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**David Rutley MP**  
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for Food and Animal Welfare

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Sir Mark Hendrick MP  
House of Commons  
London  
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11 June 2019

14 JUN 2019

19 JUN 2019

Dear Sir Mark,

Thank you for your email of 23 May to the Secretary of State on behalf of a number of your constituents, about the petition 'End the Cage Age'. I am responding as the Minister responsible for this policy area.

I understand your concerns on this matter, however I am proud that the UK has some of the highest standards of animal welfare in the world. The welfare of our farmed livestock in all systems is protected by comprehensive and robust legislation. This is backed up by statutory species specific welfare codes, which encourage high standards of husbandry and which keepers are required by law to have access to and be familiar with. Defra's Animal and Plant Health Agency inspectors and local authorities conduct inspections on farms to check that the animal welfare standards are being met.

Whatever the system of production, the most important factor in determining animal welfare is good stockmanship and the correct application of husbandry standards. This reflects the advice of our expert body, the Farm Animal Welfare Committee.

We have already banned cages or close confinement systems where there is clear scientific evidence that they are detrimental to animal health and welfare. For example, we banned the keeping of calves in veal crates in 1990, the keeping of sows in close confinement stalls in the UK in 1999, and the use of conventional ('battery') cages for laying hens in 2012.

The new statutory Code of Practice for the Welfare of Laying Hens and Pullets, which came into force last year, provides improved and up-to-date guidance on welfare legislation and reflects the latest scientific and veterinary advice. I am aware that all major supermarkets have said they will stop selling eggs from hens kept in enriched cages by 2025.

On pig welfare, the aim is to get to a point where traditional farrowing crates are obsolete and where any new system protects the welfare of the sow, as well as her piglets. As I understand it, important steps have been made on the use of free farrowing systems, but more advances are needed before compulsory replacement of farrowing crates can be recommended.

I can assure you that the Government shares the public's high regard for animal welfare and we are committed to making the UK a world leader in protection of animals as we leave the EU. Our regulatory system will offer the same level of assurance of animal welfare as it does now and we are actively exploring options for strengthening the UK system moving forward.

There are plans to increase maximum penalties for animal cruelty from six months' to five years' imprisonment and statutory welfare codes are being updated. These codes strengthen guidance on how to meet the needs of livestock animals and enhance their welfare.

Thank you once again for taking the time to contact the Secretary of State about this important issue.

With best wishes,

Yours sincerely,



David Rutley MP

Signed electronically to avoid delay