



Frequently Asked Questions about Dog and Cat Meat

Where is dog and cat meat eaten?

Dog and cat meat is consumed in several regions of the world, including parts of Europe, Russia, Africa and Latin America. However, it is most widespread in Asia, where the welfare concern is greatest due to the high numbers of dogs and cats being taken from the streets, transported long distances and brutally slaughtered. In South Korea, dogs are also intensively farmed for the meat trade, with some farms housing hundreds of dogs.

An estimated 20 million dogs are consumed each year in China (although some believe the figure to be far greater), and 1.5 to 2 million in South Korea. An estimated 5 million dogs are killed annually in Vietnam, of which a large proportion are sourced from other countries, namely Thailand, Laos and Cambodia, where conservative estimates suggest that over 80,000 dogs are exported live each year. The trade is also prevalent in other countries across the region such as in the Philippines where over 500,000 dogs are slaughtered for their meat every year, despite there being a ban in place since 1998. The figures are also high for cats slaughtered for their meat - it is estimated that each year 100,000 and 4 million cats are killed and eaten in South Korea and China respectively. It is important to note that accurate figures for all these countries are impossible to obtain, as the dog and cat meat trades are either illegal or operate largely unregulated wherever they exist.

Where does dog and cat meat come from?

In many countries where dog and cat meat are popular, the animals are often sourced from the streets either through catching strays or by stealing pets. Some owners may sell their pets directly to meat vendors, but in other cases middle men, whose job it is to steal cats and dogs, will sell them on to traders and restaurant owners. In South Korea and China, many dogs are supplied in this way, but the majority are reared on large intensive farms, some of which house over 1,000 dogs.



Every year on these farms, millions of dogs are forced to endure terrible conditions and their basic needs are often ignored, not receiving adequate food, water and veterinary care, or a clean place to sleep each day. The lack of suitable provisions for the dogs is so that the farmers can gain maximum profit. Numerous investigations into the industry have documented the cruel and pitiful conditions under which millions of dogs are farmed each year. As a result of the cramped, unhygienic and stressful environment in which the dogs are kept, physical disease and mental distress are profoundly evident, with many dogs showing obvious signs of sickness, depression, aggression, and abnormal behaviours.

After being taken from the street or farmed, the dogs and cats are often transported long distances, sometimes on journeys lasting days. During transport, dogs and cats are usually tightly packed into cages where they are unable to stand up or turn around properly. They are often sick and injured, and are not provided with any food or water on the journey. Many animals die from suffocation, dehydration or heatstroke long before they reach their destination.



Dogs caged for transport, China
Copyright: Animals Asia Foundation

Their journey ends at a slaughterhouse, market or restaurant, where they are often kept alive until purchased. The method by which dogs and cats are slaughtered varies between countries, provinces, slaughterhouses and restaurants. For example, in South Korea the only legal method for slaughtering a dog or cat is by electrocution, but hanging is still routinely practiced by some. In China and Vietnam, dogs and cats are often stunned by being beaten with a metal pipe and then bled out from a cut to the throat or groin, hanged, or thrown conscious into large drums of boiling water. In some cases the treatment of the animal prior to slaughter is deliberately cruel, because of the misguided belief that torturing a dog or cat prior to death results in better tasting, adrenaline-rich meat.



Dogs for sale in Moran Market, Gyeonggi province, South Korea (2011)
Copyright: WSPA

Can dog and cat meat ever be produced humanely?

Dog and cat meat production has evolved rapidly from traditional small-scale household businesses, where a small number of animals were slaughtered, to billion-dollar industries. The commercialisation of dog and cat meat has resulted in significant animal welfare concerns, and it is clear from evidence gathered that each year the millions of dogs and cats involved in this trade every year suffer throughout each stage from sourcing, to transport, sale and slaughter.

The dog farming that currently takes place in Asian countries shows that dogs and cats cannot be humanely farmed. Dogs are inherently unsuitable to be farmed for commercial meat production because of their behavioural and physical needs. If a commercial farm met even the dogs' most basic needs, including the provision of adequate food, water, living conditions and veterinary treatment, it would not be commercially viable, as the price of the dog meat product could not sustain such an expensive specialist production system. The same would be true if cat farming were to be introduced.

No country in the world has developed a humane way of supplying dogs and cats for human consumption, and the methods of slaughter cause immense suffering for the animals. In addition, as no country has explicitly legalised the dog and cat meat industries, wherever its consumption is popular, it is either illegal or takes place without specific regulation.



Is dog and cat meat part of some 'cultures'?

Dog and cat meat is defended by some as being a traditional part of 'culture' in some countries, but while consumption of the meat might have a long history in some places, culture or tradition can never be an excuse for cruelty.

In many countries, such as China and the Philippines, where dog meat was once consumed as part of occasional cultural or religious events, its production has proliferated for commercial rather than cultural reasons, creating a billion-dollar industry.

Today, in response to extensive international condemnation, the practice of eating dog and cat meat has become, far more than it ever was, a symbol of national pride. This is particularly evident in South Korea where dog meat has taken on this mantle even though there is little consensus about the cultural relevance or origin of eating dog meat, with some arguing that its consumption has only taken place in the country for a few generations, having become a source of food in the 1950's during the Korean War when there were national food shortages.

As our understanding of animal sentience continues to grow, it is no longer possible to ignore welfare in the name of culture, or acceptable to use tradition as an excuse for or to justify cruelty and suffering. Cultures are constantly evolving and adapting, and so what is traditional changes too. Any change that respects welfare and prevents harm to a living being should be embraced.

Why do some people say dog and cat meat have health benefits?

Dog and cat meat is often consumed for its perceived health benefits. For example, in China, dog bone is believed to have anti-inflammatory properties, and is sometimes used as an alternative to tiger bone to treat rheumatism; additionally, dog penis and testes are believed to increase virility and cure impotence. A number of classical medical texts recommend dog meat to fortify the spirit and aid in recovery from illness, and it is still common today for doctors in some countries to recommend dog meat to patients who have undergone surgery because of its perceived curative effects. Delicacies of cat include paws, eyes, stomach and testicles. Cat meat is often eaten as an aphrodisiac, or to help cure arthritis. In South Korea a liquid or 'juice' made from cats or dogs is sometimes consumed as a 'tonic' for its claimed health properties.



In China, cat and dog meat is most popular during the winter months as it is believed to have 'warming effects'. In contrast, in South Korea dog meat is considered to have 'cooling effects', and is more commonly consumed during the summer months, particularly during the *boknal* or bok days - the three hottest days of the summer - when dog meat soup (*boshintang*) is favoured.

However, there is no scientific evidence to support any of these claims, and recent research into rheumatoid arthritis has proven that cat meat is not effective in the treatment of this condition.

Are there human health risks associated with dog and cat meat?

Yes. Over recent years, there has been growing awareness of, and concern for, human health risks which are linked to all stages of the dog meat industry. Research shows that sourcing, farming, transporting, slaughtering and consumption of dogs can assist in the transmission of cholera, trichinellosis and rabies.

It was in recognition of the threats the dog meat industry posed to the Philippines' goal of eliminating rabies by 2020, that the national Anti-Rabies Act of 2007 was introduced to reinforce the existing 1998 Animal Welfare Act, prohibiting the trade of dogs for meat and strengthening penalties.

In addition, researchers now believe that severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) began its human-to-human transition in live animal markets in China, where cages piled high with traditionally farmed animals and cats and dogs are crammed into the same market space alongside wild species, such as civet cats, snakes, barking deer and many others.



Have any countries banned dog and cat meat?

Opposition to the production and consumption of dog and cat meat has become increasingly vocal as a result of mounting national and international concerns for animal welfare and the human health risks associated with the industries. Consequently, a number of countries, where dog and cat meat was once popular, have banned the slaughtering and the sale of dogs and cats for human consumption, including Hong Kong, Taiwan, and the Philippines. In addition, countries such as Germany and Switzerland have banned the commercial production of dog meat.



What is being done to tackle the issue?

The dog and cat meat trade causes intense cruelty and is one of the most concerning companion animal welfare issues, so it is crucial to prevent any further expansion of the industries and encourage countries to ban the production and consumption of all dog and cat meat products.

Animal protection groups are working hard around the world to raise public and government awareness of the profound cruelty and suffering inherent in the dog and cat meat trade, and to highlight the significant risks the industries pose to human health.

Are people's attitudes changing?

Opinion polls conducted in China and South Korea suggest that as pet ownership rapidly rises and public understanding of and concern for animal welfare increases, the consumption of dogs and cats is reducing in popularity, especially among the younger generation.

Around the world, people are standing up against the dog and cat meat industries. In China, for example, trucks stacked high with hundreds of dogs and cats destined for restaurants are

frequently intercepted by concerned members of the public. Dog meat festivals have recently been cancelled in both China and South Korea due to public protest - in 2011, an annual dog meat festival in Jinhua, China, which has been held since 1389, was cancelled following tens of thousands of letters of protest; and in South Korea a dog meat festival scheduled for the 1st July 2011 in Seongnam, home to South Korea's largest dog meat market, was cancelled following huge public opposition.

The debate worldwide has begun, and those who care about the welfare of animals and are committed to working for positive change in their own country are becoming ever more vocal.

How can I help?

Culture or tradition can never be an excuse for animal cruelty. If you care about animals, never be tempted to try dog or cat meat - wherever it is available, it will always be the product of immense suffering. Whilst some countries have not yet banned dog and cat meat, if you do see the meat for sale in countries where the industries are illegal, such as Hong Kong, the Philippines and Taiwan, please report this to a local animal protection organisation. Also, if you want to see an end to the production of dog and cat meat around the world, please consider donating to a charity that is campaigning to make this a reality.



Some charities working on the issue include:

Change For Animals Foundation (<http://www.changeforanimals.org>)

Animals Asia Foundation (<http://www.animalsasia.org/>)

Network for Animals (<http://www.networkforanimals.org/>)

Humane Society International (www.hsi.org)

Coexistence of Animal Rights on Earth (<http://www.careanimalrights.org>)

Soi Dogs Foundation (<https://www.soidog.org>)

Trade of Shame (<http://www.tradeofshame.org>)