

Written evidence submitted by The Humane League UK (WoD0043)

15 March 2023

Dear Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee,

I am writing from [The Humane League UK](#), which is an award winning animal protection charity, to request that you inquire into the Government's commitment to explore the use of cages for laying hens.

As per the briefing paper below, there are over 10 million laying hens in cages in the UK. Egg production from caged systems has been falling in recent years as retailers and major corporations fulfil commitments to go cage-free by 2025. However, once these commitments are met, there will still be between 2.3 million laying hens in cages supplying eggs for countless small, local and independent retailers and manufacturers who cumulatively account for 5-10% of egg production. These organisations don't have commitments or significant brand incentives to go cage-free. A legislative ban on cages is therefore necessary to improve the welfare of millions of animals, but it would not negatively impact the vast majority of the industry.

Enriched cages "fail to properly meet the hens' physical or behavioural needs. They provide an unacceptably restrictive amount of space per bird [and] severely restrict many important physical activities... [which] is likely to lead to frustration, bone weakness and osteoporosis - clear indicators of poor welfare."¹ There is significant public, industry and political support for a legislative ban on cages due to these poor welfare outcomes. The Humane League UK, the RSPCA and the Conservative Animal Welfare Foundation launched a petition on this issue which has over 100,000 signatories². Nine major companies including Nestlé, Greggs and Nando's published a statement calling for the Government to ban cages for hens³ and the Labour Party, the Liberal Democrats, the SNP and the Green Party have all made commitments to ban cages.

The Conservative Government committed to a review of the use of cages in DEFRA's Action Plan for Animal Welfare in May 2021⁴ and again on March 30, 2022 when the DEFRA Secretary of State committed at a parliamentary reception to launch a consultation by the end of the year. During a debate on 20 June 2022, the Minister for State told members that "we are almost ready to go with a consultation on the caging of laying hens"⁵. No consultation has been launched and last week, it was confirmed that there is no formal timescale for a consultation.⁶ This position is in contrast to the Scottish administration who recently committed to launch a consultation on cages in the coming months.

Despite avian flu and rising costs across Europe, Denmark⁷ recently joined Austria, Switzerland and Germany by banning cages for hens. The European Union is also progressing its plans to do the same with legislative proposals for banning cages expected in October. Yet while these countries, who are facing similar challenges to the UK, are banning the cruel practice of cages, the UK has yet to even begin formal discussions with stakeholders about transitioning from cage systems. We request that you urge the Secretary of State to launch this consultation as soon as possible to prevent the UK falling any further behind our European neighbours when it comes to hen welfare.

Yours sincerely,

¹ <https://www.ciwf.org.uk/news/2010/08/enriched-cages-condemned>

² <https://tinyurl.com/288apmpm>

³ https://drive.google.com/file/d/1zY4pKj4berL_gI7vF2tcOlv7jndUpf/view

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/action-plan-for-animal-welfare>

⁵ <https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2022-06-20/debates/A8711335-BF26-47F0-97B4-F6ED2471EB7F/FarmedAnimalsCages>

⁶ https://www.theyworkforyou.com/wrans/?id=2023-03-06_158877_h&s=cages#g158877_q0

⁷ <https://www.thelocal.dk/20220922/denmark-to-ban-caged-egg-production-by-2035/>



Amro Hussain
Senior Public Affairs Lead
The Humane League UK

UK CAGE-FREE EGG PRODUCTION

SUMMARY

1. Major companies across all sectors have committed to going cage-free. Currently, 28% of eggs in the UK come from cages. Based on the corporate commitments, we estimate that circa 90% of UK egg production will be cage-free by 2025.
2. This estimation means that nearly 2.3 million laying hens will remain in cages every year. Legislation is needed to ensure the welfare of these hens and to encourage companies to meet their commitments.
3. From our discussions with the industry, there is a real desire for legislation to be introduced to support the good work done by those trying to lead the way. Several major companies, including Nestle, have even publicly called for legislation to ban eggs from caged hens.

KEY FACTS

- 1. All leading supermarkets have a cage-free egg commitment**, and by 2025 will be selling only cage-free eggs.
 - This not only applies to own brand shell eggs, but all shell eggs sold in stores (where applicable). Furthermore, all the leading supermarkets - with the exception of Iceland - have clear policies to phase out cage eggs from their own brand ingredients, if they have not already done so.
 - Morrisons, Marks & Spencer, Waitrose & Sainsbury's are already 100% free-range for shell eggs.
- 2. Many major companies in the restaurant, manufacturing and catering sectors have public commitments to transition to 100% cage-free egg use by 2025** at the latest. All of these

commitments apply to shell and ingredient eggs.

- **Restaurants** - leading chains such as Greggs, Pizza Express, Nando's, KFC & Pret a Manger are already sourcing only cage-free eggs, with over 75% of the sector now committed to do so.
 - **Manufacturers** - Samworth Brothers, known for brands such as Ginsters is committed to only sourcing cage-free eggs by 2025 at the latest.; Premier Foods, whose brand portfolio includes Mr Kipling's; and Princes Food Group, the canned food specialists, have been exclusively sourcing cage-free eggs since 2021.
 - **Catering/Food Service** - Compass Group plc, the largest contract foodservice company in the world, sources 100% cage-free shell and liquid eggs in the UK. And the food travel experts SSP Group plc are another of the leading players in this sector committed to going cage-free by 2025.
- 3. 71% of egg packers are either cage-free, publicly committed to being cage-free by 2025, or have publicly stated their intention to become a cage-free operation.** With the industry shift in line with consumer demand, egg packers themselves have had to change and adapt to the new cage-free landscape. Of the top 10 major UK egg packers, 3 are fully free-range, 2 are currently pledged to meet cage-free demand, and 3 have full commitments to be cage-free by 2025 including the UK's leading egg supplier Noble Foods (The Happy Egg Co). Only 2 companies have no clear statement.
- 4. 28% of eggs in the UK still come from cages, which equates to approximately 10.6 million laying hens a year.** These eggs are being used by companies who have not yet fulfilled their commitments or much smaller companies who will only change practices when the law changes. According to the [DEFRA Egg Statistics](#), the percentage of UK eggs from caged hens has been falling consistently in recent years:

Year	Percentage of Eggs from Cages
2018	44%
2019	42%
2020	40%
2021	38%
2022	28%

- 5. We estimate that circa 90% of egg production in the UK will be cage-free by 2025.** This figure is based on the existing egg packer and food company commitments. This is a great step in the right direction and one the industry should be proud of. However, this estimation means that up to **10%** of laying hens will still be in cages, which equates to around 2.3 million laying hens every year.
- 6. Several major companies, including Compass Group, Kraft-Heinz and Nestlé, have called on Governments to act to ban eggs from caged hens.**
- These companies have set their own high standards but are now calling for the backing of legislation to ensure that no eggs come from caged hens. For example, Nestlé stated that it is *“committed to improving animal welfare in our food supply chain in Europe, including transitioning to cage-free eggs by 2020 and improving conditions for broiler chickens. However, we cannot achieve system wide change on our own. National or preferably EU legislation would create a level playing field and help speed up improvements in welfare*

practices for the whole sector.” Bart Vandewaetere, Nestlé Head of Corporate Communications and Government Relations, Zone Europe, Middle East & North Africa.

March 2023