

# OCTOPUS FACTORY FARMING: A RECIPE FOR DISASTER



## INTRODUCTION

Interest in octopuses has skyrocketed in recent years: the Oscar-winning documentary, *My Octopus Teacher*, highlighted some of the incredible reasons these cephalopods have captivated us, including their intelligence, curiosity, and fascinating ability to change their appearance.

Unfortunately, octopuses have also captured the wrong kind of attention. Wild-caught octopuses have been consumed all over the world, especially in several Mediterranean countries in Europe, as well as in Asia and Mexico. Recently, there has been high demand for octopus in other markets, such as the United States and Japan. As a consequence, octopuses have been under increased pressure, leading to a decrease in wild populations. Growing market demand and rising prices have made food industries eager to farm octopuses in captivity.

The common octopus, *Octopus vulgaris*, is the main species of interest for farming in Europe, with researchers, primarily in Spain, exploring the development of open-ocean net cages and tanks on land. Outside Europe, there are also plans for octopus farming in the United States, Mexico, and Japan. Factory farming practices restrict animals' natural behaviours and lead to untold suffering, regardless of species. Octopuses' exceptional characteristics make them uniquely unsuitable for intensive farming, and this report sets out the main reasons why this should never be allowed to happen.



# 8 REASONS TO STOP OCTOPUS FARMING



## 1 Octopuses are solitary by nature

As naturally solitary animals, octopuses would not fare well in the crowded conditions and high stocking densities that are typical of factory farm systems. This can result in very poor welfare and creates the risk of aggression and territorialism that can lead to cannibalism.

## 2 They are highly inquisitive and intelligent

Octopuses are known for their extraordinary intelligence, and as a result of their natural inquisitiveness and tendency to explore, manipulate and control their environment, they would be easily susceptible to boredom in captivity. The mass production of octopuses is likely to have barren, controlled and sterile environments and, therefore, lack sensory inputs.

## 3 Their carnivorous diets would be unsustainable in a farming environment

We face a global crisis of overfishing. Fish farming is responsible for much of the industrial fishing of our endangered oceans. Approximately 20-25% of all wild-caught fish are used to make fishmeal and oil – feed for carnivorous farmed fish. As octopuses are carnivorous, industry and researchers are currently developing feeds for farmed octopuses based on the use of fishmeal and fish oil. This would place additional unsustainable pressure on wild fish populations – 90% of which are suitable for human consumption (and reduces the amount of food available for species that rely on small fish, like penguins). It also means that octopus farming would contribute to further food security issues in regions such as West Africa, Southeast Asia and South America where the main industrial fishmeal factories are located.

## 4 Little is known about their complex welfare needs and suffering in captivity

Octopus farming is an attempt to farm wild animals who have never been farmed before. It is therefore likely that their welfare needs will not be properly met in farms, and they will suffer as a result.

## 5 They are fragile creatures that are easily injured

Octopuses do not have internal or external skeletons to protect them, and their skin is very fragile and easily damaged. In a farm environment, octopuses are likely to be injured, either through physical contact by a handler or aggressive interactions with other octopuses. Their fast jet-propelled locomotion means that if they are confined in small spaces, they can easily be injured by crashing into tank walls or cages. Therefore, there is a high risk of pain and suffering from injuries that are likely to occur.

## 8 It is incompatible with the EU Strategic Aquaculture Guidelines (SAGs)

These guidelines encourage the reduction of aquaculture's reliance on fishmeal and fish oil produced from wild-caught fish and they stress the need for EU aquaculture to diversify, introducing species that do not need fishmeal or fish oil.

## 7 There is no current legislation to protect the welfare of farmed octopuses

Octopuses are totally unprotected from suffering and inhumane slaughter methods as there are currently no laws in place in the EU, the US, Mexico, or Japan, where octopus farming is being developed, to regulate their welfare and farming practices. It would be totally irresponsible for lawmakers to allow the continued development of plans to farm octopuses without proper legislation in place.

## 6 There is currently no scientifically validated method for the humane slaughter of octopuses

While slaughter methods are currently being studied, none has been scientifically approved as humane. Current literature on wild-caught octopus slaughter mentions a variety of methods, including clubbing their heads, slicing their brains, asphyxiation in a net, and chilling in ice. Humane alternatives to these methods – which would ensure that octopuses are rendered immediately unconscious before being killed – are yet to be developed.

### CONCLUSION

In summary, these fascinating, intelligent, and sentient wild animals cannot be allowed to be exploited and suffer lives in factory farms that are simply not worth living. The serious environmental and animal welfare problems associated with octopus farming mean that it cannot be compatible with the EU's new Strategic Guidelines for the sustainable development of aquaculture.

Therefore, Compassion in World Farming is urging the aquaculture industry to stop the development of octopus farming altogether to prevent unnecessary suffering and environmental damage.