

Know your facts about battery cages. Please take a moment to read this letter to RI State Legislators in regards to the proposed bill to ban battery cages on egg farms.

Letter to legislators:

Please do not support the ban on caged egg layers in Rhode Island, HB 5505A. The premise that this proposal will lead to more humane conditions for the chicken is misdirected by the advocates for this change. The National Association of Egg Farmers (NAEF), representing egg farmers nationwide, says this misinformation has led some food companies to source their eggs from cage-free farmers believing it is more humane or better from a food safety perspective. In fact, Little Rhody Egg Farms is producing eggs as advanced with increasing knowledge of the chicken, its welfare, and its consumer providing assurances to food safety considerations.

Today's modern conventional cages, like Little Rhody Egg Farms, in producing eggs provide:

- 1) A humane way of producing eggs as evidenced by extensive scientific evidence.
- 2) Provide a safe and wholesome egg.
- 3) Provide a lower cost for a high quality protein product

1) A humane way of producing eggs

So here are the facts from today's farmers concerning the welfare of the chicken. Every egg farmer knows that increasing the population size of a flock of chickens increases the stress on those chickens due to the establishment of a "pecking order" among the chickens. The behavior inherent in chickens is to determine the social standing of the individual hens through "pecking" each other. The individual chicken lower in the social order is pecked the most. When chickens are housed in conventional cages with 6 chickens, the establishment of this pecking order is minimized compared to upwards of 60 chickens in the California-style enhanced, colony cages, and even more so in an aviary (cage-free chickens) with thousands of chickens.

The Coalition for Sustainable Egg Supply, a cooperative effort of animal scientists investigating the published research concluded recently that different housing systems (cage-free, enhanced colony cages, and the conventional cages used today by nine-five percent of egg farmers) are not significantly different in the stress among the chickens. This compliments earlier findings by The American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) in 2010 which released a report on different housing systems. The report concluded consumers need to balance the hen's freedom against exposure to potential hazards such as disease vectors and the cannibalism caused by pecking. Certainly cannibalism and pecking are welfare issues, and in conventional cages where the number of chickens is minimized, these concerns are reduced compared to the enhanced, colony cages or aviaries.

Dr. Kenneth Anderson, a preeminent Poultry Extension Specialist at NC State University, presented his research findings to the egg industry at a conference in March 2010 where he noted that chickens reared in conventional cages had:

- 1) significantly greater numbers of Grade A eggs,
- 2) significantly greater numbers of total eggs produced,
- 3) significantly better feed conversion rates (meaning a lower carbon footprint),
- 4) better immune response (meaning better able to resist disease).

Certainly these are indicators of a healthier chicken and thus better welfare.

2) Provide a safe and wholesome egg

In considering food safety, eggs laid on the floor in an aviary system have more pathogenic bacteria from contact with manure. This is virtually eliminated in conventional cages where the birds stand on a wire and the manure falls below the cages and away from the eggs. As published in Food Control [47 (2015) 161-165] entitled "Microbiological Contamination of Shell Eggs Produced in Conventional [battery cages] and Free-Range" the authors from Clemson University reported Enterobacteriaceae on egg shell surfaces were 90% greater in free-range over battery cages (conventional cages). Salmonella for free-range was 2.36% and 0 for battery while Campylobacter for free-range was 26.1% compared to 7.4% for battery eggs.

3) Provide a lower cost for a high quality protein product

Lastly, consumers benefit from conventional caged egg production with a lower cost for a high quality protein product. The Coalition for Sustainable Egg Supply reported recently the cage-free eggs (aviaries) were thirty-six percent more expensive than conventional caged eggs and enhanced colony caged eggs were thirteen percent more expensive. When California implemented their egg law this past January, the price difference between the wholesale price of eggs in the state compared to the Midwest peaked at \$2.00 a dozen more. Retail prices of a dozen eggs were reported in San Francisco to reach \$6.00 per dozen. How do those prices benefit a low income family trying to make ends meet?

Over the past five decades of improving the welfare of the chicken and improving the food safety of shell eggs with today's conventional cages, unfortunately companies and misinformed readers believe it is better to return to the old days when eggs were laid near manure or the chicken suffered from the pecking order. This is false and harms both the chicken and the consumer. Today's egg farmer, using conventional cage systems, is producing a safe and wholesome egg while providing for the needs of each chicken.

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