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Intensive rabbit farm planned for Gnosall

Leading farm animal welfare organisation Compassion in World Farming has objected to plans to build an intensive rabbit farm near Gnosall, Staffordshire.

If given the green light the plans would see 40 breeding does kept in small cages for most of their lives, giving birth to as many as six litters per year – producing thousands of rabbits annually. The applicant states that these rabbits would then be used for meat, fur, or even sold as pets.

Philip Lymbery, Compassion's CEO, said: *"Cages confine animals and thwart the natural behaviours which are so important for their well-being. Intensively farmed rabbits are confined to tiny, barren cages, unable to hop, skip or jump. Farming animals in cages is cruel and outdated, and must be stopped."*

It is believed that the farm would be the first caged rabbit farm of this scale in the UK. Intensive rabbit farms where rabbits are kept in cages are common in Europe, with 320 million rabbits farmed in cages across Europe every year.

The application notes that the cages will be made of wire, and stacked three cages high. It is not clear if the cages will have solid floors, or be formed of wire, which would cause untold pain to the feet of the rabbits and result in the droppings from rabbits in the higher cages falling on those in cages below them.

In the UK, fur farming is illegal if it is the primary purpose of the business, but is legal if the fur is produced as a by-product. Yet, according to the business plan written by the applicant, the sale of fur from the rabbits will form a substantial part of the overall farm income.

Compassion in World Farming has urged the farmer submitting the plans to consider higher-welfare systems instead, and warned that a ban on farming rabbits in cages could be on the horizon, which would be a significant risk factor for the business.

There are a number of other critical concerns with this application – odour from waste, the lack of an Environmental Impact Assessment, and no mention of how far rabbits will have to travel to slaughter – but most importantly, it would represent a major backward step for rabbit welfare in the UK.

ENDS

Notes to Editors:

The planning application reference is: Planning Application 16/23992/FUL

For more information or to interview a spokesperson, please contact Hannah Yates:
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Compassion in World Farming was founded in 1967 by a British dairy farmer who became horrified at the development of intensive factory farming. Today Compassion is the leading farm animal welfare organisation dedicated to ending factory farming and achieving humane and sustainable food. With headquarters in the UK, we have offices across Europe in the US, China and South Africa.

To find out more about Compassion in World Farming visit: www.ciwf.org