

PRESS RELEASE

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US SALMONELLA OUTBREAK IN EGGS

BATTERY CAGE FARMS SIX TIMES MORE LIKELY TO HARBOUR SALMONELLA

Half a billion eggs are being recalled in the USA as part of an investigation into an outbreak of Salmonella. Two farms in the State of Iowa are reportedly involved in the recall – Wright County Egg and Hillandale Farms, after tests proved positive for the food poisoning bug. Although reports are not clear about the exact farming method used, battery cage farms dominate US egg production.

A number of large-scale studies of UK laying hen flocks have shown that the risk of Salmonella is significantly lower in non-caged birds than in caged birds. Hens kept in battery cages are often at greater risk of contamination with Salmonella. Laying hens in cage systems are tightly packed and experience greater levels of stress which can increase the spread of disease and lower immunity. Free-range eggs have been shown to have greater resistance to penetration with bacteria, such as Salmonella.

A recently published study by the Veterinary Record* found that 25% of battery cage farms in Britain tested positive for Salmonella, compared with 7% of free range and 5% organic farms. Overall, cage farms were six times more likely to harbour the dangerous strain of Salmonella (S Enteritidis) than non-cage systems.

The study also showed that despite cleaning and disinfection, Salmonella (including S Enteritidis) was still present in most of the cage houses when the next flock was introduced causing potentially an even larger problem. Another major factor in the presence or absence of Salmonella at farm level is flock size, with larger farms “consistently associated with an increased risk of infection” according to the study.

Philip Lybery, Chief Executive of the world’s leading animal welfare charity, Compassion In World Farming, said: “The industrialisation of egg production has meant that millions of hens are confined to cruel restrictive cages rather than being free to roam. Not only is this cruel, but it also poses a serious risk to public health. It is time to end the use of all cages for laying hens in Europe, the USA and elsewhere.”

Reference: L.C. Snow, R.H. Davies, K.H. Christiansen, J.J. Carrique-Mas, A.J.C. Cook, S.J. Evans, 2010. Investigation of risk factors for Salmonella in commercial egg-laying farms in Great Britain, 2004-2005. Veterinary Record, 166: 579-586 (May 8th, 2010).

*(Snow et. al., 2010)

NOTE TO EDITORS:

Philip Lymbery, Chief Executive of Compassion in World Farming is available for interview on 07584 392685 (outside office hours) or 01483 521992 (inside office hours).

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- In total, the UK alone consumes over 29 million eggs per day.
- It is estimated that over 60% of the world's eggs are produced in industrial systems, mostly using battery cages.
- The cages usually have a sloping wire mesh floor and are kept in rows stacked in several tiers. Each unit holds thousands of hens this way. They are typically kept in closed sheds that are artificially lit and ventilated.
- Caged hens may never experience natural light or fresh air and do not leave their cages until they are taken for slaughter.
- Caged hens have as little room as an A4 piece of paper each.
- Compassion in World Farming campaigns peacefully to end cruel factory farming practices. We believe that farm animals should not and need not suffer.

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