



Brussels, 11.01.2007
D(2006) 2413

Dear Dr. Lucas,

Thank you for your letter of 6 November 2006 concerning the Commission's forthcoming report to the European Parliament and to the Council on the various systems for the keeping of laying hens.

The discussion about the various systems for keeping laying hens laid down in Directive 1999/74/EC¹, and especially about the ban on traditional cages beginning in 2012, will resurface in the coming months. I understand the preoccupation that the ban on traditional cages might be postponed in connection with the Commission's above-mentioned report, which is currently under preparation.

I have always confirmed that animal welfare is a high priority for the Commission. I strongly believe that Europe's high animal welfare standards represent an opportunity which should be capitalised upon by EU producers.

I can assure you that the Commission's services will carefully analyse the existing studies on the issue – both from the economic and scientific aspects. The Commission intends to base its report on all the available data. This includes in particular the socio-economic study and the opinion from the European Food Safety Authority provided especially for the Commission's report, but also further studies undertaken as e.g. the scientific study funded by the Commission on the "Welfare implications of changes in production systems for laying hens" and position papers requested from the stakeholders.

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Dr. Caroline Lucas, MEP
European Parliament
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1047 Brussels

¹ Council Directive 1999/74/EC laying down minimum standards for the protection of laying hens (OJ L 203, 3.8.1999, p.53)

In your letter you question in particular who is going to bear higher production costs caused by alternative or enriched cage systems. Many ways could be explored how to share costs. As concerns the egg market, at least for the shell egg sector higher production costs will not be entirely borne by producers since consumers will be prepared to assume higher costs in exchange for better welfare standards. Furthermore the Community Action Plan on the Protection and Welfare of Animals announces the classification of welfare standards applied (the so-called "welfare indicators"). Options for EU animal welfare labelling will also be explored in this context, which may help to make consumers more sensitive to welfare issues.

I hope that the Commission's report will contribute to the debate in the Parliament and the Council on the welfare of laying hens and its collocation in the international scene and in the context of the reformed European agricultural policies.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'S. P.' followed by a large, stylized flourish that loops back to the left.