

# Temple Grandin

On how to raise resilient animals



In the 1990s, animal scientist and autism advocate Temple Grandin revamped the livestock industry to improve animal welfare and food safety—which meant lower costs too. Today, almost half of the cattle in North America is processed through a system she designed. Now, she's focused on a new challenge: how to reverse the damage done by decades of overly selective breeding.



“I think a lot of millennials feel a disconnect—they want to know where their food comes from, but a third of them have never been on a farm.”



When it comes to breeding animals today, many factors contribute to what I call “biological system overload.” People are over-selecting animals until they get health problems. Hens, for example, are chosen for greater egg production and end up with osteoporosis. They put all their calcium in the eggs and there’s nothing left for their bones. Recent studies on pigs and other animals indicate that high-producing animals may have less resistance to disease. We’re seeing the consequences of that now.

It’s possible the current avian flu outbreak might be related to genetics. A study presented at the Midwest Poultry Federation Convention showed that wild ducks can live with avian influenza, while it kills high percentages of domesticated turkeys. So let’s breed some hardiness back into these animals. Let’s have a little less milk, and then we’ll have a healthy cow that will milk for four years instead of dying after two. We need to breed for optimum—not maximum—production.

Another problem we need to address is that people are too far removed from the entire world of practical things, including farming. That can result in people making policy about stuff they don’t know anything about. Take lab-grown meat, for example. It’s a nice idea, but it’s not very energy efficient. A warm-blooded animal requires a lot of energy. If you want to grow food in the lab, why not grow scallops without the shells? We’ve got to get people connected to real, physical stuff—it teaches problem solving.” **AS TOLD TO LOIS PARSHLEY**

# 41

Chickens, in millions, infected with avian influenza between December 2014 and June 2015. The USDA says it’s the worst U.S. outbreak ever.