

Brussels, 28 April 2021

**Open Letter from Members of the European Parliament
to European Food Companies on their International Animal Welfare Policies**

To Whom It May Concern,

Over the past twenty-five years, the European Union and its member nations have increasingly worked to address the issue of the treatment of animals raised for food, enacting policies to prohibit certain industrial farming practices that caused severe, prolonged and preventable animal suffering.

A central focus in this area for the EU and certain member nations has been ending the use of cages and crates that restrict animals from engaging in even the most basic natural behaviours such as turning around, walking and fully spreading their limbs. Through Council Directives 2008/119/EC, 2008/120/EC and 1999/74/EC, the EU prohibited the use of caged confinement for veal calves; restricted the use of gestation crates for mother sows; and prohibited the use of “battery cages” for egg-laying hens. Several individual member nations as well as other European nations not represented in the EU – including Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Norway and Sweden – have enacted even stronger legislation, such as a complete ban on the caged confinement of egg laying hens and/or a complete ban on the individual confinement of breeding pigs.

In regards to egg-laying hens, in addition to the serious animal welfare problems caused by caged confinement, the EU has looked extensively at the human health risks caused by such

practices. An exhaustive 2007 report by the European Food Safety Authority's Task Force on Zoonoses, which examined data from over 5,000 laying houses across 25 countries, found that farms which confined hens in cages had dramatically higher risks of certain strains of salmonella¹. Similarly, a 2019 report by the European Food Safety Authority's Panel on Biological Hazards concluded that the shift toward cage-free eggs in Europe has successfully resulted in lower rates of salmonella contamination on farms and lower rates of salmonella poisoning in customers².

The majority of eggs produced in the EU are now produced in cage-free or free-range systems, and the percentage of eggs produced in such systems has been increasing significantly year over year³. This shift has generated strong improvements in animal welfare and better protection of public health. The shift has been driven in part by legislative policy, in part by increasing consumer concern, and also in significant part by action on the part of leading food companies.

Over 1,000 leading European food companies have set a timeline for using only cage-free or free-range eggs in their operations, with many having already completed the switch⁴. In addition to national and pan-European commitments on the issue, an increasing number of global food companies have set a timeline for using only cage-free eggs in their operations worldwide – including across Asia, the Middle East, Africa and Latin America. Companies that have made global cage-free egg commitments include top retailers such as Marks&Spencer, ALDI, LIDL and METRO; top restaurant and café brands such as Pret A Manger, Costa Coffee and Burger King; top packaged foods brands such as Unilever, Nestle, Danone and Mondelez; top food service companies such as Compass Group, Sodexo, Aramark

¹ <https://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/efsajournal/pub/rn-97>

² <https://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/efsajournal/pub/5596>

³ https://ieep.eu/uploads/articles/attachments/5acf278b-c1b1-4e88-a14e-6c5a4f04257a/Transitioning%20towards%20cage-free%20farming%20in%20the%20EU_Final%20report_October_web.pdf?v=63769792427

⁴ <https://chickenwatch.org/progress-tracker>

and Elior Group; and top hospitality companies such as InterContinental, Accor, Wyndham and Marriott. While we are hoping for future improvements ensuring full protection of animal rights, this alone must be considered as a promising step towards reaching this objective.

How important moving to cage-free solutions is we could see on 15th April, when the hearing on the “End the Cage Age” ECI was held in the PETI committee. Nearly 1.4 million citizens from all the UE countries and UK supported this crucial initiative calling for a ban of cage farming in EU. This clearly shows that the timing is right to push for businesses to stop selling and using eggs from cage systems but it is also a sign for companies that consumers’ needs are changing and they need to respond to that.

In that spirit, we are calling on those European companies that have not yet set a public timeline for ending the use of caged eggs in their international supply chain to follow suit. We believe it is imperative that companies that operate globally extend the same animal welfare and food safety polices they practice in Europe to their operations abroad. The duty for food companies to behave responsibly toward animals and toward consumers does not end at the borders of the continent.

For European food companies to use in their supply chains in Asia, the Middle East or elsewhere practices that are so cruel and unsafe as to be illegal in the E.U. – and practices that in many cases violate the companies’ own stated animal welfare policies – is an abdication of corporate social responsibility and a transgression of what customers and the public expect of them. In addition, given the increased health risks of eggs from caged hens, inaction on this issue puts international customers at increased risk of illness and hospitalization. Failing to provide Asian, Middle Eastern, African or Latin American consumers the same level of food safety and food quality provided to European consumers can rightly be viewed as discriminatory.

We urge all globally-operating European food companies that have not yet done so to set a public timeline for ending the sale of caged eggs in their international supply chains — bringing animal welfare and food safety standards abroad into accord with those standards that are both legally mandated and societally expected at home.

Signed,

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Co-signatories:

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