

Cage free eggs



As part of our vision to be a positive force for change, we've produced a series of factsheets to help our customers better understand sustainability issues, and what we're doing about them.

Overview

There has been a growing demand for cage-free eggs in the UK following a petition set up by a 14-year-old girl to Tesco, asking them to stop selling caged eggs.

Tesco made a commitment to do so, which was shortly followed by more retailers, foodservice companies, manufacturers and other food businesses who recognised the need for better systems for laying hens and the rising demand from the public who were buying free range eggs.



What's the problem?

After World War 2 when food was scarce, food producers were encouraged to find ways to produce more food as quickly as possible. Egg farmers met this demand by increasing stocking densities, made possible by putting hens into cages which prevented injuries from crushing, aggression or panic.

This had the downside of impacting the hens' welfare, through restricting their natural behaviour and movement. In 2012 battery cages were banned. These held around 5 hens all with less space than a piece of A4 paper. With no clear guidance of what systems to move to, egg producers moved to enriched colony systems, which are still classed as caged systems, but with around 80 birds in each cage, 20% more room for each bird, a small perch, litter and a nest.

However this still didn't address the welfare issues facing laying hens in that they are unable to express their natural behaviour – there aren't enough perches for all birds, they're unable to form the natural hierarchies they need to be able to avoid aggression and bullying, and they're unable to wing flap or dust bathe.

Welfare organisations reviewed research of these systems and realising they are not meeting hens welfare requirements, began campaigning for these systems to also be banned.

Cage-free laying hen systems allow hens more room to roam and the ability to express their natural behaviours such as dust bathing, wing flapping and perching on different levels. This means the birds are less stressed and enjoy a better quality of life, areas which are important to consumers and also contribute to better quality egg production.

Our targets and plans

We're fully committed to the move towards cage-free eggs by 2025. This includes branded and own label shell and liquid eggs, and own brand products containing eggs as an ingredient.

We are working with suppliers to source cage free eggs, as well as speaking to customers to understand whether they would like to move to barn or free range eggs in the future.

What can you do?

If you are currently sourcing caged eggs, please speak with your account manager to discuss whether you would like to move to barn or free range eggs in the future.

Useful to know

Battery eggs:

These are eggs produced from hens kept within small cages, and are now illegal in the UK and EU.

Colony/enriched eggs:

These are still from caged hens, however the cages are larger and contain more birds, as well as having next boxes, perches and litter.

Barn eggs:

These are produced from hens that are free to roam throughout the barn. They may all be on one level, or more commonly have 'aviary systems' which allow birds to perch on multiple levels throughout the barn.

Free range eggs:

These have the same types of houses as barn eggs, but they are also able to go outside, which for our UK lion coded eggs is for a minimum of 8 hours a day. They also must have at least an acre for every 1000 hens.

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