

## End Cages for Farm Animals

### Key Information

- Despite the progress made on farm animal welfare in the UK in recent years, it is still the case that millions of animals are kept and reared in cage-based or confined farming systems.
- Caged systems can never completely allow an animal to express the full range of their natural behaviours.
- The RSPCA is calling for a ban on all cage based or confined farming systems.
- We would like to see the UK Government bring forward a consultation for the use of cages and close confinement systems in England.

### Enriched Cages

In 2012, the then UK Government adopted the EU Council Directive that took the landmark decision to end the use of conventional cages for egg laying hens. Despite this step forward for animal welfare, so-called 'enriched cages' were still permitted. Enriched cages provide just 9% more usable space per bird than conventional battery cages. They provide an unacceptably restrictive amount of space per bird, with usable space equivalent to a single sheet of A4 paper per bird. There are around 10 million laying hens in such cages in the UK. The RSPCA does not permit cages in its welfare standards, which are used by the RSPCA Assured scheme.

### Farrowing Crates

Pig farrowing crates are barred, often barren, metal crates within a pen for pregnant sows. Farrowing crates prevent the sow from turning around, with only a small amount of movement forwards and backwards permitted.

In the UK around 60% of sows (~205,680 sows) are placed in farrowing crates one week before they give birth and remain for the entire duration of nursing their piglets (4-5 weeks). A sow will give birth to 2-3 litters a year, meaning she will spend on average 10-15 weeks a year in a farrowing crate. This does not include 'foster sows' who remain longer to nurse any extra piglets. About 6 million pigs reared for slaughter are born each year in farrowing crates. The RSPCA does not permit farrowing crates under its welfare standards, which are used by the RSPCA Assured scheme.

## Public Concerns

There is public support for an end to the use of cages and confinement systems in farming. The RSPCA commissioned polling from Savanta in September 2023 which revealed that 84% of the British public oppose the use of cages for laying hens, and 78% of people oppose the use of farrowing crates. All leading UK supermarkets have committed to phase out the sale of eggs laid by hens in cages by the end of 2025. Farrowing crates are now banned in Norway, Sweden and Switzerland.

## RSPCA Assured

The RSPCA sets the animal welfare standards for RSPCA Assured, the UK's only higher welfare farm assurance and food labelling scheme. The use of cages, including enriched cages for hens and farrowing crates for sows, is not allowed on RSPCA Assured farms. Instead, laying hens may only be kept on free-range farms or in large barns where they are free to roam around and better able to perform natural behaviours like foraging, perching and dust bathing.

Sows on RSPCA Assured farms remain loose-housed at farrowing, either indoors in individual pens with more space to move about and material such as straw to root around in and build nests with, or outdoors in paddocks or runs with access to a dry, bedded, comfortable shelter. Plenty of straw in their housing helps cushion and protect their piglets, whilst also allowing the ability to express natural nesting behaviours. Sows living outside are provided with a dry, warm and comfortable shelter.

RSPCA Assured has over 3,000 members and currently accounts for 55% of the UK's laying hens and 30% of UK pigs. The continued success and increasing market share of RSPCA Assured (up from 31% to 55% of the eggs produced in the UK in the past 15 years) demonstrates that the public are willing to support cage-free and higher welfare production methods even if this sometimes does have an impact on cost. Major food businesses are also supporting the move to higher welfare. In addition to those with cage-free egg commitments mentioned above major retailers like McDonalds now use 100% RSPCA Assured pork as well as only free-range eggs, and RSPCA Assured products are stocked in supermarkets ranging from M&S and Sainsbury's to ALDI and LIDL.

## RSPCA's Position and Recommendations

- **The RSPCA is calling for an end to cage based or confined farming systems.**
- **We would like the UK Government to introduce a consultation on caged farm systems as soon as possible with a view to phase out their use in England.**