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September 15, 2010

Lady GaGa
Los Angeles, CA

Dear Lady GaGa,

Congratulations on your big wins at the MTV Video Music Awards! As one of your loyal gay fans, my heart sang for you Sunday night; you certainly earned the recognition for being such a talented, hardworking, creative and cutting-edge artist.

My heart also sang Sunday night as you made a bold and powerful statement on behalf of gay rights. Once again, you made our community proud by using your vastly influential voice to speak out against oppression – taking a thoughtful stand against “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell.” I sincerely admire your dedication to pursuing justice on behalf of those of us who are still marginalized for simply being who we are. For that, I am sincerely grateful.

It is the sign of a great human being to take such decisive, and often unpopular, positions on behalf of others that are victims of unjust, unkind, unfounded and outdated policies and belief systems. Your work on behalf of gay rights is truly helping push our society out of the dark ages and into a more enlightened time.

Yet, as someone who has dedicated over half my life to advocating on behalf of animal rights, as well as gay rights, my heart sank Sunday night when you revealed “the meat dress.” Although you explained that your intention was “not to offend vegetarians or vegans,” the unintended consequence of this “fashion statement” was the promotion, and glamorization, of cruelty and violence toward animals.

As a style icon, your attire has entertained and inspired countless fans. And, in such a position, I hope you would agree that fashion should be fun and creative, not fatal and cruel.

Sadly, “the meat dress” crossed the line between shocking, and entered the realm of simply being sickening. You see, meat is more than simply a “meal” or a “fabric,” it’s the rotting remains of a “someone.”

Eleven years ago, I founded Mercy For Animals, an organization that works to give a voice to farmed animals – perhaps the most abused and exploited creatures on the planet. Since then, MFA has worked diligently to expose the cruel plight faced by these nameless “someones” – the billions of cows, pigs, chickens and turkeys unfortunate enough to be doomed to a life of suffering, simply to end up on the dinner table – or, in this case, your closet.

Risking their safety, our investigators have gone undercover into the nation’s factory farms, hatcheries, livestock auctions and slaughterhouses – uncovering the daily nightmare these sensitive, thinking and feeling animals endure before being processed and packaged as meat.

Each time our investigators step foot into the factories where our nation’s meat is produced, they find egregious and rampant abuse of animals. For example, the vast majority of today’s breeding pigs spend their short, miserable lives locked inside metal stalls so small they cannot even turn around or lie down comfortably. In such factory farm conditions, these animals, whose intelligence surpasses that of dogs, are denied the simple ability to breathe fresh air, feel the sun on their backs, touch the grass, walk, run, play, bond with their loved ones or have even the most basic control over their lives.

Within days of being born, their screaming babies are snatched from their sides, have their tails cut off, their teeth pulled, and for the males, their testicles cut out of their bodies – all without a single drop of painkillers.

Cows, chickens and other farmed animals are also subject to intensive overcrowding, painful mutilations, violent and malicious beatings, stressful transport, lack of veterinary care, separation from their families, and in the end a violent and merciless death – with many hacked apart on the slaughterhouse line while still alive and fully conscious.

It is clear that you are a caring and compassionate human being who believes that our society can and should work against injustices. The manner in which farmed animals are raised, killed and exploited is one of our society's darkest shames.

As perhaps the world's most famous individual, you hold enormous power – and with it responsibility. I urge you to widen your circle of compassion, concern and empathy to include all animals – including farmed animals – by rejecting the cruel meat industry. Like other oppressed individuals, who are often marginalized and exploited, these animals deserve our respect and consideration.

I hope you will consider shedding “the meat dress” and turning over a new leaf, not only by ditching meat from your closet, but also your refrigerator. I've enclosed a copy of our *Vegetarian Starter Kit*, packed full of quick and easy tips and recipes, which can aid in making the transition toward a healthy and compassionate plant-based diet.

Simply by adopting a vegetarian diet, you can spare the lives of thousands of animals – and by encouraging others to join you, untold millions of animals could be spared the harsh and unrelenting cruelty of our nation's factory farms and slaughterhouses.

I'd be happy to meet with you to further discuss this issue, over a vegan dinner. You can contact me anytime at 937-470-9454 or by email at NathanR@MercyForAnimals.org.

Thank you for your time and attention, and for daring to dream for a brighter tomorrow.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Nathan Runkle". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "N" and "R".

Nathan Runkle
Executive Director