 76 percent in 2023. See Figure 4. The most common breaches appear to have been transport-related, as wings or heads have been crushed in transport crates. However, in terms of numbers of chickens affected, the most extensive violations have been related to footpad dermatitis. These are caused by the rearing environment and are common among Franken chickens.

During the three years of the investigation, it is estimated that 127,000 chickens have been subjected to suffering so severe that it could be classified as criminal. The highest number of individuals were affected in 2023, as more chickens died during transport or suffered from footpad dermatitis compared to other years.

Atria's slaughterhouse uses only Franken chickens and have electrical water bath stunning. Every year, at least one chicken has been subjected to inadequate stunning at the facility. Read more about the risks and the suffering this causes in the section on Live scalding. Atria Sverige AB states on their website: *"We focus on good animal welfare."*

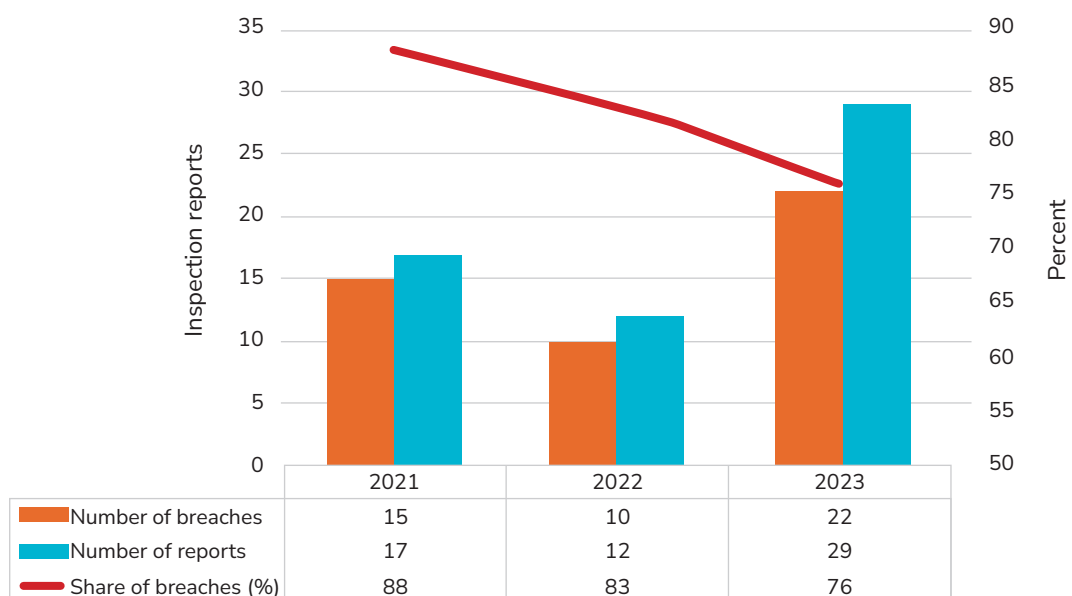


Figure 4. The graph shows the number of inspection reports reviewed and the proportion of breaches detected between 2021 and 2023, recorded for the slaughterhouse owned by Atria Sverige AB. The yearly average was 16 breaches of 19 inspection reports, at an 82 % violation rate.

## VIOLATIONS IN 2021

- A total of four chickens had been transported with their heads trapped in the transport crate. One was still alive when found.
- On seven occasions, a total of eight chickens were discovered with a wing trapped in the transport crate.
- On two occasions, almost all examined chickens had footpad dermatitis. A total of approximately 50,000 chickens.
- On one occasion, the chickens were wet and frozen, and over 1,000 individuals had died during the transport.
- On one occasion, two chickens were found without having been properly euthanized, which indicated that they could have been scalded alive.

**“During an inspection of live animals at midday on April 19th, 2021, many wet chickens were observed... When preparing the animals for stunning, 1,034 already dead chickens were found among 7,552 delivered ones.”**

*– The Swedish Food Agency on Atria Sverige AB, 19th April 2021*

## VIOLATIONS IN 2022

- On five occasions, a total of six live chickens were discovered with a wing trapped in the transport crate.
- On two occasions, nearly all examined chickens had footpad dermatitis. In total, this affected approximately 40,000 chickens.
- On one occasion, the chickens were wet and frozen, and over 500 individuals had died during the transport. On another occasion, an “unusually high number” of chickens were found dead in the transport. An autopsy revealed that they had suffered from oxygen deprivation and internal bleeding.
- On one occasion, a chicken was found scalded alive.

**“An official veterinarian discovered a bird that had not been stunned, and therefore was not properly bled, at the slaughterhouse. The bird was found in the offcuts on August 31st, 2022.”**

*– The Swedish Food Agency on Atria Sverige AB, 31st August 2022*

## VIOLATIONS IN 2023

- On at least one occasion, an “unusually high number” of chickens had footpad dermatitis, indicating that tens of thousands of chickens had suffered.
- On at least two occasions, an “unusually high number” of chickens were found dead in the transport vehicle, affecting at least a thousand individuals.
- On 13 occasions, chickens were found crushed in transport crates, or "an unusually high number" of chickens were found dead or sick in the transport vehicle, something that had affected thousands of individuals.
- On seven occasions, violations were discovered at the slaughterhouse. On at least one of these occasions, a chicken was found without having been properly bled, indicating that it may have been scalded alive.

Due to strict confidentiality, it is not possible to determine what the Swedish Food Agency has outlined as the specific cause of the violations in 2023.

The picture was taken at a different location on a different occasion.  
Credit: Shutterstock





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## The animal welfare breaches

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In this chapter, we delve into the most common animal welfare breaches for chickens, which were discovered at Swedish slaughterhouses between 2021 and 2023. The breaches concern both problems that occurred before and during slaughter. There is a solid scientific basis that animals have been subjected to suffering, and Project 1882 proposes important political measures.

### Footpad dermatitis

Footpad score, footpad dermatitis, poor foot health or burns under the feet – this is a common animal welfare problem with many names. This is the animal welfare breach that has affected the most individuals at Guldfågeln's and Atria's slaughterhouses. There have been cases when almost all chickens have had poor foot health, which indicates great suffering throughout the life of the chickens – during breeding, transporting and slaughter.

Footpad dermatitis is a well-known challenge for the chicken industry. The injuries involve skin irritation or wounds under the chickens' feet, which cause pain and lameness. This is a clear indication that there have been problems that have led to the chickens becoming sedentary in feces and humid bedding at the production hall.<sup>11</sup> Rapid growth rate can cause more sedentary behaviors because of the heavy bodies. Therefore, Franken chickens are often more affected by footpad dermatitis than more healthy and slow-growing chicken breeds.<sup>12</sup>

In Sweden, the majority of chickens are Franken chickens and they are usually crowded with up to 25 chickens per square meter. This corresponds to a maximum of 36 kilograms of chickens per square meter. The control of footpad dermatitis is carried out only on dead chickens at the slaughterhouse, and on a sample of 100 chickens per breeding stock.<sup>13</sup> This means that only a fraction (about 0.3 percent) of all chickens are checked, and that an assumption is made about how widespread the problem has been. This means that many injuries remain undetected and that no chicken receives care. Every year, hundreds of thousands, or even millions of chickens are transported with wounds under their feet. In fact, this contradicts the Swedish animal welfare legislation that prohibits sick or injured animals to be transported.<sup>14</sup>

The authorities, through the industry association Svensk Fågel, use footpad dermatitis as an indicator to be able to allow the highest possible stocking density (36 kilos of chickens per square metre) if the problem is under control, and reduce the stocking rate slightly if major deficiencies are discovered. Over the past 15 years, there has been a reduction in footpad dermatitis in Sweden, but the problem is still widespread. In 2019, about 11 percent of controlled chickens had footpad dermatitis in the Swedish chicken industry, which translates to about 11 million chickens out of the 100 million that were slaughtered. Since then, the problem has remained stable at 5-10 percent.<sup>15</sup>

The European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) has reviewed the available research until 2023 and concluded that the stocking density, i.e. crowding, needs to be reduced to a maximum of 11 kilograms per square meter and that more active and healthier breeds need to be used instead of Franken chickens.<sup>16</sup> This is to eliminate the risk of footpad dermatitis and improve the welfare of the chickens.

## SUGGESTED SOLUTIONS

1. Reduce the stocking density to 11 kilograms per square meter by 2030, with a transition period where 30 kilograms per square meter will be a new minimum level from 2026.
2. Prohibit breeding for rapid growth and promote breeding of healthier breeds of chickens.

## Crammed cages

The loading of chickens for transport to the slaughterhouse is done by stressed people lifting the chickens upside down by their legs, or by large machines "sweeping up" the chickens on conveyor belts that lead down to transport cages.<sup>17</sup> The most common in Sweden is mechanical loading by machines. Transport cages, or crates, are made of plastic – specially made to be stackable on top of each other and easy to clean. There is no specific transport cages made for Swedish conditions; they look about the same in large parts of the world. The floor is usually plastic grates, so that feces do not accumulate with the chickens.<sup>18</sup> Franken chickens that have reached a slaughter weight of two kilograms are allowed to be transported in **320 square centimeters of space per individual**.<sup>19</sup> **This is about half an A4 sheet. See the red dotted line.** On that surface, they can't move or stretch – and if they were to try, they risk injuring themselves. The same measurements apply throughout the EU.<sup>20</sup> According to the Swedish Board of Agriculture's regulations, the height must be adapted to the species of animal, but only so that the chickens can sit and lie down. This means that the chickens normally do not have the opportunity to stand up in the transport cages. The time for transport and loading may be a maximum of 12 hours if the transport takes place at night.<sup>21</sup>

Even though the legislation is already so restrictive on the comfort of chickens, it happens at least once a year that chickens are crammed together more than is allowed in the transport cages. This is called overcrowding in animal welfare inspections and means that the chickens cannot lie down. They are held up by each other's bodies and the walls of the cage.

In a proposal for new transport legislation, the European Commission proposes an increase to 460 square centimeters per individual for chickens weighing two kilograms.<sup>22</sup>

It also clarifies the requirement that chickens must be able to sit up normally without hitting their comb or head. This is in line with EFSA's recommendations from 2022.<sup>23</sup> Project 1882 believes that it is of great importance that the EU legislation is updated, and that Sweden begins to implement new legislation as soon as possible.

## SUGGESTED SOLUTIONS

1. Update national transport legislation to achieve the minimum level in the European Commission's proposal as soon as possible.
2. Promote the update to more progressive EU legislation on the protection of animals during transport.

## Crush injuries and wounds

When the chickens are loaded into the transport cages and the crates are closed, there is always a risk that the feathered skin, wings or heads of chickens will be trapped. If left undetected, it can mean that the chickens are stuck for the entire journey time, up to 12 hours<sup>24</sup>, if they don't die on the way. When heads are trapped, the chickens often slowly suffocate to death. On three different occasions since 2021, however, individual chickens have been found alive with their heads crushed when the transport truck arrived at Swedish slaughterhouses. Those chickens have been so battered and injured that they have been euthanized before slaughter.

When the wings are trapped, the chickens risk fractures or other pain caused by skin damage, as well as being stressed by being stuck. These chickens usually survive the entire transport time, unless they die of another cause, and are usually euthanized if discovered before slaughter.

On several occasions, severe wounds where the muscle was exposed have also been reported in Project 1882's investigation. In one case, it was so bad that the chicken had its intestines hanging outside its body. That chicken was still alive after the stress of transportation, despite the severe injury.

Crushing injuries and wounds are the most common animal welfare breach in number of control reports that Project 1882 received during the years the investigation has been carried out. Crushing occurs frequently and at all the large chicken factory farms, but it affects relatively few individuals in comparison to footpad dermatitis and high mortality. There are no tendencies that the problem has been remedied through the controls and training programs that Svensk Fågel claims to have carried out. They say that the transport cages are not optimal for the purpose of transporting chickens on a large scale to slaughter but have also not initiated a change in the design of the cages.<sup>25</sup>

Project 1882 believes that there must always be time for control before transport begins and that it is beneath all criticism that animals are harmed in this way. Pre-transport checks should already take place for the farmers to comply with animal welfare legislation, as no sick or injured animals may be transported and must be detected before transport starts.<sup>26</sup>

According to EFSA, the most important ways to prevent injuries are increased human presence, adapted speed for loading, and ensuring that the transport cages are sufficiently large.<sup>27</sup> The solutions are thus partly the same as for remedying cramped transport cages.

## SUGGESTED SOLUTIONS

1. Demand control at individual level when loading chickens and thus slower loading speed.
2. Update national transport legislation to achieve the minimum level in the European Commission's proposal as soon as possible.
3. Promote the update to more progressive EU legislation on the protection of animals during transport.

## Hunger and thirst

No chicks are given food or water during the transport period, and usually the food is taken from them at the farm – up to 12 hours before slaughter begins.<sup>28</sup> This should be put in relation to the fact that Franken chickens at the age of six weeks like to eat at least twice an hour, if they can.<sup>29</sup> They thus miss about 20 eating opportunities during long transport times.

The reason why the chickens are forced to be without feed for so long is mainly practical reasons. Loading of the chickens by machine can only take place if the water and feed troughs are moved away. The fact that the chickens are not fed is also due to food hygiene for humans, as intestinal bacteria such as campylobacter are more likely to spill onto the meat if there is feces in the intestinal system of the dead chickens.<sup>30</sup> There may be a small welfare benefit for the chickens if it means that they do not have to pass feces during transport – as the transport cages are stacked on top of each other and have a permeable mesh floor.<sup>31</sup> But it could be more appropriately remedied with better transport cages, than with the present hunger and thirst.

According to a scientific summary of the state of research, chickens probably begin to experience dehydration and thirst after just six hours. In adverse climatic conditions, the combination of thirst and heat can greatly increase mortality during transport.<sup>32</sup> All surviving chickens are therefore very likely to be both thirsty and hungry when they arrive at the slaughterhouse and are killed, unless they have been transported for less than six hours.<sup>33</sup>

The system is also very fragile. If there are delays due to traffic accidents, queues or disruptions in the slaughter process – downtime – it is very likely that the chickens will be without feed and water for more hours than the already long allowed period of 12 hours. This happened, for example, in 2023 at Torsåsens Fågelprodukter's slaughterhouse (Guldfågeln, p. 13 ). On each such occasion, thousands of individuals are affected by increased hunger and thirst. To solve the problem, these chickens are slaughtered first, as there is currently no possibility of giving them food or water at the slaughterhouse.

## SUGGESTED SOLUTIONS

1. Reduce the maximum transport time for the transport of birds to four hours.
2. Prohibit the possibility of removing food and water more than an hour before loading for transport.
3. Introduce requirements for the slaughterhouses to be able to provide the chickens with water and feed if needed.

## High mortality

Around 150,000 Franken chickens die in connection with transport in Sweden each year, which is more prevalent than for any other animal species.<sup>34</sup> Franken chickens have a significantly higher risk of dying both at the breeding facility and during transport, than healthier chicken breeds. This is both because they get sick more often and because they are more sensitive to stress.<sup>35</sup> Another factor that increases mortality is that it is allowed to transport chickens for longer periods of time than other animal species without food and water, in transport cages that are so cramped that they cannot stand up. The large number of birds secretes moisture and heat, which leads to a very muggy and hot environment that is at its worst during the summer. If it's cold outside, it happens that they freeze to death. Many also die from injuries sustained during loading or transport. According to EFSA, mechanical ventilation is needed in the transport vehicle, and a transport time of no more than four hours is recommended to reduce the risk of death.<sup>36, 37</sup>

In the case of other animal species, the health of each individual animal must be checked to see if they can cope with a transport – before the transportation. But the large scale of the chicken industry has made it practically impossible. Today, the authorities accept mortality where up to one percent of the chickens have died in connection with transport before arrival at the slaughterhouse,<sup>38</sup> even though it can be hundreds of chickens per transport occasion and hundreds of thousands per year. The deaths reported in the investigation made by Project 1882 are thus only what is seen as an "abnormally high" proportion of deaths. In Germany and the Netherlands, the mortality rate is reported as high if it is above 0.5 percent. EFSA recommends that the reporting limit should be lowered to 0.1 percent throughout the EU.<sup>39</sup> Lowering the limit would be a first step in starting to

see chickens as individuals, although it could increase the proportion of animal welfare breaches if the risk factors for high mortality are not addressed at the same time.

The chickens that have not died during transport may also have major injuries or disease discovered after they are slaughtered. Their bodies are then "discarded" at the slaughterhouse. According to a Norwegian study, the "discarding" of chickens was much more common before switching to a healthier breed. This is because Frankenchickens of the hybrid Ross 308 more often had signs of ascites – a painful disease that leads to fluid in the abdominal cavity – and other damage to the muscles. Such damage is classified as unappetizing or risky to eat for humans and is therefore cleared away by Swedish National Food Agency inspectors.<sup>40</sup>

Every year, more than three million chicken carcasses are thrown away at Swedish slaughterhouses, which is more than the total number of pigs slaughtered per year in Sweden.<sup>41</sup>

The problem of high mortality is serious and complex, but there are measures that make a big difference. It also leads to reduced waste of food and lives when chickens survive to become what they were bred for and not be thrown away because of the wrong timing of their death, illness or injury.

## SUGGESTED SOLUTIONS

1. Prohibit breeding for rapid growth and promote the breeding of healthier breeds of chickens.
2. Reduce the maximum limit for transport time when transporting birds to four hours.
3. Lower the reporting limit to 0.1 percent deaths on arrival at the slaughterhouse.

## Live scalding

The animal welfare problem at the chicken slaughterhouses that has resulted in the most media headlines in recent years has probably been live scalding.<sup>42-44</sup> At all inspected slaughterhouses, chickens have been discovered where their throat has not been cut correctly for bleeding. The chickens have then been discovered after scalding, which means that they were probably alive before they were further taken in the slaughter process – and possibly inadequately stunned. Being cut and bled when conscious or scalded alive causes stress, fear and pain in chickens.<sup>45</sup>

In Sweden and the EU, stunning is normally done with electrified water baths where the chickens are hung upside down when conscious in leg shackles, or with carbon dioxide stunning in the transport crates. After stunning, bleeding should take place to ensure the

death of the chicks. This is normally done on an assembly line with rotating blades that cut open the chickens' throats, before scalding takes place in hot water.<sup>46</sup>

A previous control project on animal welfare at slaughter in Sweden only showed problems with scalding during electric bath stunning and not if gas stunning was used as a method. Approximately 150 chickens received inadequate stunning out of the total number of stunning occasions that were checked in 2010.<sup>47</sup> However, even with gas stunning, there is a risk that chickens will be scalded alive, as has been the case at Kronfågel's slaughterhouse on several occasions in recent years. The difference is that the chickens had better stunning and may have been unconscious during scalding because the stunning method lasts longer than electric stunning. At the same time, the slaughter rate is so high in slaughterhouses with carbon dioxide stunning, several chickens are handled every second,<sup>48</sup> that it becomes difficult to control each chicken. To reduce the risk of scalding when the chickens are conscious or alive, stunning needs to be done correctly, by individual handling or by gas stunning with individual monitoring and with gradual increase in gas concentration. All these measures have the potential to reduce the stress and suffering of chickens at the moment of death,<sup>49</sup> although death itself is something that will always involve some stress and suffering. At the very least, it is of great importance that the death of each chicken is checked before they are scalded.<sup>50</sup>

## SUGGESTED SOLUTIONS

1. Set an end date for the use of electric bath stunning and promote the improvement of other stunning methods, preferably by 2027.
2. Demand that the appropriate stunning of each chicken should be checked before scalding, and that stunning and bleeding should be able to take place separate for individual chickens at each slaughterhouse.



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## High confidentiality

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In Sweden, it has previously been easy to obtain complete information in official documents, such as reports from animal welfare inspections. Reports relating to the supervision of legislation are considered public in the Swedish Public Access to Information and Secrecy Act (offentlighets- och sekretesslagen), as well as the Swedish Public Access to Information and Secrecy Ordinance (offentlighets- och sekretessförordningen).<sup>51</sup> Many of the inspection reports that Project 1882 has requested have nevertheless had a high level of confidentiality, and the authorities' handling of the cases has shifted from classifying which company caused the animal welfare breach (2021–2023), to masking what the animals have been subjected to (in 2024). The same type of change in confidentiality management has taken place when it comes to photos taken during animal welfare inspections. In previous years, Djurens Rätt received the images in their entirety, while they are now masked with large black squares. At the same time, the authorities refer to the same type of legislation, which has not been changed for such confidentiality management during the period. There are many indications that a new joint directive for the county administrative boards has had an impact, which will be described in more detail in the next section. However, there may still be differences between different administrators at the same authority. See Figure 5–7.

Current handling of public access and confidentiality at the Swedish National Food Agency and the county administrative boards prevent an independent control of the authorities' work and make it difficult for non-profit organizations and the media to reveal irregularities at the companies where animal welfare inspections take place. It must be reasonable to ensure that the Swedish Animal Welfare Act (djurskyddslagen) is complied with by external actors by disclosing information from animal welfare inspections.

It is possible to appeal the authorities' decisions on the secrecy of public documents, but the experience of Project 1882 has shown that it has rather cemented the decisions to classify animal welfare breaches as confidential. Project 1882 believes that the increased secrecy is bad for animals, consumers and for society's trust in the judicial system.

<b>Beskrivning</b>	Dnr: 14668/2022-S
Vid levandedjurbesiktning av fåglar från [REDACTED] den 2022-11-23 upptäcktes av officiell veterinär 1 fågel som fått vingen klämd i en transportbehållare. Företaget informerades och fågeln lossades omedelbart.	
Länsstyrelsen informeras per rutin om händelserna som bedöms ha inträffat vid lastning av fåglarna hemma på gården.	

Figure 5. An extract from an inspection report from the Swedish National Food Agency 2022, requested in May 2023. It is confidential which farm the chickens come from and who transported the chickens. It is clear what the chicken has been subjected to, wing crushing.



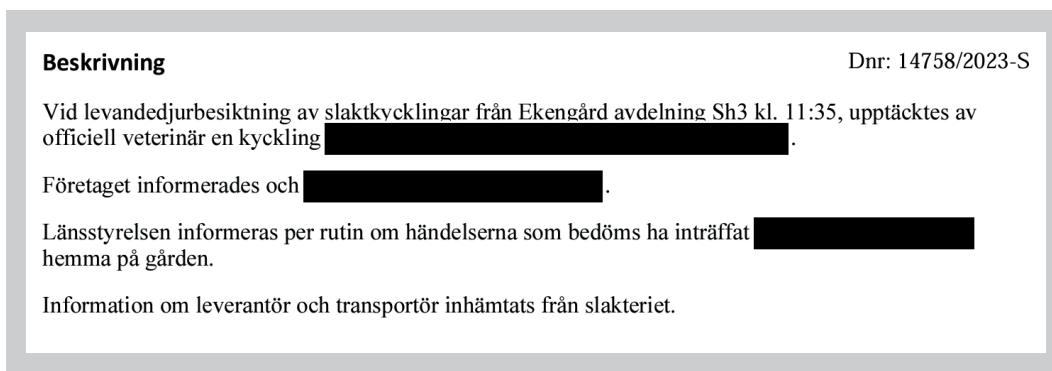


Figure 6. An extract from an inspection report from the Swedish National Food Agency 2023, requested April 2024. It is clear which farm and from which building the chicken was from, but not what type of violation that has been discovered.

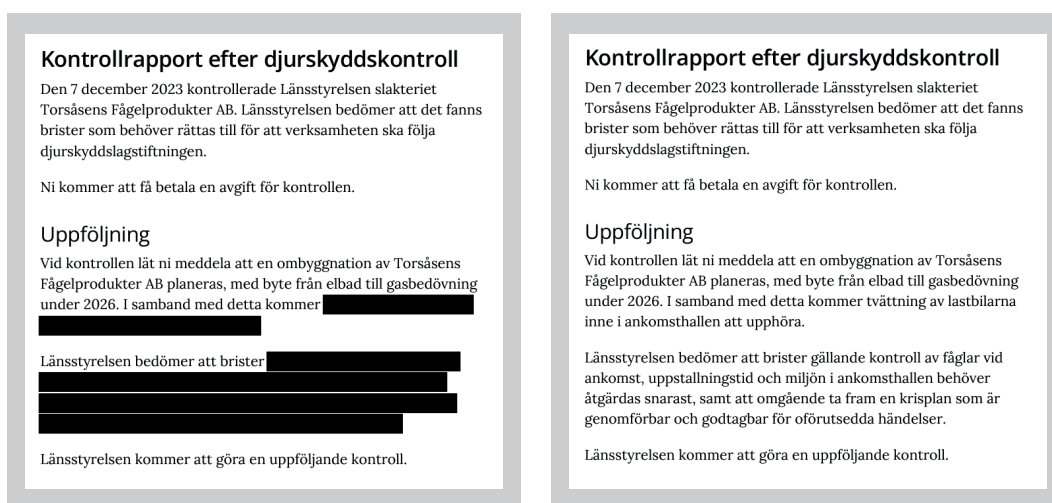


Figure 6. An extract from an inspection report from the Swedish National Food Agency 2023, requested April 2024. It is clear which farm and from which building the chicken was from, but not what type of violation that has been discovered.

## More about the law

**"Pursuant to Chapter 30, Section 23 of the Swedish Public Access to Information and Secrecy Act (2009:400) and Section 9 of the Swedish Public Access to Information and Secrecy Ordinance (2009:641) and p. 30 of the appendix to the Ordinance, the County Administrative Board has removed information relating to business and operating conditions."**

– County Administrative Board of Södermanland, 2023

The experience of Project 1882 shows that in recent years, the authorities have increasingly interpreted animal welfare breaches as information that can harm companies if they are disclosed to the public. This shows that animal welfare is important and that companies that treat animals badly risk getting into trouble, but such interpretations of confidentiality reduce transparency in the food industry. According to the Swedish National Food Agency 2024, documents containing information about animal welfare are to be equated

with individuals' business and operating relationships that are confidential, but only if the disclosure of the information can lead to harm to the companies concerned.<sup>52</sup> Such wording in the legislation means that animal welfare breaches are actually covered by very weak confidentiality, where there should actually be precedence over publicity and openness. Only one change has been made to the relevant chapter of the Public Access to Information and Secrecy Act since 2021, but this has not affected the authorities' handling of general matters relating to animal welfare control as the amendment concerns unfair trading practices.<sup>53</sup> The annex to the Ordinance has been amended several times, but not in the section that concerns what is confidential in animal welfare control. According to an interview in the magazine *Syre*, it is instead a new directive of its own that has been developed by the county administrative boards in 2022. The directive has caused changes in how the authorities handle public access to information and confidentiality and is based on decisions by the Swedish Administrative Court of Appeal that have made it clear that company names or people's names are not confidential – while the animal welfare breaches should be classified.<sup>54</sup>

Current legislation is thus interpreted by the authorities as that it is the companies' or persons' operating conditions (e.g. breaches in animal welfare) that must be classified, and not information that shows that they are animal keepers. The consequence of the new directive has made it easier for outsiders to obtain personal home addresses of animal keepers, but difficult for the media and democratic organizations to map animal welfare breaches in society. Project 1882 believes that this is the wrong way to go and that a change is needed – both in practice and in legislation.

Regarding Chapter 28 of the Public Access to Information and Secrecy Act (2009:400), there are wordings that show consideration for the public interest in products that can reach consumers and that information on product safety should be disclosed.<sup>55</sup> Just like product safety, animal welfare is of interest to the public and to consumers. In addition to the public interest that animals should be treated in accordance with animal welfare legislation, there are, for example, risks of disease spreading if products from sick animals in the food industry end up with consumers.<sup>56</sup> Such animal welfare breaches that have been discovered during the supervision of animals in the food industry should therefore reasonably be public.

To solve the problem of confidential animal welfare violations and standardize the authorities' handling of confidentiality, more needs to be done than simply referring to the fact that authorities handle the regulations incorrectly. A similar exemption for confidentiality that exists for product safety should be introduced for animal welfare breaches in the Public Access to Information and Secrecy Act. Another option could be to clarify in the regulation that animal welfare breaches cannot be classified as business or operating conditions. This would increase trust in the judiciary system and increase transparency in how animals are treated in the food industry, as well as potentially reducing the risk of animal keepers' home addresses being used incorrectly.

## **SUGGESTED SOLUTIONS**

1. Clarify for authorities that confidentiality for animal welfare conditions should be interpreted restrictively as there is weak confidentiality for operating conditions in current legislation.
2. Clarify the legislation by making exceptions from confidentiality in animal welfare cases that are of interest to consumers.



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## Conclusion

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In this report, Project 1882 has shown that animal welfare breaches have been both extensive and serious at Sweden's chicken slaughterhouses in recent years. Several policy measures are needed to address the problems. Among other things, stricter requirements are needed regarding the breeding of chickens and how they may be kept at the breeding facilities. In addition, conditions in connection with transport and the stunning methods at slaughter need to be improved to reduce the risk of animal welfare violations. Project 1882 also wants food companies to implement animal welfare policies in line with the European Chicken Commitment. Part of the change needs to be that both companies and authorities become more transparent about the number of animal welfare inspections and which animal welfare breaches are discovered, to further clarify how chickens – and other animals – are treated in the food industry. This needs to change immediately through a change in the law so that we can get closer to a country where the Animal Welfare Act protects every individual animal.

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### **Author and translation:**

The report was written in 2024 and 2025 by Anna Harenius, animal welfare specialist at Project 1882 in Sweden. The translation from Swedish to English was made by volunteers in March 2025.

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### **About Project 1882:**

Project 1882 works globally to make a difference for the animals that are the most exploited and suffer the worst. We have been a driving animal advocacy organization in Sweden and beyond since 1882.

Project 1882 strives for a world where animals are respected as sentient beings with the right to their own lives.

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