

My name is Frank Reese and I'm a poultry farmer. It's what I've given my whole life to. I don't know where that comes from. I went to a little one-room country school. Mother said one of the first things I wrote was a story titled "Me and My Turkeys."

I just always loved the beauty of them, the majesticness. I like how they strut. I don't know. I don't know how to explain it. I just love their feather patterns. I've always loved the personality of them. They're so curious, so playful, so friendly and full of life.

I can sit in the house at night, and I can hear them, and I can tell if they're in trouble or not. Having been around turkeys for almost sixty years, I know their vocabulary. I know the sound they make if it's just two turkeys fighting or if there's a possum in the barn. There's the sound they make when they're petrified and the sound they make when they're excited over something new. The mother turkey is amazing to listen to. She has a tremendous vocal range when she's speaking to her babies. And the little babies understand. She can tell them, "Run and jump and hide under me," or "Move from here to here." Turkeys know what's going on and can communicate it, in their world, in their language. I'm not trying to give them human characteristics, 'cause they're not humans, they're turkeys. I'm only telling you what they are.

A lot of people slow down when they pass my farm. Get a lot of schools and churches and 4-H kids. I get kids asking me how a turkey got in my trees or on my roof I tell 'em, "He flew there!" And they don't believe me! Turkeys used to be raised out on fields like this by the millions in America. This kind of turkey is what everybody had on their farms for hundreds of years, and what everybody ate. And now mine are the only ones left, and I'm the only one doing it this way.

Not a single turkey you can buy in a supermarket could walk normally, much less jump or fly. Did you know that? They can't even have sex. Not the antibiotic-free, or organic, or free-range, or anything. They all have the same foolish genetics, and their bodies won't allow for it anymore. Every turkey sold in every store and served in every restaurant was the product of artificial insemination. If it were only for efficiency, that would be one thing, but these animals literally can't reproduce naturally. Tell me what could be sustainable about that?

These guys here, cold weather, snow, ice doesn't hurt 'em. With the modern industrial turkey it would be a mess. They couldn't survive. My guys could maneuver through a foot of snow without any trouble. And my turkeys all have their toenails; they all have their wings and beaks; nothing's been cut off; nothing's been

destroyed. We don't vaccinate, don't feed antibiotics. No need to. Our birds exercise all day. And because their genes haven't been messed with, they have naturally strong immune systems. We never lose birds. If you can find a healthier flock, anywhere in the world, you take me to it and then I'll believe you. What the industry figured out -- and this was the real revolution -- is that you don't need healthy animals to make a profit. Sick animals are more profitable. The animals have paid the price for our desire to have everything available at all times for very little money.

We never needed biosecurity before. Look at my farm. Anyone who wants to can visit, and I wouldn't have a second thought about taking my animals to shows and fairs. I always tell people to visit an industrial turkey farm. You may not even have to go into the building. You'll smell it before you get there. But people don't want to hear those things. They don't want to hear that these big turkey factories have incinerators to burn all the turkeys that die every day. They don't care to hear that when the industry sends turkeys off to be processed, it knows and accepts that it's gonna lose 10 to 15 percent of them in transport, the DOAs at the plant. You know my DOA rate this Thanksgiving? Zero. But these are just numbers, not anything anyone gets excited about. It's all about nickels and dimes. So 15 percent of the turkeys suffocate. Throw them in the incinerator.

Why are entire flocks of industrial birds dying at once? And what about the people eating those birds? Just the other day, one of the local pediatricians was telling me he's seeing all kinds of illnesses that he never used to see. Not only juvenile diabetes, but inflammatory and autoimmune diseases that a lot of the docs don't even know what to call. And girls are going through puberty much earlier, and kids are allergic to just about everything, and asthma is out of control. Everyone knows it's our food. We're messing with the genes of these animals and then feeding them growth hormones and all kinds of drugs that we really don't know enough about. And then we're eating them. Kids today are the first generation to grow up on this stuff and we're making a science experiment out of them. Isn't it strange how upset people get about a few dozen baseball players taking growth hormones, when we're doing what we're doing to our food animals and feeding them to our children?

People are so removed from food animals now. When I grew up, the animals were taken care of first. You did chores before you ate breakfast. We were told that if we didn't take care of the animals, we weren't going to eat. We never went on vacations. Somebody always had to be here. I remember we had day trips, but we always hated them because if we didn't get home before dark, we knew we'd be out in the pasture trying to get the cows in, and we'd be milking cows in the dark. It had to be done no

matter what. If you don't want that responsibility, don't become a farmer. Because that's what it takes to do it right. And if you can't do it right, don't do it. It's that simple. And I'll tell you another thing: if consumers don't want to pay the farmer to do it right, they shouldn't eat meat.

People care about these things. And I don't mean rich city people. Most of the folks who buy my turkeys are not rich by any means; they're struggling on fixed incomes. But they're willing to pay more for the sake of what they believe in. They're willing to pay the real price. And to those who say it's just too much to pay for a turkey, I always say to them, "Don't eat turkey. "It's possible you can't afford to care, but it's certain you can't afford not to care.

Everyone's saying buy fresh, buy local. It's a sham. It's all the same kind of bird, and the suffering is in their genes. When the mass-produced turkey of today was designed, they killed thousands of turkeys in their experiments. Should it be shorter legs or shorter keel bone? Should it be like this or like this? In nature, sometimes human babies are born with deformities. But you don't aim to reproduce that generation after generation. But that's what they did with turkeys.

Michael Pollan wrote about Polyface Farm in *The Omnivore's Dilemma* like it was something great, but that farm is horrible. It's a joke. Joel Salatin is doing industrial birds. Call him up and ask him. So he puts them on pasture. It makes no difference. It's like putting a broken-down Honda on the Autobahn and saying it's a Porsche. KFC chickens are almost always killed in thirty-nine days. They're babies. That's how rapidly they're grown. Salatin's organic free-range chicken is killed in forty-two days. 'Cause it's still the same chicken. It can't be allowed to live any longer because its genetics are so screwed up. Stop and think about that: a bird that you simply can't let live out of its adolescence. So maybe he'll just say he's doing as much right as he can, but it's too expensive to raise healthy birds. Well, I'm sorry if I can't pat him on the back and tell him what a good guy he is. These aren't things, they're animals, so we shouldn't be talking about good enough. Either do it right or don't do it.

I do it right from beginning to end. Most important, I use the old genetics, the birds that were raised a hundred years ago. Do they grow slower? Yes. Do I have to feed them more? Yes. But you look at them and tell me if they're healthy.

I don't allow baby turkeys to be shipped through the mail. Lots of people don't care that half their turkeys are going to die under the stress of going through the mail, or that those that do live are going to be five pounds lighter in the end than those that you give food and water to immediately. But I care. All my animals get as much pasture as they want, and I never mutilate or drug them. I don't manipulate lighting or starve them to cycle unnaturally. I don't allow my turkeys to be moved if it's too cold or too hot. And I have them transported in the night, so they'll be calmer. I only allow so many turkeys on a truck, even though I could pack many, many more in. My turkeys are always carried upright, never hung by their feet, even if that means it takes much longer.

At our processing plant they have to slow everything down. I pay them twice as much to do it half as fast. They have to get the turkeys off the trailers safely. No broken bones and no unnecessary stress. Everything is done by hand and carefully. It's done right every time. The turkeys are stunned before they're shackled. Normally they're hung live and dragged through an electrical bath, but we don't do that. We do one at a time. It's a person doing it, handheld. When they do it one by one, they do it well. My big fear is having live animals put in the boiling water. My sister worked at a large poultry plant. She needed the money. Two weeks, and that was all she could take. This was years and years ago, and she's still talking about the horrors she saw there.

People care about animals. I believe that. They just don't want to know or to pay. A fourth of all chickens have stress fractures. It's wrong. They're packed body to body, and can't escape their waste, and never see the sun. Their nails grow around the bars of their cages. It's wrong. They feel their slaughters. It's wrong, and people know it's wrong. They don't have to be convinced. They just have to act differently. I'm not better than anyone, and I'm not trying to convince people to live by my standards of what's right. I'm trying to convince them to live by their own.

My mother was part Indian. I still have that thing where the Indians apologize. In the fall, while other people are giving thanks, I find myself apologizing. I hate seeing them on the truck, waiting to be taken to slaughter. They're looking back at me, saying, "Get me off of here." Killing is ... it's very ... Sometimes I justify it in my mind that I can at least make it as good as possible for the animals in my custody. It's like ... they look at me and I tell them, "Please forgive me." I can't help it I personalize it. Animals are hard. Tonight I'll go out and make everybody that jumped the fence come back in. These turkeys are used to me, they know me, and when I go out there, they'll come running, and I'll open the gate and they'll come in. But at the same time, I put thousands on trucks and send them off to slaughter.

People focus on that last second of death. I want them to focus on the entire life of the animal. If I had to choose between knowing that my throat was going to be slit at the end, which might last three minutes, but I've had to live for six weeks in pain, I'd probably ask for that slit throat six weeks earlier. People only see the killing. They say, "What's the big deal if the animal can't walk or move, 'cause it's just gonna get killed anyway?" If it was your child, do you want your child to suffer three years, three months, three weeks, three hours, three minutes? A turkey chick isn't a human baby, but it suffers. I've never met anyone in the industry -- manager, vet, worker, anyone -- who doubts that they feel pain. So how much suffering is acceptable? That's what's at the bottom of all of this, and what each person has to ask himself. How much suffering will you tolerate for your food?

My nephew and his wife had a baby, and as soon as it was born they were told it wasn't going to survive. They're very religious. They got to hold her for twenty minutes. For twenty minutes she was alive, and in no pain, and she was part of their life. And they said they would never have traded those twenty minutes. They just thanked the Lord and praised him that she was alive, even if it was only twenty minutes. So how you gonna approach that?