



NEWS RELEASE

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Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall urges Defra not to reverse welfare standards

Despite sales of higher welfare chicken increasing by 42%, the Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) is planning to lower UK standards of stocking density.

River Cottage Chef Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall, who launched the Chicken Out! campaign in 2007, responded to the proposed legislation: "The UK shopper's concern about the welfare conditions that their food comes from has never been higher.

I ask Defra to listen to the public and not reverse the law to recommend the maximum of 18-19 chickens per square metre, or worse. These birds suffer in incredibly cramped conditions in order for us to eat low price chicken.

Consumers, especially those on tight budgets, rely on the Government to ensure that the food they have access to is of an acceptable ethical standard. The proposal to reduce welfare standards is not only wrong but ignores this increasing public opinion and most importantly, ignores public interest."

Compassion in World Farming, who coordinate the Chicken Out! Campaign with Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall, say that this EU law, which comes into force in 2010, "will effectively give the green light to further intensification of chicken farming."

Eloise Shavelar, Compassion's Chicken Out! Campaign Co-ordinator said: "The proposed legislation would mean a huge step backwards for UK poultry welfare. With many major retailers reacting to consumer supported campaigns and with over 260 MPs having signed a Parliamentary motion for improved standards, the government must acknowledge the importance of this issue and respond to the public pressure."

To come in line with the EU, Defra is planning to abandon its previous recommended maximum density of 34kg/m² (15-17 chickens per square metre) and instead increase the maximum permitted density to either 39kg/m² (18-19 chickens per square metre) or even up to 42kg/m² (19-21 chickens per square metre).

Defra will be finalising and publishing the UK law on meat chickens in September.

URGENT ACTION NEEDED!

Urgent support is needed to convince the UK Government not to lower chicken welfare standards. We must ensure that higher standards of welfare are written into UK law.

- [**CONTACT THE ANIMAL WELFARE MINISTER**](#)

- **JOIN THE CHICKEN OUT! CAMPAIGN**

The Chicken Out! team is visiting the most influential towns and cities in the UK to persuade Britain to opt for higher welfare quality, such as RSPCA Freedom Food, as the minimum standard when buying chicken.

The 39 day intensively farmed chicken blog launched on 10th August 2009 at www.chickenout.tv

-Ends-

For further information or to arrange interviews contact Rebecca Deeny on 01483 521973 or 07771 926005 or email rebecca@ciwf.org

Notes to the editor

About the Chicken Out! campaign

The Chicken Out! campaign is led by Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall in association with Compassion in World Farming. Hugh first took on the supermarkets, the poultry industry and consumers in 2008, to try to change the UK's relationship with its favourite meat forever.

In the UK 784.4 million meat chickens were slaughtered in 2008 (Defra stats). It is estimated that around 90% of chickens in the UK are reared in industrial systems. Standard chickens are grown from newly hatched chick to oven-ready bird in just 39 days. These birds, reared in the intensive systems, are bred to increase weight rapidly and at least 25% of them suffer from lameness and discomfort related to their excessive growth rates. Millions of broiler chickens die from heart failure in these sheds.

The Chicken Out! campaign aims to highlight the unacceptable practice of the intensive factory farming of chickens and encourage consumers to choose higher welfare standards when buying chicken.