

Brussels, 26 September 2008

Egg farmers urged to act now after EU presidency says no to delaying battery cages ban

Eurogroup for Animals is calling on producers to work towards replacing their conventional battery cages for laying hens as soon as possible after the French presidency stated it would oppose any proposals to delay the 2012 ban. Michel Barnier, French minister of agriculture, made the statement during a meeting of the European Parliament's Intergroup on the Welfare and Conservation of Animals in Brussels.

The minister said: "I would not like us to go back on that date. I would not like to see it postponed. That is the Council position, that battery farming should cease on that day."

His comments have been welcomed by Eurogroup as this is the first time France has clarified its position regarding a possible delay. Producers have put pressure on the Commission to delay the implementation and some have stopped investing in alternatives systems.

Sonja Van Tichelen, director of Eurogroup for Animals, said: "There is no longer an excuse not to be working on replacing the conventional cages. France has clearly stated that it is against any delays of the ban.

"They have had almost nine years to prepare and only have three years left to make the necessary changes. It is now time to act and stop complaining that there is not sufficient time left."

Under the conventional battery system, each hen has the equivalent of less than one sheet of A4 paper in floor space. As it causes chickens much suffering, the EU agreed to phase out the practice by 1 January 2012.

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For more information or to receive a copy of the annual report call Steven Blaakman, senior press officer at Eurogroup, on 0032 (0)27400823 or email him on s.blaakman@eurogroupforanimals.org. Outside office hours please call 0032 (0)475 731066.

Notes:

- Eurogroup for Animals represents animal welfare organisations in nearly each of the European member states. Since it was launched in 1980, the organisation has succeeded in encouraging the European Union to adopt higher legal standards of animal protection. For more information about Eurogroup, visit www.eurogroupforanimals.org.
- The battery cage system prevents the animal from fulfilling basic movements such spreading its wings and turning around. There is also no opportunity for the animal to perch or to dust bathe. The close confinement often leads to increased aggression.
- Viable alternatives to the battery cage system have always existed. Barn systems, while confining the animals indoors, allow them to move freely, to perch, and dust bathe. Free-range systems permit a similar freedom of movement but with the ability to go outside into the fresh air.