



## Frequently Asked Questions: *Laying hens*

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- How much did it cost Compassion to produce the (Pre-roll video) ad?
- [I want to own chickens, please give me some advice](#)



## **BEAK TRIMMING & FEATHER PECKING**

### **What is feather-pecking?**

Feather-pecking can be a serious behavioural problem occurring both in caged birds and those kept in non-cage systems. Studies strongly suggest that feather-pecking is redirected ground pecking behaviour associated with foraging. Hens showing this abnormal behaviour misdirect their normal foraging pecks towards flock mates. This can lead to their victims suffering damage to plumage, and in severe cases, even wounding. Injured birds are at particular risk as wounds can be attractive targets for the attentions of other hens, and can result in their being pecked to death. Severe feather pecking can therefore result in cannibalism.

### **Why are chicks' beaks trimmed?**

Beak-trimming is carried out to prevent feather-pecking and cannibalism. However, it is treating a symptom rather than dealing with the underlying motivational cause of feather-pecking which is stocking birds at high densities in barren environments where they have no opportunity to perform natural behaviours such as foraging or dust-bathing.

### **Does beak trimming cause suffering?**

The consequences of beak trimming for welfare include trauma during the procedure, pain due to tissue damage and nerve injury, loss of normal function due to reduced ability to sense materials with the beak, and loss of integrity of a living animal.

Some have suggested that beak-trimming is no more painful than the cutting of nails in humans. This is a false analogy. Scientific evidence shows that beak-trimming causes pain at the time of the operation, and can also cause a lasting, chronic pain.

### **Is beak trimming necessary?**

Scientific research shows that the correct way to prevent these problems is not to beak trim the birds, but to keep them in good environmental/housing conditions – in particular to provide opportunities for them to forage and ground-peck - and to breed select birds that are less prone to feather pecking and cannibalism.

There is ample practical experience to draw on as numerous farmers have successfully phased out beak-trimming. Beak-trimming was largely phased out in Austria in 2001-2005 and this was accompanied by a reduction in the incidence of injurious feather-pecking.

### **Are chicks' beaks really cut with scissors?**

No. Chicks' beaks are trimmed either with a hot blade (although this method is now banned in the UK) or an infra-red beam.

### **Does infra-red beak trimming cause less suffering than hot blade?**

In the past, beak trimming has been carried out with a hot blade. More recently, another method has been developed which involves focusing a high intensity infra-red beam at the tip of the beak, causing the tip to be lost after 10-21 days.

Some argue that the use of infra-red beak trimming should be permitted as research commissioned by Defra did not find evidence of chronic (long term) pain. In contrast to this, however, another recent study found that infra-red trimming caused traumatic neuromas that lasted into adulthood. These are swollen entangled nerve masses which have been implicated in long term pain after beak-trimming.

In addition, infra-red trimming causes concerns because of:

- trauma to the bird during the procedure; the chicks are suspended by the neck on a moving carousel while the infra-red beam is applied
- loss of a sensory tool. The beak is a key sensory organ for hens
- loss of integrity of a living animal by the removal of part of its body.

### **I buy free-range eggs. Does this mean that these hens haven't had their beaks trimmed?**

No, but in the UK a number of farms avoid beak-trimming their egg-laying flocks. Eggs from the



Columbian Blacktail breed are marketed by Waitrose as a higher welfare quality product, either free-range or organic. More than 85% of these hens are not beak-trimmed. In Sweden all laying hens have intact beaks as it is against the law to beak trim.

### **I buy organic eggs. Does this mean that these hens haven't had their beaks trimmed?**

Soil Association bans all beak-trimming, but the practice of other organic labels varies. Organic EU law states that beak-trimming must not be used unless there is a problem within the flock, so it is not a routine practice, but is permitted under EU-organic rules. It is banned in China, Argentina and Australia under organic rules.

## **BATTERY CAGES**

### **I thought there were five hens in a barren battery cage – your video shows six?**

In Europe, there were/are typically 4 or 5 hens in one barren cage. However, in some other countries (such as the USA), the space allowance per hen is often even less, and six or even more birds may be kept in one cage.

### **I thought barren battery cages had been banned – your advert says that half of all hens are still in these cages?**

A ban on barren battery cages came into force across the European Union on 1 January 2012. In many other parts of the world barren cages are still legal and widely used. As a result, an estimated 3 billion hens are still living in these cages worldwide.

### **How many hens were still in cages in the EU on January 1st 2012?**

Estimates showed that at least 50 million hens were still in the illegal barren battery cages on January 1st. In addition at least 138 million would be living in enriched cage systems. Official E. Commission figures stated that non-compliance was running at around 50 million (April 2012). Industry contacts suggest the real figure was likely to be much higher and closer 84 million.

### **How many countries were not ready on time for the ban and still have hens in the cages?**

14 countries are in some way non-compliant with the ban (April 2012). These include Italy, Spain, France and Poland. Others such as the UK and Germany were expected to be fully compliant (but for a few weeks after 1<sup>st</sup> January 2012 there were, in fact, around 500,000 hens in illegal cages in the UK. These were dealt with quickly and the UK became fully compliant by February 2012).

### **How did Compassion respond?**

As long as there are nations still not compliant it is important to keep up the pressure to ensure there are no further delays. A number of nations wanted to see the Egg Marketing Regulation changed to allow them to sell eggs from hens kept in illegal cages. We opposed this – they have had, after all, 12 years to comply with the conventional cage ban.

### **Why are you celebrating when so many hens will still be in barren battery cages and enriched caged systems too?**

The ban on the barren battery cage – the worst form of cage for hens – is a tremendous step forward for animal welfare, brought about by many years of hard work and campaigning, and we think it is right to recognise this leap and thank everyone who has helped keep up the pressure. However we agree that hens should not have to live their lives in cages. We will continue to campaign on behalf of all of these hens and will of course continue to advocate and work towards the use of non-caged systems as the best systems of production.

### **Is your campaign continuing after the ban has come in to force?**

Yes, there are at least 48 million and maybe as many as 84 million hens in the EU still suffering in these cages after the ban came into force, and a further 138 million in enriched cage systems. We will carry on the campaign for the hens.



## **What are you doing about barren battery cages outside Europe?**

When the EU takes action on animal welfare, other countries often follow. At the moment we are therefore focusing our limited resources on ensuring that the whole of the EU is compliant with the ban on barren cages. Only then will we be able to use this example to show other countries that barren cages aren't just cruel but are also unnecessary. However, the good news is that Turkey has already announced plans to outlaw barren cages by 2015 – showing the far-reaching impacts that our long-term campaigning can have.

## **INVESTIGATIONS**

### **What investigations are you doing in Europe?**

Right now, we're focusing on exposing the sale of illegal eggs. To do this, our partners in non-compliant countries are on the ground checking codes on eggs to report back to the commission to identify their source and establish whether they are from barren battery systems, i.e. non-complaint farms.

## **AVIAN INFLUENZA**

### **What is "bird 'flu"?**

"Bird 'flu" or avian influenza is a form of influenza virus that affects birds. It is an infectious disease that exists worldwide and occurs naturally among wild birds. There are many types of bird 'flu. The virus currently causing concern is the "highly pathogenic" Asian strain of the H5N1 virus. H5N1 is deadly to birds and can cause disease and even death in humans.

However, the disease cannot pass easily from person to person. Almost all humans that have been infected have been poultry workers who had direct contact with birds.

The disease can be carried by migratory wild birds, but the concern is that they can pass it on to domestic poultry, which are far more susceptible to the disease.

In poultry, bird flu affects the respiratory tract and also invades multiple organs and tissues causing massive internal bleeding. Infected birds release the influenza virus in their faeces, saliva and nasal secretions. Domesticated birds may become infected with bird 'flu through direct contact with infected wild birds, infected poultry, or through contact with contaminated excretions, surfaces (such as dirt or cages) or materials (such as feed or water).

### **What are the risks to animal welfare?**

Left unchecked, bird 'flu has the potential to cause disease and suffering to millions of wild and domesticated birds.

However, mass culling situations risk severe suffering for thousands of birds. Previous emergency disease management situations have highlighted serious animal welfare concerns. The 2001 Foot and Mouth outbreak in the UK saw some of the best animal welfare legislation in the world being ignored with many reports of animals not being properly slaughtered and surviving for long periods in great pain and distress.

Confinement of free-range flocks raises welfare concerns. If plans are announced to bring free range and organic poultry indoors to help tackle an outbreak, CIWF believes this should be carried out in response to a real and substantial local risk and should last only as long as this real risk is present. Birds moved indoors should be provided with enrichment to promote foraging and reduce feather pecking.

Meanwhile, deep concerns remain about the welfare of animals kept in the crowded and barren conditions of intensive systems.

### **Surely risks to human health outweigh concerns for animal welfare?**

Concern for human health and safety must be kept a priority. However, birds are recognised to be



sentient beings, capable of feeling pain and suffering. These birds are being kept in unnatural environments in intensive farming systems to produce food for human consumption. It is our responsibility to ensure that the animals in our care are treated humanely. CIWF is calling on authorities to ensure that any disease management efforts protect both human and animal welfare. Any necessary cull of birds should be swift, efficient and above all humane to prevent the spread of the virus.

### **Why do we need to cull animals?**

The most effective way of preventing the spread of bird 'flu is by killing birds that are infected or at risk of being infected. This also prevents the prolonged suffering of the birds that would be caused if the disease were allowed to run its natural course.

### **How should the infected animals be culled?**

Inert gasses often provide a more humane means of killing birds as the gas cannot be detected by the animals before they become unconscious and, if the gas is maintained at an appropriate concentration, birds will not regain consciousness before they die.

However in emergency situations the government can allow 'ventilation shutdown' as a method of culling poultry in an outbreak of avian influenza. This emergency procedure involves sealing poultry sheds, shutting down the ventilation system and leaving the birds to die slowly through oxygen depletion, overheating and the effects of avian influenza. Ventilation shutdown is not recognised as a humane method for disease control by the OIE (World Animal Health Organization) and European Union humane slaughter guidelines. By failing to ensure immediate unconsciousness this method appears to breach internationally agreed guidelines. It also fails to avoid anxiety, pain, distress and suffering.

CIWF asks authorities to ensure that any necessary cull of birds should be swift, efficient and above all humane.

### **Does intensive farming increase the risk of disease outbreak?**

Intensive commercial farms are likely to be breeding grounds for highly virulent influenza viruses. According to Professor John Oxford of London Queen Mary's, poultry kept in these systems are likely to be less able to resist infectious diseases. This occurs for a number of reasons - once an influenza virus invades a commercial poultry farm, it has a large population of susceptible poultry at its mercy. Avian influenza viruses lack 'proof-reading' mechanisms and are therefore unable to repair errors that occur during replication - this means that the virus continuously accumulates a large number of mutations as it reproduces. With more animals in a confined space, changes in the virus can occur faster, possibly resulting overtime in the emergence of a highly virulent strain of virus, such as H5N1.

In intensive production systems, stocking densities are very high - between 11 and 25 birds per square metre in the EU - and the animals are packed together in a closed environment. The chronic stress to which the birds are subjected as a consequence of their living conditions is likely to cause immune-suppression, making individuals more susceptible to disease. When we add to this the fact that selective breeding has essentially produced an almost completely uniform poultry population that has weakened immunity to infection, the overall result is that the virus can spread, amplify and mutate very easily within an intensive commercial flock. However, free range farms are also susceptible to the virus and while the spread may take longer within the flock, the virus is still able to affect free range and organic birds.

## **MISCELLANEOUS**

### **I've tried to fold the origami hen and I can't follow the instructions**

There is a 'how to' video on the same web page ([origamihen.org](http://origamihen.org)) that you might like to watch. Otherwise, you can take action online instead of sending the hen. Again, a link to the online action is on the same page.

### **How much did it cost Compassion to produce the (Pre-roll video) advert?**

Nothing – an agency produced the advert for us free of charge. We are, however, paying to display the advert online (at a cost of 1.5p per time the ad is shown). We believe this advertising is worth this investment because of the new supporters that it will encourage to join Compassion, and because of the awareness that the adverts are raising of both Compassion and the issue of barren battery cages.



## **I want to own chickens, please give me some advice?**

We can't provide practical answers, please visit the British Hen Welfare Trust. However for a hen to feel and safe and be able to express all her behaviours:

- They are social animals and they need company of other hens
- They need a large hut which includes:
  - High perches so they can feel safe at night
  - Nests with nesting material to lay their eggs in
  - Dust on the floor to dust-bathe
  - Doesn't get too hot or too cold
- They need access to an outdoor area which
  - Gives them a large area over which they can forage for food (or is moveable so that they get moved to a new area daily)
  - Includes cover from trees, bushes etc in which they will feel safe to roam – they are forest birds and need access to cover outside as well as the sun
  - Contains vegetation to scratch and eat
  - In which they can dust-bathe
  - Is protected from any predators

All of this in addition to good food, water etc for which advice can be provided elsewhere.

Images courtesy of istockphoto and Compassion in World Farming.

