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INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Thousands of Chicks Drowned

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A bankrupt poultry farm drowned its fuzzy day-old chicks by the hundreds of thousands in garbage cans over the weekend and posted videos of the slaughter online in a bid to attract state aid.

The videos posted on YouTube showed sobbing factory workers chucking trays full of peeping, yellow chicks into rusty barrels and drowning them alive in freezing water.

Older birds were shown frantically flapping as they were dumped from garbage trucks into snowy fields and left to freeze to death.

The head of the Krasnaya Polyana poultry farm in the Kursk region said it has been forced to slaughter more than 1 million chickens after it ran out of money for feed.

In the video appeal to Prime Minister Vladimir Putin and President Dmitry Medvedev, farm director Vladimir Butkeyev pleaded for them to step in and save workers' jobs, warning that he would have to fire his 1,700 workers amid debts of 40 million rubles ($1.3 million).

"On Dec. 10, we had to start putting to death over 1 million chickens and shutting down the

factory, with over 1,000 people to lose their jobs on the eve of New Year's," Butkeyev said. "We don't have any other options left."

Closure of the farm, which accounts for some 55 percent of the region's poultry production and up to one-third of the local budget, would deal a major blow to the rural region's economy.

Footage from inside the bankrupt farm in the town of Zheleznogorsk showed workers in tears as they carried out their grim labor, sweeping incubators clear of hatchlings.

In the nearby cages, chickens pecked at the carcasses of birds that had starved to death.

"They told us 'throw out the birds and goodbye,'" sobbed one distraught middle-aged worker. "But where are we going to go now. The younger girls maybe have a chance at finding other jobs but not my husband and I. Who'll take us?"

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