

Submission
No 425

INQUIRY INTO USE OF BATTERY CAGES FOR HENS IN THE EGG PRODUCTION INDUSTRY

Organisation: Edgar's Mission

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Edgar's Mission Farm Sanctuary welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission into the use of battery cages for hens in the egg production industry.

Edgar's Mission supports the view expressed by leading emeritus professor of animal welfare at Cambridge University, Donald Broom – "Any breeding that can be predicted to result in poor welfare should be illegal". Breeding hens for exponential egg production has been shown to have deleterious effects on hens. This is evidenced by their short productive life. Hens beyond the age of two years are considered "spent" by industry, yet their wild cousins can live for 10 -12 years.

Breeding programs targeted for egg-producing hens over the last 60 years or so have concentrated on an increased number of eggs per year per hen, currently equating to around 300 per bird. This unnatural egg production takes its toll on the hens in terms of calcium depletion from their bones leading to increased incidences of osteoporosis and bone fractures. As one of Australia's foremost sanctuaries for rescued farmed animals, Edgar's Mission increasingly witnesses the negative impacts of breeding for increased egg production in terms of reproductive problems, tumors, and liver disease.

Of note too is the negative impact that confining hens in cages has on their natural behaviors. These natural behaviors are consistency thwarted and include; inability to stretch wings, lay eggs in private, dust bathe, perch, forage, scratch about in the soil, and move away from bullying conspecifics which can lead to injurious pecking. The barren environments further deny access to natural light, appropriate nesting materials or stimulating activities.

Aside from the negative impact of egg production on laying hens (regardless of system of egg production), an issue that is rarely discussed, yet one that remains an inconvenient truth, is the fate of roosters. With nature dictating that roughly 50% of the chicks hatched being male, these hapless animals are killed shortly after hatching in such a cruel manner that would shock many Australians. Such a situation would not be tolerated should these animals be male puppies or kittens. Regardless of species, these animals possess the ability to suffer, the only thing that alters is societies perception of them.

It is unconscionable that in a progressive nation such as ours and one that is increasingly becoming aware of the sentience of farmed animals along with the science that supports a more just treatment of animals, the battery cage system of egg production has any place.

References-

Are we pushing animals to their biological limits-Temple Grandin and Martin Whiting

The behavioural biology of chickens -Christine J Nicol

Farmed bird welfare science review October 2017 – Agriculture Victoria

Domestic animal behavior and welfare, 4th Edition – DM Broom and AF Fraser

The incidence of bone fracture and osteoporosis in laying hens – Agriculture Victoria

A review of cognition, emotion, and behavior in the domestic chicken -Lori Marino and Christina M. Colvin

<https://www.voiceless.org.au/hot-topics/battery-hens>