

# END THE CAGE AGE FOR HENS



## The life of a hen in natural conditions

The breeds of hens farmed for their eggs are descended from the jungle fowl of south-east Asia. In nature, a hen would live in a small group, in wooded land, with an expansive home range. In a normal day, the birds in her group would walk, run, flap their wings, explore the area, forage and scratch the ground to find food, dust-bathe for good feather health, and perch up on branches for safety from predators. Her group may travel several kilometres according to season.

The mother hen spends time finding a safe place to lay her eggs. She makes her nest using her beak and feet to scrape a hollow in the ground which she then furnishes with dry leaves, twigs and downy feathers. The chicks 'talk' to the hen and each other with little peeping calls while still in the egg.



*In natural conditions hens live in small groups and nurture their chicks*

The hundreds of millions of hens we farm commercially each year still need to carry out these natural behaviour patterns. But how can they when they are confined in a cage?

## The life of an EU hen in a cage

Council Directive 1999/74/EC prohibited the use of barren battery cages from 1 January 2012. Regrettably it allowed the use 'enriched' cages which provide little meaningful enrichment. More than 180 million egg-laying hens in commercial flocks are kept in cages every year. A hen imprisoned in a cage does not experience a life worth living.

She has very little room to walk, can't even flap her wings properly and has no chance to fly. She can't dust-bathe and the perch isn't high enough for her to feel safe from predators, which is what she needs. Her bones can become weak from lack of exercise. The cages are supposed to be provided with a scratching area but such areas are often minimal. The severe restriction of their behaviour causes hens frustration and distress.

So-called 'combination' or 'convertible housing' systems are not a suitable alternative to 'enriched' cages as they also limit hens' welfare in several important ways.



*Life in a cage is no life at all*

This suffering is completely unnecessary as higher welfare alternatives are available.

## Higher welfare systems for laying hens

Non-cage systems are economically viable and in commercial use for just over 50% of EU hens. Some forward-looking member states and food businesses have rejected the caging of laying hens. 'Enriched' cages are already banned in Luxembourg and Austria. They will be banned in Germany from 2025 and Slovakia will end their use from 2030. Retailers across Europe and beyond are also moving to cage-free systems.

Barns or aviaries allow the hens to be more active, to forage, scratch and dust-bathe. EU barns and aviaries have lower stocking densities than cage systems.

However, well-managed free-range and organic systems are much better for hens. They allow outdoor access for some daylight hours. A well-managed outdoor range has pasture, trees and shrubs to help them feel safe from predators and thus attract them outside. On the range, hens can enjoy life, supplementing their diets with vegetation and insects and able to dust-bathe and experience fresh air and sunlight. Organic systems have smaller flocks and more space indoors.



*Ranging on a French organic farm*

## EU legislation to End the Cage Age for hens

Compassion in World Farming calls for a phase-out in the use of cages in EU animal agriculture by 2027.

This could be included in a revision of Directive 98/58/EC on the protection of animals kept for farming purposes. The Directive stipulates that "the freedom of movement of an animal ... must not be restricted to cause unnecessary suffering". It also states that "where an animal is continuously or regularly confined, it must be given the space appropriate to its physiological and ethological needs in accordance with established experience and scientific knowledge."

Confining hens in cages does not fulfil these requirements.

Additionally, Article 13 TFEU requires "the Union and member states, since animals are sentient beings, to pay full regard to the welfare requirements of animals."

To do so, the European Commission must take the initiative to bring in and enforce a ban on the use of all cages in laying-hen production across all member states. The ban should also cover pullets (young hens), hens used for breeding and flocks of under 350 hens, none of which are currently well protected by law. In addition, the use of cages for broiler breeders (the parents of the chickens used for chicken meat) should be outlawed.

The vast majority of EU citizens demand reform for farmed animals; the 2016 Eurobarometer poll on animal welfare shows that 94% think protecting the welfare of farm animals is important. The recent [End the Cage Age European Citizens' Initiative](#) has gathered well over the required one million validated signatures from across the EU.

# It is time to End the Cage Age.

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