

Submission
No 450

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

Name: Name suppressed

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Partially
Confidential

Most of the time when judging animal welfare standards humans, especially those whom believe they are doing the right thing place their inherent standards of human welfare onto animals. This is such a case.

Chickens evolved from guinea fowl, they were jungle dwelling animals that lived in small stable family groups and bred rarely. They lived under canopies and rarely travel far from their abode due to the threat of predators. Those images of birds exploring paddocks up on a hill with a barn in the distance behind them is advertising, not reality.

Although the modern chicken has been genetically selected and evolved to lay almost every day their instincts remain the same. Have you ever wondered why they call it a 'pecking order' If chickens see an injured, bleeding or unwell chicken they will peck it to the point of death. Similarly, there is a natural hierarchy in flocks (small groups up to 8) to create a stable family group where the dominant chickens will peck at and subjugate the other chickens. Once this family group is stable the pecking order is set and the chickens are no longer attacking each other. When chickens are placed into an environment such as a large barn or outdoor flock they lose the capability to regulate their hierarchy, they do NOT lose the instinct to do so. Meaning that in free-range and barn laid systems there is an astoundingly higher rate of mortality because the hens are unable to regulate their environment, social structure and then injure each other. Similarly, in caged systems the hens have stable family groups and are able to create and live in a stable structured environment.

Hens in caged systems use fewer antibiotics and much lower mortality rates... why is this?

1. In caged systems the hens are caged above their faeces and cannot peck at it - they eat fewer faeces lowering the incidence of diseases such as coccidiosis.
2. The cages create a physical barrier between the hens preventing diseased birds to transport and spread disease throughout the flock.
3. It is easier to clean, disinfect and ensure a healthy disease free environment for caged hens especially when flocks are being cycled.
4. The hens are not outside open to the elements, they will not be interacting with wild birds and then spreading diseases i.e. bird flu, parasitic infections.
5. Biosecurity measures in caged environments allow the prevention of travelling peoples, staff and individuals in the supplier chain from coming into contact with the hens. This significantly lowers the incidence of human and or fomite (disease on car tyres) transmission of viruses, bacteria and parasitic infections.
6. The diet of caged hens can be more tightly controlled, laying has a huge impact on the biology of a hen and many birds in free range environments do not receive the calcium required by their bodies to form eggs in the diet. Furthermore gizzard and crop impaction is becoming a serious concern in free range environments.... Hens are not ruminants and should not be consuming lots of long grasses which in no way meets their dietary nutrient requirements. In many cases the hens will choose to eat the grass over their supplied diet, they do not have the knowledge to determine what is best for them to eat and as such literally kill themselves through grass impaction.

Farmers who raise caged chickens are constantly making their production systems compliant with regulations standards and have a lot of financial investment in their flocks, infrastructure - what would the impact be on them if battery cages systems were to be banned.

Welfare is a multi-faceted topic. If I had realised that earlier that this inquiry was happening, and not on the day that submissions close I would have taken the time to delve into the welfare of hens

using peer reviewed data for your reference. It is something that I would be happy to do – however I only found out about this today (25.07.2019) and have somewhere to be.

I, for one have been to both free range and caged system properties. There is no way I would purchase free range eggs.

So I'll leave you with one final thought.... It simply cannot be argued that the greatest measurement of animal welfare is not mortality rate or survivability. In the instance of caged hens vs. free range hens the mortality rate is significantly lower in caged systems. It simply cannot be evidence based argued the welfare of free range hens is higher than that of caged hens when death occurs at a higher rate from many different causes in a free range environment. Put your feelings aside, look at the evidence and you may discover that what you feel, and what the birds feel are two very different things.

I am happy for the committee to know my name and location. I am not happy for it to be publicised because I do not want be harassed by vegan activists.