

# THE SOUTH KOREAN DOG MEAT TRADE

ANIMAL WELFARE INSTITUTE



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## FRIEND OR FOOD?

While most Westerners view dogs strictly as companion or working animals and find the practice of raising and slaughtering dogs for food strange and unsettling, a large number of people in South Korea as well as in China, Vietnam, and the Philippines, consume dog meat. What is considered “normal,” of course, is often a matter of cultural perspective—especially when it comes to culinary practices and taboos.

Extreme cruelty, however, cannot be dismissed as merely a matter of cultural norms. The sad fact is that in many places where dog meat is consumed, the dogs raised for food commonly endure a lifetime of abuse and often are slaughtered in a manner that is nightmarish in its brutality. This is especially true in South Korea.



Near Kimje, South Korea, dogs stuffed tightly into a cage await transport to slaughter.



Stacked cages crammed with dogs fill the back of a pickup truck as it carries the dogs to slaughter. Many of these dogs will die from starvation, dehydration, and heat exhaustion before they even reach their final destination.

## CULTURAL FACTORS

Although there is evidence suggesting that dog meat consumption occurred in South Korea over a thousand years ago, the non-profit International Aid for Korean Animals claims that the practice is not one that is deeply embedded into the history and culture of South Korea: “Even during desperate times... the consumption of dog was not a dietary tradition. Like anywhere else, dog was eaten only as a last-ditch resort to avoid starvation. Then sometime in the last century the practice was taken up by a few older men for mythical health benefits regarding virility.”

Younger South Koreans tend to shy away from eating dogs, and the percentage of South Koreans who eat dog meat on a regular basis is believed to be relatively small. Nevertheless, 2 million dogs are purported to be killed for food every year in South Korea, and over 100,000 tons of dog meat is consumed annually. Among those who do consume the meat, consumption increases during South Korea’s scorching hot summers, as there is a belief that eating dog will keep one cool. This is particularly evident during Bok days, the three hottest days of the summer according to the lunar calendar.

Dog meat farms are scattered throughout the countryside, and the industry is estimated to be worth US\$2 billion. The farms primarily raise a type of large, yellow, mixed-breed dog common in the region. The “farmed” yellow mixed-breed dogs are not the only dogs eaten, however—despite claims by some supporters of the industry. Abandoned pets are a common phenomenon in South Korea, and small, purebred dogs fall victim to the dog meat trade, as well, after they are unceremoniously dumped into the streets by owners who have grown tired of them. Such abandoned dogs are picked up by a collector, stuffed into tiny wire cages filled to capacity with other such dogs, and taken to Moran market—the largest dog meat market in the nation—and other smaller markets around the country to be slaughtered.

## LEGAL STATUS

South Korean law is ambiguous on the legality of the dog meat trade and official efforts to reign in the trade have been half-hearted at best. One legal analyst concluded that “Despite the significance of the industry, there is no clear law governing the trade of dog meat. There is neither explicit recognition of dog meat as legitimate food, nor a clear ban on the sale or slaughter of dogs for food.” According to the South Korean non-profit, Korea Animal Rights Advocates (KARA), “It is technically illegal to process dogs like livestock and use dog meat as any kind of food product. However, it is not illegal to breed, or raise, or slaughter dogs for dog meat.”

South Korea’s Animal Protection Act of 2007 expressly prohibits some of the cruel methods used by people in the dog meat trade to handle and slaughter dogs. The law, however, is widely ignored, despite being revised with stronger penalties. With no substantive enforcement action to curb the sale of dog meat, it is available in restaurants throughout the country. In the late 1990s, a government survey estimated that well over 20,000 restaurants—counting those that were unregistered—offered dog meat. A similar number of such restaurants are believed to be in operation today.

## PREMEDITATED TORTURE

Akin to the abysmal manner in which pigs and chickens are raised for meat in factory farms, dogs raised for meat in South Korea endure miserable living conditions. From birth to slaughter, these dogs are kept in cramped, rusty cages stacked on top of each other. The method of slaughter is often extremely—and intentionally—brutal, and the dogs are commonly butchered in full view of the others.

Most horrifically—due to a widely held belief that high adrenaline levels will produce tender meat and increase the supposed health benefits—many dogs who are killed are sadistically made to experience extreme fear and suffering prior to death. Dogs are typically killed via bludgeoning, hanging, or electrocution. Many dogs are hung and then beaten to increase their fear and panic. Some even have a blow torch used on them while they are still alive to remove their hair. At the open-air markets, dogs are electrocuted and their necks are broken—all in plain sight to passers-by.



In this picture, two men hoist a dog up to hang by the neck—a common practice. Often, while hanging, such dogs are beaten with sticks.

## YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE FOR KOREAN DOGS

Many South Korean animal advocates see their nation's hosting of the 2018 Winter Olympics as an opportunity to focus international light on the practice, and in so doing finally bring an end to the deplorable dog meat trade.

Please send letters to the South Korean Ambassador, the President of South Korea, and the Secretary General of the United Nations urging South Korea to stop the killing of dogs for human consumption.

### **Honorable Ambassador Choi Young-jin**

Embassy of the Republic of Korea  
2450 Massachusetts Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20008

### **Her Excellency President Park Geun-Hye**

1 Cheongwadae-ro, Jongno-gu  
Seoul 110-820  
Republic of Korea

### **The Honorable Ban Ki-moon**

Secretary General  
760 United Nations Plaza  
United Nations  
New York, NY 10017



Maggie McElhenry

Lucy Lu, rescued from a shelter in South Korea, was named "Ambassador Dog of Korea" in 2011 by the Korean Animal Protection and Education Society. Now living in Washington, DC, she continues her ambassadorial duties through outreach on Capitol Hill.





AWI's Rosalyn Morrison (far right) spent two years in South Korea, where she advocated for ending the production and sale of dog meat. Here, young South Koreans stop to admire "Ambassador Dog" Lucy Lu in Myeongdong, a central shopping area in Seoul.

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For more information about the dog meat trade and what individuals can do to fight this cruel industry, please visit AWI's website:

<http://awionline.org/dogmeat>

A number of organizations are working within South Korea and beyond to build awareness of the issue and shut down the dog meat trade. Learn about their efforts by visiting the following websites:

**International Aid for Korean Animals**

<http://koreananimals.org>

**Korea Animal Rights Advocates**

<http://animalrightskorea.org>

**Korean Animal Protection and Education Society**

<http://www.kapes.or.kr> (in Korean)



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KARA

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