

25 November 2009

DEFRA TO CUT KEY ANIMAL WELFARE REFORM

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) is poised to drop one of Labour's key animal welfare reforms. In 2002 Defra banned the beak trimming of laying hens; the ban is due to come into force on 1st January 2011. Defra has now been advised to repeal the ban.

The Government advisory body, the Farm Animal Welfare Council (FAWC), has recommended the ban on beak trimming should be postponed until an unnamed date. Compassion argues that the science today is as strong as in 2002 and the eight years the industry were given to implement the ban was sufficient. Compassion in World Farming is urging Defra to uphold the ban on beak trimming and support alternative systems that avoid this mutilation.

Beak trimming or 'debeaking' involves cutting off around a third of a chicken's beak with a red-hot blade or an infra-red beam. This painful mutilation is used to prevent feather pecking and cannibalism.

Compassion in World Farming has released a new report that reviews the science research behind the ban on beak trimming. The report, *Controlling Feather Pecking & Cannibalism in Laying Hens Without Beak Trimming*, concludes that the correct way to prevent feather pecking and cannibalism is not to beak the hens, but to keep them in good conditions and to select for birds that are less prone to feather pecking and cannibalism.

Peter Stevenson, Chief Policy Advisor at Compassion in World Farming said "The ban gave farmers a very generous eight year phase out period. Egg producers, however, have been slow to adapt their methods of production. It is totally unacceptable for them to now say they need more time. A number of farmers have shown that it is possible to avoid feather pecking without resorting to beak trimming."

85% of Waitrose eggs come from non-beak-trimmed birds. Other farmers can take example from Waitrose's suppliers in how to manage their farms without beak-trimming. UK farmers can also find examples of good practice in a number of countries where beak trimming is not carried out. These include Finland, Sweden, Norway and Switzerland (only 5% trimmed).

Peter Stevenson adds "This is the fourth time in as many months that the Government has shown contempt for animal welfare. In August Defra's draft vision for the future of food policy treated animal welfare as a marginal issue. Defra and the Department of Health have recently published draft criteria for the *Healthier Food Mark* (HFM) which is designed to raise health and sustainability standards in public sector catering. The HFM claims to promote high animal welfare standards but allows caterers to use battery eggs even though this system will be illegal EU-wide from 2012. New regulations are likely to allow meat chickens to continue to be factory farmed. And now the ban on beak trimming is likely to be dropped.

ENDS

Notes to editors:

To arrange an interview or for more information please contact Rebecca Deeny at Compassion in World Farming on 01483 521973 / 07771 926005 or email rebecca@ciwf.org

Download a copy of the report **Controlling Feather Pecking and Cannibalism without Beak Trimming**: http://www.ciwf.org.uk/feather_pecking_report

About Compassion in World Farming:

Compassion in World Farming is based in the UK and has representatives in Germany, Italy, France, The Netherlands, China, South Africa and Australia. Compassion co-ordinates a network of 34 animal welfare groups in 27 European countries.

In line with other UK animal welfare charities, Compassion's income is primarily derived from voluntary donations and gifts from its supporter file. Compassion receives no government funding.

More about Compassion:

<http://www.ciwf.org>