



DEBATE PACK

Number CDP 2020/0057, 11 March 2020

Debate on an e-petition relating to the caging of farm animals

There will be a debate on [e-petition 243448](#), *End the Cage Age: ban cages for all farmed animals* in Westminster Hall at 6pm on Monday 16 March 2020. The debate will be opened by Kerry McCarthy MP.

By Dr Elena Ares
Nikki Sutherland

Contents

1.	Background	2
1.1	Use of cages	3
1.2	Game birds	4
1.3	Farrowing crates	5
1.4	Individual calf pens	7
2.	The petition and response	8
3.	News items	10
4.	Press releases	12
5.	Parliamentary material	16
	Debates	16
	PQs	16

The House of Commons Library prepares a briefing in hard copy and/or online for most non-legislative debates in the Chamber and Westminster Hall other than half-hour debates. Debate Packs are produced quickly after the announcement of parliamentary business. They are intended to provide a summary or overview of the issue being debated and identify relevant briefings and useful documents, including press and parliamentary material. More detailed briefing can be prepared for Members on request to the Library.

1. Background

A parliamentary petition [End the Cage Age: ban cages for all farmed animals](#) received 107,187 signatures in the six months to 8 September 2019:

Across the UK, millions of farmed animals are kept in cages, unable to express their natural behaviours. This causes huge suffering.

We call on the UK government to end this inhumane practice by banning all cages for farmed animals. Cages are cruel.

This cannot be the future of British farming.

We, the undersigned, call on the Secretary of State for the Environment Food and Rural Affairs to bring forward legislation that amends the Welfare of Farmed Animals (England) Regulations 2007 to prohibit the use of:

- a) barren and enriched cages for farmed animals including cages for laying hens, rabbits, pullets, broiler breeders, layer breeders, quail, pheasants, partridges, guinea fowl;
- b) farrowing crates for sows;
- c) individual calf pens

A response from the Government was published on the petition page on 22 March 2019 which highlighted bans had been introduced where there was “clear scientific evidence that they are detrimental to animal health and welfare” and that there are comprehensive laws protect the welfare of livestock in all systems”.

The rules relating for the use of a range of confinement systems for farmed animals are set out in the [Welfare of Farmed Animals \(England\) Regulations 2007](#).

An article on the [British Veterinary Association](#) website summarised some of the benefits and concerns relating to the use of a range of confinement systems in UK farming:

Proponents of these confinement systems refer to their favourable health and productivity outcomes - for example, reduced prevalence of infectious diseases, reduced risk of keel bone damage in hens and reduced piglet mortality. But prioritising a limited repertoire of health and performance outcomes and excluding behavioural enrichment fails to capture the full impact of a farming practice or assurance scheme on animal welfare.¹

The campaign [End the Cage Age](#) is being run by a range of animal welfare organisations in the UK and across Europe, including Compassion in World Farming which has published [a report](#) of the same title. They view use of cages in farming as cruel:

Science shows us that caging animals is cruel: they are sentient beings, capable of feeling pain and joy. These farming systems cause immense suffering because animals in cages have no control over their lives, experience extreme frustration, are

¹ BVA, [Consideration of behavioural opportunity in farm animal welfare standards](#), September 2018

severely restricted in their movement, and are prevented from performing almost all natural behaviours.²

An animal welfare report published by [the NFU](#) in 2018, looking at international comparisons, stated:

The UK has one of the most robust and comprehensive legal frameworks protecting animal welfare, extremely mature and well-developed industry bodies that recognise the importance of animal welfare, and a significant number of credible quality assurance and welfare schemes and/or initiatives.³

The [Conservative Animal Welfare Foundation](#) called for ban on the use of cages, in advance of the December 2019 election, together with a review of the intensive cages used to rear game birds.

Labour's [Animal Welfare Manifesto](#) made a pledge to "seek to end the 'cage age' of outdated farming practices that cause animals distress and restrict natural behaviour" and provide support to farmers moving to higher welfare standards. It also committed to introduce legislation on the use of cages for the rearing of game birds.

1.1 Use of cages

Welfare concerns about bird species kept in cages relate to their inability to exhibit natural behaviour, overcrowding and the fact that they are often held indoors in large numbers.

Since 2012 all caged laying hens are required to be kept in enriched cages. The [NFU describes](#) the system as follows:

Birds are still housed indoors and are still in a cage but it is a very different environment to the previous system. 'Enriched' because the cage includes features such as a scratch area, perch and nest box; 'colony' because the number of birds kept in these significantly larger cages are typically up to 80.⁴

The NFU also sets out the benefits of the cages as better feather cover, lower mortality, improved shell quality and increasingly long life-cycles as the result of a lower stress burden compared to unenriched cages.

Defra's most recent [quarterly egg statistics](#) cover September to December 2019. This states that eggs produced from hens in enriched colony systems accounted for 42% of the total throughput in Q4 2019, two percentage points lower than the same quarter in 2018. The rest are produced in either barn, free range or organic systems.

The space requirements for laying hens in enriched cages are set out as follows in regulations:

Laying hens must have at least 750 cm² of cage area per hen, 600 cm² of which must be usable; the height of the cage other than that above the usable area must be at least 20 cm at every point and the minimum total area for any cage must be 2000 cm².⁵

² CIWF, [End the Cage Age](#), 2018

³ NFU, [Animal welfare global review summary report](#), February 2018

⁴ NFU, [Enriched Colony Cages – the facts](#), July 2016

⁵ Defra, [Code of practice for the welfare of laying hens and pullets](#), 2018

Further details of the standards can be found in the [Code of practice for the welfare of laying hens and pullets](#), published by Defra in 2018

The [British Laying Hen Trust](#) campaigns for farmers and consumers to convert to free-range eggs. However, it states that welfare in the UK egg industry “is amongst the highest in the world”. Compassion in World Farming considers [enriched cages unacceptable](#) as “it is still a confinement system and still restricts behaviour”.

In its report, End the Cage Age, CIWF also refers to the use of cages for [rearing quails](#) intensively. It has number of welfare concerns, including the impact of their instinct to fly up when startled.

The petition refers to the use of cages when farming rabbits. According to the End the Cage Age report, no rabbits are farmed commercially in cages in the UK.

1.2 Game birds

There is no legislation that sets out the standards for raising game birds. There is a voluntary [Code of practice for the welfare of gamebirds reared for sporting purposes](#), first published by Defra in 2009 together with an [Impact Assessment](#).

The [Code of Practice](#) which does allow barren cages, states:

Barren raised cages for breeding pheasants and small barren cages for breeding partridges should not be used. All laying systems used for the housing of birds should be designed and managed to ensure the welfare of the birds. Any system should be appropriately enriched.

Gamebird keepers should explore possible methods of enrichment with their veterinary surgeon or other suitable adviser. Laying birds should be provided with nest areas sufficient for the number of birds housed.

Defra published a [Study to determine whether cage-based breeding can meet the needs of game birds, and if not, to identify best practice](#) in 2015. The report focused on whether enrichment in cages could be beneficial:

Enrichment and space allowance, in the forms provided, had little impact on the welfare of caged pheasants but egg production and quality and most measures of pheasant welfare were improved in cages compared to floor pens. For the partridges, the behavioural results indicate that enrichment may be positive for welfare and is probably a more valuable modification than increasing the size of an otherwise barren cage. However, there may be penalties from parasitism and reduced egg production if enrichment is offered at a conventional space allowance. The welfare impacts of enrichment may be different to those found here when birds are housed for a longer period of time and would require further study.⁶

The design of the research project and its conclusions were criticised by [Animal Aid](#), which campaigns for a ban on the use of cages for rearing

⁶ Defra, [Study to determine whether cage-based breeding can meet the needs of game birds, and if not, to identify best practice](#), 2015

game birds. They describe the systems used for breeding game birds as follows:

Game bird production typically involves the use of metal battery cages for birds used for egg production, as well as industrial hatcheries, sheds (which can each hold as many as 10,000 birds) and large release pens for their offspring. Each pheasant breeding cage holds one male and between eight and ten females. The units are fitted with a wire mesh sloping floor so that the eggs can roll through for easy collection. The roof is usually made from flexible wire netting. The cages are exposed to the elements and the birds have little respite from the wind, rain, cold and burning sun. Our undercover investigators have recorded temperatures as high as 41C in summer and -4C in winter inside the cages.

Partridges are confined in breeding pairs in enclosed metal boxes that are smaller and just as bleak as the pheasant units.⁷

In response to the [Labour manifesto pledge](#) to ban use of cages for rearing game birds the British Association for Shooting and Conservation commented:

The proposed ban on the cage rearing of gamebirds appears to be based on a misunderstanding because no gamebirds are reared in cages. Cages are used by a minority of game farms for laying stock.⁸

1.3 Farrowing crates

Farrowing crates are enclosures designed to limit the movement of sows when giving birth, or farrowing, and in the weeks following. They are normally used from the week before birth and the following 28 days⁹ Their use is explained as follows by the then [Farm Animal Welfare Committee](#), a Government advisory body now called the Animal Welfare Committee:

The principal rationale for farrowing crates was to preserve piglet life by reducing crushing (due to the sow being about 150 times the size of the offspring) and other injuries, to ease handling of sows and litters and improve safety for stockpeople. However, there are conflicting interests of sow and piglet welfare where the sow in a crate has her mobility reduced and her ability to express behaviour such as nest building frustrated.¹⁰

The use of farrowing crates was identified by the [British Veterinary Association](#) as one of 7 priority animal welfare problem relating to pigs. A blog on its website [summarises](#) the concerns and how they can be addressed as follows:

The farrowing crate was designed to reduce laid-on piglet mortality, and coupled with genetic selection of sows for litter size has created a highly efficient pig production system, but one that does not facilitate normal sow behaviours at farrowing.

In free-farrowing systems, genetic selection for maternal behaviours is much more important to reduce the incidence of

⁷ Animal Aid, [Briefing: the Game Bird Shooting Industry](#), September 2019

⁸ BASC, [BASC statement on Labour's animal welfare manifesto](#), 29 August 2019

⁹ FAWC, [Opinion on Free Farrowing Systems](#), October 2015

¹⁰ FAWC, [Opinion on Free Farrowing Systems](#), October 2015

laid-on piglet mortalities, and together with effective free-farrowing pen infrastructure, provides a robust solution to mitigating the trade-off between providing behavioural opportunity and increasing piglet mortality.¹¹

The Farm Animal Welfare Committee produced [a report](#) on farrowing in 2015 which recommended work to phase out farrowing, and a review of progress within 5 years:

107. FAWC recommends continued development of commercial free farrowing systems with the aim of replacing farrowing crates, with robust information from these systems available to interested stakeholders.

108. Adoption of free farrowing systems should be reviewed in 5 years, and compared to that in other countries. If judged necessary for full adoption, the possibility of legislation to phase out farrowing crates should then be considered. For commercial reasons this may require action at EU level.¹²

The Government [response](#) to the petition states that 60% of UK sows are placed in farrowing crates to give birth, and the remaining 40% housed outside and free farrowed; that this is significantly better than other EU countries achieve, and that research is on-going to develop and test indoor free farrowing systems under commercial conditions.

An updated [Code of Practice for the Welfare of Pigs](#) was published by Defra in February 2020. The space rules for pigs are set out in [Schedule 8](#) of the Regulations.

A National Pig Association article [Why the pig industry uses farrowing crates](#) from July 2019 set out their view on their use:

NPA would strongly oppose any attempts to unilaterally ban the use of farrowing crates as they serve an important purpose in protecting piglet welfare and stockperson safety during the critical period after birth.¹³

Countries such as Norway, Sweden and Switzerland have banned farrowing crates.¹⁴

The Opposition moved an amendment during the [Committee stage](#) of the Agriculture Bill in March 2020 in the Commons aimed at ending the use of sow farrowing crates. The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Victoria Prentis, rejected the amendment, which failed at division. When responding she referred to the new [Welfare Code for Pigs](#), stating that the aim was for farrowing crates to:

“no longer be necessary but it would not be right to end the use of such crates without examining all the evidence around their use and considering all the options. It is important to recognise how they protect piglets, for example”.¹⁵

¹¹ BVA, [Consideration of behavioural opportunity in farm animal welfare standards](#), September 2018

¹² FAWC, [Opinion on Free Farrowing Systems](#), October 2015

¹³ National Pig Association, [Why the pig industry uses farrowing crates](#), July 2019

¹⁴ FAWC, [Opinion on Free Farrowing Systems](#), October 2015

¹⁵ PBC (Bill 7) 2019 -2021, [Public Bill Committee: Agriculture Bill, Compilation of sittings so far 5 March 2020](#), p 199

1.4 Individual calf pens

The Government response states that “as young calves are highly susceptible to disease, up to 8 weeks of age, they are permitted to be kept in individual hutches of a specified size with bedding provided”. This is set out in Schedule 6 of the [Welfare of Farmed Animals \(England\) Regulations 2007](#).

There are moves towards reducing the length of time [hutches](#) are used or ending their use for holding individual calves altogether. Individual hutches are allowed by the RSPCA in its [welfare standards for dairy cattle](#). However, it also notes that “some scientific evidence suggests that paired housing can be beneficial for calf welfare” and that the issue would be kept under review. [Tesco introduced a requirement](#) in 2018 that all dairy calves on supplier farms be reared in pairs or groups pointing to evidence suggesting they fair better as a result.

2. The petition and response

The petition [End the Cage Age: ban cages for all farmed animals](#) received 107,187 signatures in the six months to 8 September 2019. It read:

Across the UK, millions of farmed animals are kept in cages, unable to express their natural behaviours. This causes huge suffering.

We call on the UK government to end this inhumane practice by banning all cages for farmed animals. Cages are cruel.

This cannot be the future of British farming.

We, the undersigned, call on the Secretary of State for the Environment Food and Rural Affairs to bring forward legislation that amends the Welfare of Farmed Animals (England) Regulations 2007 to prohibit the use of:

- a) barren and enriched cages for farmed animals including cages for laying hens, rabbits, pullets, broiler breeders, layer breeders, quail, pheasants, partridges, guinea fowl;
- b) farrowing crates for sows;
- c) individual calf pens

The Government responded on 22 March 2019:

We have already banned cages where there is clear scientific evidence that they are detrimental to animal health and welfare. Our comprehensive laws protect the welfare of livestock in all systems.

The Government shares the public's high regard for animal welfare and the welfare of our farmed livestock is protected by comprehensive and robust legislation. This is backed up by statutory species specific welfare codes, which encourage high standards of husbandry and which keepers are required by law to have access to and be familiar with. Defra's Animal and Plant Health Agency inspectors and local authorities conduct inspections on farms to check that the animal welfare standards are being met.

We have already banned cages or close confinement systems where there is clear scientific evidence that they are detrimental to animal health and welfare. For example, the keeping of sows in close confinement stalls was banned in the UK in 1999, whereas it was not until 2013 that a partial ban on sow stalls was introduced across the rest of the EU. Whatever the system of production, the most important factor in determining animal welfare is good stockmanship and the correct application of husbandry standards. This reflects the advice of our expert body, the Farm Animal Welfare Committee.

Since the 2012 EU ban on the use of conventional ("battery") cages for laying hens, hens are kept in either free range, enriched cages, barn or organic systems. Over half of UK egg production is free range, higher than any other country in the EU. Enriched cages provide more space for the birds to move around than conventional cages and are legally required to provide nest boxes, litter, perches, and claw shortening devices which allow the birds to carry out a greater range of natural behaviours. Pullets (young

hens) which will be housed in an enriched cage system as adults are reared in enriched cages, to ensure that the two environments are matched as far as possible to reduce stress and the likelihood of injurious pecking. In the UK, the use of cages to house both layer breeders and broiler (meat chicken) breeders is prohibited under the UK's farm assurance scheme standards.

The UK has a very small industry producing rabbits commercially for meat which uses free range systems, not cages.

The statutory welfare code for gamebirds states that barren raised cages for breeding pheasants and small barren cages for breeding partridges should not be used. Guinea fowl are not kept in cages.

The UK is ahead of most other EU pig producing countries in terms of non-confinement farrowing, with approximately 60% of UK sows in farrowing crates to give birth, and the remaining 40% housed outside and free farrowed (crate-free). Research is ongoing to develop and test indoor free farrowing systems under commercial conditions which protect the welfare of the sow, as well as her piglets.

The UK unilaterally banned the keeping of calves in veal crates in 1990, sixteen years before the rest of the EU. However, as young calves are highly susceptible to disease, up to 8 weeks of age, they are permitted to be kept in individual hutches of a specified size with bedding provided, as long as they have visual and tactile contact with other calves.

The Government will maintain its high regulatory baseline and look to raise standards sustainably over time as new research and evidence emerges. We have been very clear that EU Exit will not lead to a lowering of our high animal welfare standards. Our regulatory system will offer the same level of assurance of animal welfare following EU Exit as it does now and we are actively exploring options for strengthening the UK system moving forward. This includes plans to increase maximum penalties for animal cruelty from six months' to five years' imprisonment.

Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

3. News items

The Pig Site

Attempt to ban farrowing crates in UK Agriculture Bill rejected

7 March 2020

<https://thepigsite.com/news/2020/03/attempt-to-ban-farrowing-crates-in-uk-agriculture-bill-rejected>

iNews

Morrisons stops selling caged eggs five years ahead of schedule

19 February 2020

<https://inews.co.uk/news/consumer/morrisons-first-supermarket-stop-selling-caged-eggs-free-range-hens-welfare-1884498>

Farming UK

Defra ponders farrowing crate ban despite NPA opposition

29 January 2020

https://www.farminguk.com/news/defra-ponders-farrowing-crate-ban-despite-npa-opposition_54862.html

Independent

Supermarkets 'paying for game birds to be kept in cruel and environmentally damaging' cages

19 December 2019

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/marks-spencer-waitrose-sainsburys-pheasant-partridge-game-birds-cruel-cages-a9254236.html>

Farmers Weekly

Research shows benefits of pair housing calves pre-weaning

27 June 2019

<https://www.fwi.co.uk/livestock/livestock-feed-nutrition/research-shows-benefits-of-pair-housing-calves-pre-weaning>

Times [subscription]

European chick imports fuelling shoots of game birds

13 June 2019

<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/chick-imports-fuelling-shoots-of-game-birds-5c59fxjtj>

Farmers' Weekly

Tesco reveals reason for single-calf hutch ban

13 October 2018

<https://www.fwi.co.uk/livestock/youngstock-management/tesco-reveals-reason-for-single-calf-hutch-ban>

4. Press releases

National Pig Association

New Pig Welfare Code comes into force

2nd March 2020

All pig producers are being urged to download and read the new Code of Practice for the Welfare of Pigs in England, which came into force on March 1.

The draft Code was published in September 2019, but has been through a lengthy parliamentary process, delayed by the election, before becoming law.

The Code is Defra's interpretation of existing welfare legislation and is designed to help keepers maintain the standards required to comply with it. It sets out enhanced guidance in a number of areas, including:

- Improved practices on how to prevent tail biting, with a focus on avoiding the need to dock pigs' tails
- Detailed guidance on enrichment attributes and acceptable combinations that should be used
- Greater emphasis on record keeping, especially related to tail biting incidence, prevention measures and proactive action taken, including a requirement to record light levels and monitor environmental gasses
- Defra's intention to move towards a future where farrowing crates are no longer needed and advice on free farrowing pens
- Greater focus on correct handling procedures for pigs.

You can view the Code [here](#)

You can read the NPA's detailed analysis of what's new and important in the Code [here](#)

The NPA will be discussing the Code's requirements at our Spring Regional meetings. See the events section of the website for dates.

A Defra spokesperson said the updated Code, which replaces the 2003 version, would 'ensure farmers know how to practice good standards of stockmanship, in line with the most recent scientific and veterinary advice'.

This is a key step in strengthening our pig welfare standards in the UK. Although it is not an offence to breach a code of practice, this can be used as supporting evidence in court when there are breaches of animal welfare laws.

Pigs are inquisitive, social animals and adapt well to different environments. Nevertheless, it's vital that all operational livestock farms, regardless of their size or scale, must meet our high standards and comply with the robust animal health and welfare legislation.

There is no official transition period, but NPA senior policy adviser Rebecca Veale said the association and the Pig Veterinary Society (PVS) were meeting Defra soon to discuss how it will interpret the Code and 'transition periods for producers to make any necessary changes in order to meet the Code's requirements'.

The Code is the Government's interpretation of the law. Therefore, producers must comply with it – we urge all producers to download, read and understand the Code,

she added.

Background

The Code was developed in consultation with the APHA, the NPA and other industry bodies as well as welfare NGO's (RSPCA and CIWF), before final sign off by the Farm Animal Welfare Committee (now AWC - the Animal Welfare Committee).

Welfare codes are statutory and owners and keepers of pigs are required by law to be familiar with, and have access to, the relevant code.

Defra's Animal and Plant Health Agency conduct inspections on farms to check that the animal welfare standards are being met.

When inspecting against the codes and the law, APHA advise farmers on achieving compliance. If appropriate, legal action will be taken. Compliance or not with the provisions in a code of practice can be used as supporting evidence in cases which go to court.

The Code applies to England only, although devolved administrations will aim to align their new codes as closely as possible to Defra's.

Morrisons

Morrisons puts all its eggs into the free-range basket

February 2020

The egg industry needs an extra 334,000 free roaming chickens this week after Morrisons became the first major supermarket to sell only free range eggs(1).

Morrisons originally committed to move away from caged eggs by 2025 after listening to a consumer campaign spearheaded by teenager Lucy Gavaghan in 2016(2).

Morrisons can move five years earlier after doubling the number of free-range farmers that supply its egg packing business.

The commitment will mean all Morrisons eggs will come from hens that have outdoor access for at least eight hours each day, as well as nest boxes with wide perches and spaces for scratching and dust bathing.

Morrisons is continuing to work on ensuring that 100% of eggs used as ingredients in products are cage free by 2025.

Morrisons is also dropping the price of a pack of six free range eggs from 80p to 75p to make them even more affordable.

Morrisons sells over 10 million eggs a week, with 2 million previously coming from caged hens.

Robert Hofmann, Morrisons Egg Buyer, said:

Improving animal welfare is very important to customers and it's very important to us. We source our eggs directly from farms and have worked hard to help them all move to free range.

"From today, all our eggs will come from free-range hens that are able to roam freely outdoors – typically during daylight hours - and then return to nest boxes in the evening.

Dr Tracey Jones, Director of Food Business at Compassion in World Farming, says:

It's great to see Morrisons achieving their commitment to be 100% free range on shell eggs ahead of their 2022 target. Momentum on ending the use of cages for laying hens is growing and Morrisons are leading the way. Importantly, they also have a 2025 cage-free commitment on the eggs that go into processed and ingredient foods.

In 2018 Morrisons introduced a popular Pick Your Own Eggs service enabling customers to choose and pack their own free-range eggs in recycled boxes – choosing from one single egg to a tray of 30.

1 - None of the UK's six biggest supermarkets have previously gone free range only (Tesco, Sainsbury's, ASDA, Morrisons, Aldi, Lidl). In the past 52 weeks Morrisons sold 107 million caged eggs. Broadly, it would need 334,000 hens to lay that many eggs in 52 weeks.

2 - Morrisons moved subsequently to a target of moving away from caged eggs by 2022 before today's announcement.

Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs

Expert animal welfare body expanded to advise Government on future reforms

1 October 2019

The remit of an expert animal welfare body which advises Government has been expanded to provide research and advice on pets, wild animals kept by people as well as farmed animals.

The Farm Animal Welfare Committee's (FAWC) remit has been expanded to provide expert and detailed research and advice to Ministers on pets, wild animals kept by people as well as farmed animals

The committee has been renamed [the Animal Welfare Committee](#) (AWC) from today (1 October 2019). The committee will continue in its role as an expert committee advising Defra and the Devolved Administrations in Scotland and Wales.

Animal welfare minister, Zac Goldsmith said:

We are a nation of animal lovers and this government is committed to taking important steps forward to strengthen our already high standards on animal welfare.

The committee has provided the government with invaluable advice over the years and I look forward to continuing work with colleagues as they broaden their remit to include pets and wild animals kept by people, as well as farmed animals.

The renamed committee's priorities will include:

- Advice to government on future farming reforms to deliver welfare enhancements
- Advice to government on the welfare of companion animals and wild animals kept by people
- Review of dairy and beef cattle production systems and the welfare of the animals
- Working closely with the European Forum of Animal Welfare Councils (EuroFAWC)

To mark this expansion the AWC is recruiting new experts. Further information on these is available on gov.uk.

Peter Jinman, Chair of the Animal Welfare Committee, said:

I welcome the expansion of the committee's remit to advise on a broader spectrum of animal welfare issues and encourage experts with the relevant skills to apply for a role in this important new area of activity.

5. Parliamentary material

Debates

Agriculture Bill (Sixth sitting of the Public Bill Committee)

25 February 2020

Amendments concerning sow farrowing crates discussed and rejected

<http://bit.ly/2TlteMD>

Commons adjournment debate: Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations

HC Deb 12 November 2018 | Volume 649 c150-

<http://bit.ly/2PZTivQ>

PQs

[Pigs: Animal Welfare](#)

Asked by: McCarthy, Kerry

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, how many and what proportion of sows are kept in (a)(i) outdoor and (ii) indoor farrowing systems and (b) farrowing crates; and if she will make a statement.

Answering member: George Eustice | Department: Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

The UK is ahead of most other pig producing countries in that an estimated 40% of breeding sows in the UK are kept outdoors and farrow freely. Of the 60% of sows kept in indoor group housed systems the majority will use farrowing crates, of which there are many different designs. I believe the aim should be for farrowing crates not to be necessary. It is important that we make progress towards a system which both safeguards the welfare of the sow as well as the piglets and also works commercially, and that we do so as quickly as possible so that crates can be consigned to history.

A new statutory welfare code for pigs was laid in Parliament on 9 September 2019 and includes guidance on farrowing to protect the welfare of both sows and piglets. The code will come into force shortly.

HC Deb 13 February 2020 | PQ 11510

[Livestock: Animal Welfare](#)

Asked by: Huq, Dr Rupa

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment she has made of the merits of banning the caging of farmed animals.

Answering member: Zac Goldsmith | Department: Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

The issue of cages for farmed animals is one in which the government is taking a close interest. We have already banned cages or close confinement systems where there is clear scientific evidence that they are detrimental to animal health and welfare. We banned the keeping of calves in veal crates in 1990, sixteen years before the rest of the EU. We banned the keeping of sows in close confinement stalls in the UK in 1999, and conventional battery cages for laying hens in 2012. I am pleased that the UK has by far the largest free range laying hen sector of any EU country, with over 50% of our hens kept in free range systems.

The government is actively looking into the use of cages and we will be considering the full range of options that are available for future reform.

HC Deb 05 September 2019 | PQ 284800

[Eggs: Imports](#)

Asked by: Farrelly, Paul

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what recent assessment he has made of the potential merits of a ban on the import of caged hen eggs.

Answering member: David Rutley | Department: Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

The Government shares the British public's high regard for animal welfare. In 2012 we banned the domestic use of battery cages for laying hens. Our current import requirements for eggs and for egg products will continue to apply when we leave the EU.

We are committed to further enhancing welfare standards once we leave the EU and there will be an opportunity to consider further our position towards imports of eggs and other products.

HC Deb 11 June 2019 | PQ 259050

[Poultry: Animal Welfare](#)

Asked by: Halfon, Robert

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps the Government is taking to encourage supermarkets to stop selling eggs from hens kept in enriched cages before 2025.

Answering member: David Rutley | Department: Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

I am aware that all major supermarkets have committed to stop selling eggs from hens kept in enriched cages by 2025. This is a voluntary initiative and as a result it is not necessary for the Government to take steps to help ensure they meet that target. The Government shares the public's high regard for animal welfare and the welfare of our farmed livestock in all systems is protected by comprehensive and robust legislation.

Consumers can make an informed choice as, under Commission Regulation (EC) 589/2008 laying down detailed rules as regards marketing standards for eggs, it is a requirement to include an indication of the farming method on the packs and the eggs themselves.

HC Deb 10 June 2019 | PQ 257736

[Game: Birds](#)

Asked by: Lavery, Ian

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, how many game birds are kept in barren cages; and what legal recourse is available in relation to people caught keeping game birds in those cages.

Answering member: David Rutley | Department: Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

The Government shares the public's high regard for animal welfare and the welfare of our farmed livestock is protected by comprehensive and robust legislation.

The welfare of gamebirds is protected by the Animal Welfare Act 2006 which makes it an offence to cause unnecessary suffering. This is backed up by the statutory Code of Practice for the Welfare of Gamebirds Reared for Sporting Purposes, which recommends that barren cages should not be used for breeding birds. Keepers are required by law to have access to, and be familiar with this code, which encourages the adoption of high standards of husbandry. Failure to observe the provisions of a code may also be used in support of a prosecution.

Whatever the system of production, the most important factor in determining animal welfare is good stockmanship and the correct application of husbandry standards. This reflects the advice of our expert body, the Farm Animal Welfare Committee.

Data on numbers of gamebirds kept in barren cages is not held centrally by Defra.

HC Deb 30 April 2019 | PQ 247714

[Game: Birds](#)**Asked by: McCarthy, Kerry**

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will commission research comparing the welfare of caged game birds with those that are not caged.

Answering member: David Rutley | Department: Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

Defra conducted research into gamebird welfare in different rearing systems. The 2010 to 2012 project AW1303 looked at whether cage-based breeding can meet the needs of gamebirds, and if not, to identify best practice. This research found that for pheasants and partridges, providing increased space does not necessarily equate with enhanced welfare.

Prior to this, Defra's advisory body, the Farm Animal Welfare Committee (FAWC), was tasked with considering all aspects of gamebird farming in order to inform future work in this area. This assessment included a range of traditional and more intensive methods of gamebird breeding and rearing, including: breeding partridges in cages; breeding pheasants in grass pens or raised cages; rearing partridges and pheasants in brooder huts with grass pens; and commercial broiler chicken-type sheds with outdoor runs.

In 2008 FAWC published an Opinion on the Welfare of Farmed Gamebirds, and its recommendations fed into Defra's current Code of Practice for the Welfare of Gamebirds Reared for Sporting Purposes:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/69379/pb13356-game-birds-100720.pdf

HC Deb 22 November 2018 | PQ 192785

[Rabbits: Animal Welfare](#)**Asked by: McCarthy, Kerry**

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if she will bring forward species-specific legislative proposals to (a) prohibit the use of barren cages for new rabbit farm developments and (b) make other provision for protecting the welfare of farmed rabbits.

Answering member: George Eustice | Department: Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

There are existing provisions which protect the welfare of rabbits kept for meat production. Whilst there is no specific EU-wide legislation for rabbits, any kept for meat production in cages or in other systems in this country are protected by the general provisions of the Animal Welfare Act 2006, which makes it an offence to cause suffering to an animal. The Welfare of Farmed Animals (England) Regulations 2007 specifically covers the welfare of rabbits kept for the production of food. In addition, the statutory welfare code for rabbits provides good

husbandry advice including recommendations for housing, feed, water and space allowances which should be regarded as absolute minimum.

HC Deb 20 January 2015 | PQ 221036

About the Library

The House of Commons Library research service provides MPs and their staff with the impartial briefing and evidence base they need to do their work in scrutinising Government, proposing legislation, and supporting constituents.

As well as providing MPs with a confidential service we publish open briefing papers, which are available on the Parliament website.

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in these publicly available research briefings is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware however that briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.

If you have any comments on our briefings please email papers@parliament.uk. Authors are available to discuss the content of this briefing only with Members and their staff.

If you have any general questions about the work of the House of Commons you can email hcinfo@parliament.uk.

Disclaimer

This information is provided to Members of Parliament in support of their parliamentary duties. It is a general briefing only and should not be relied on as a substitute for specific advice. The House of Commons or the author(s) shall not be liable for any errors or omissions, or for any loss or damage of any kind arising from its use, and may remove, vary or amend any information at any time without prior notice.

The House of Commons accepts no responsibility for any references or links to, or the content of, information maintained by third parties. This information is provided subject to the [conditions of the Open Parliament Licence](#).