

DR. CAROLINE LUCAS
Green Party

for the South East of England

Commissioner Kyprianou
DG Health and Consumer Protection
The European Commission
B1049 Brussels
Belgium

December 8th 2005

Dear Commissioner,

As you are aware, the 1999 Laying Hens Directive established minimum cage sizes for hens and introduced a system of 'enriched cages'. In addition, the Directive introduced a ban on conventional cages, active from 2012, with a provision allowing for this date to be put back, depending on a 2005 review by the European Commission. I understand that this review, based on the findings of the European Food Safety Authority's animal health and animal welfare panel, will be presented to the Council of Ministers in early 2006.

Ahead of this report, I am writing to urge you to ensure that the EU continues to be at the forefront of efforts to improve animal welfare. Both the 'enriched cage' system, that is intended to fully replace conventional cages by 2012, and the original battery cages are too restrictive. Exacerbating the mental cruelties inflicted upon the caged egg-laying hen, the environment of the caged system also poses significant physical welfare concerns. The wire floor causes problems for hens' feet as their claws can become twisted around the mesh, further reducing the hen's chances of exercise and sometimes preventing her from reaching the food and water supply. Because of their close proximity to each other, aggression can become a problem with hens attacking their cage mates. In an attempt to stop the physical injuries of such anti-social behaviour, hens are often de-beaked, removing a third of the bird's beak using a red-hot blade - a case of treating the symptom, rather than treating the cause.

The enriched cages are scarcely any better:

- The increase in space allocated to each bird amounts to 200cm², the area of a postcard
- The minimum ceiling height of the cage is too low at 45cm - hens are still unable to stretch and flap their wings
- Too little litter and too little physical space, together with disturbances from cage-mates, leads to dust-bathing in cages being abnormally short and incomplete and failing to satisfy the hens' strong behavioural need to dust-bathe.
- The perches in enriched cages are too low to the floor to satisfy the hens' needs for a raised perch for roosting and instead are simply a way of escaping the discomfort of the caged wire floor
- Competition for the single nest box, together with disturbances within the cramped confines of the cage mean that hens are anxiously hurried when nesting and laying.

I believe that all EU farmers should change to perchery or free range systems, which, if designed and managed well, can significantly improve animal welfare. In the barn (perchery) system hens are kept in loose flock sheds with raised perches or platforms. The flooring must be littered, often wood-shavings are provided, and the current European maximum stocking density numbers are 25 hens per square metre of floor space, and 15cm of perch is to be provided for each bird. Free range hens are usually kept in houses similar to those used for barn systems, but they have access to the outdoors (which must be mainly covered with vegetation) during the day and space allowance of between 2.5m² and 4m² per hen. Without question, the free-range system offers the hen a more natural environment and the freedom to act out her normal behaviours - offering mental and physical welfare improvements over all other systems.

I hope that the Commission's review is in line with this position and that any attempts to delay the ban on conventional cages are strongly resisted. I would also like to ask the Commission to review the current legislation relating to egg labelling standards, so that they apply equally to imported eggs. The European Parliament's delegation to the WTO leaves Brussels today and, as a member, of that delegation I hope that you will be using your position to argue that WTO rules need reforming to offer better protection to EU farmers from farmers that do not have to implement the EU's high animal welfare and other standards, as is the case with egg labelling.

I trust you will pursue these matters on my behalf and wish you well for the festive season.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Caroline Lucas". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Caroline Lucas - Green Party MEP for South East England.