

Northern Ireland Egg Production Industry Under Threat

April 2010



Egg production in Northern Ireland is an important industry. It is facing a crisis as a result of an EU Directive which will ban the traditional cage system and enforce the use of enriched cages by 1 January 2012.

The industry in Northern Ireland is committed to exploring any method to improve animal welfare, however, the huge cost of changing the cage system in such a short period of time may prove too much to bear for many producers.

New colony systems will provide each bird with a floor area of 750cm², perches plus specialised litter areas and nesting boxes will be provided. The new cages will also have a greater height requirement with 80% of available floor area being at least 45cm high.

Implementing the new regulations will come at a great cost. It is estimated that to convert a deep litter unit currently housing 30,000 birds into one fully equipped with a colony system, in tandem with a conveyor belt of manure handling, could cost up to £420,000. A new purpose built unit will require expenditure in the region of £15-£25 per bird. Added to this is the fact that conversions will take about 6 months to complete, so producers need to factor in how they will maintain supply to their existing customers whilst work is ongoing. A new build, on the other hand, will require planning permission. It may well take up to 18 months to get from the design stage to completion. Investment in either option may also bring with it the requirement for a purpose built manure stores which may have to comply with IPPC Regulations.

Unlike their counterparts in the Republic of Ireland, who are receiving a €16 million grant to meet the new EU system of enriched cages, farmers in Northern Ireland will not receive such grants and must bear the cost themselves. The situation is further compounded by the fact that after 1 January 2012 it will still be lawful to import battery farmed eggs from outside of the EU which will increase competition faced by local producers.

The Northern Ireland egg production industry must take steps to implement enriched cages and must act now to seek professional advice on compliance with all necessary planning and environmental laws.

Please note: The content of this article is for information purposes only and further advice should be sought from a professional advisor before any action is taken.