

WRITTEN QUESTION E-4137/08

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to the Commission

Subject: Prohibition of rearing laying hens in unenriched cages from 1 January 2012

Council Directive 1999/74/EC¹ of 19 July 1999 laying down minimum standards for the protection of laying hens states that Member States shall ensure that rearing of laying hens in unenriched cages is prohibited with effect from 1 January 2012. In its report that was published on 8 January 2008 the European Commission concluded that animal welfare is a core value to European citizens and that they are particularly concerned about the welfare of laying hens. Based on the scientific studies that are available, the Commission recommends not to amend the current provisions of the Directive (including the deadline for the ban on unenriched cages). As the implementation and enforcement of the Directive is of great importance to the welfare of European laying hens the following questions arise.

1. Can the Commission confirm that currently still close to 70%² of the laying hens that are commercially kept in the EU are housed in unenriched cages, and does the Commission believe that it will be physically and economically feasible for the farmers concerned to change to new husbandry systems such as enriched cages, barn, free range or organic systems before 1 January 2012?
2. What action does the Commission plan to take in order to accelerate the change towards farming systems other than unenriched cages?
3. Does the Commission agree that if any unenriched cages were to be in operation after 1 January 2012 this would mean great injustice to all the farmers who already invested in systems other than unenriched cages or who will do so between now and 1 January 2012?
4. What action is the Commission planning to take after 1 January 2012 in order to ensure that no eggs are produced in unenriched cages?
5. What action does the Commission intend to take in order to restrict the import of eggs and egg products produced in unenriched cages from outside the EU (often with less surface per hen than the current European standards), in particular after 1 January 2012?

¹ OJ L 203, 3.8.1999, p. 53.

² See European Commission website <http://circa.europa.eu/>