

LABOUR ANIMAL WELFARE SOCIETY

Briefing: Strengthening Farm Animal Welfare and Supporting Farmers



Labour has pledged to “introduce the biggest boost in animal welfare for a generation”. The vast majority of domesticated animals in the UK are farm animals. The government must therefore make meaningful improvements to farm animal welfare in order to deliver this election promise.

We set out below three priority policy outcomes and how they can be achieved. The proposed measures would boost profits for British farmers, support our government’s growth agenda, and improve consumer information whilst improving the lives of hundreds of millions of animals.

Increase profit for farmers whilst raising domestic animal welfare standards

 **Policy solution:** Introduce mandatory animal welfare labelling

Defra proposed a mandatory method-of-production welfare label for eggs, chicken, and pork in a public consultation which closed in May 2024. These proposals should be taken forward.

The proposed labelling regime would help consumers to make more informed decisions about the animal welfare status of their purchases and would allow farmers to be more easily compensated for their higher welfare production.

Defra’s impact assessment estimates:

- Mandatory labelling would increase the profit of British farmers by over £40 million per year and would provide a net benefit to society in the value of £139.9 million over 10 years.
- Improve animal welfare significantly—benefitting approximately 110 million meat chickens, 700,000 laying hens and 510,000 pigs per year. The large number of animals benefitting makes the proposed labelling regime one of the most impactful policies at improving animal welfare.
- Only mandatory, and not voluntary, labelling can achieve this.



 **Policy solution:** Phase-out low welfare imports

In addition to the proposed labelling regime, **low welfare imports that do not meet the UK’s animal welfare standards should be phased out** within five years.

After this point, any imports should be required to meet the UK’s on-farm welfare standards if they are to be sold on British markets. This requirement would mirror rules already in force in relation to humane slaughter standards, which require meat imports to have been produced using slaughter methods consistent with the UK’s humane slaughter laws.

It is also essential that **any veterinary agreement concluded with the European Union preserves the UK’s right to place restrictions on imports on animal welfare grounds**. Otherwise, British farmers may suffer significant detriment.



Save British Farming Demonstration Parliament Square. Credit: Barry Marsh/Flickr 2020

Transition to world-leading, cage-free farming systems

 **Policy solution:** Use secondary legislation and the farming subsidy budget to support farmers' transition

Each year in the UK, approximately 8 million laying hens spend their lives in cages and around 200,000 mother pigs are confined in farrowing crates. These systems prevent animals from expressing normal patterns of behaviour and significantly compromise their welfare.


Phasing out cages would ensure the UK keeps up with Europe. A number of European countries have already banned these cage systems, leaving the UK behind. The UK is currently ranked as only 9th in Europe by percentage of cage-free animals.

We therefore recommend that Defra follow Scotland's lead by releasing the consultation already prepared by Defra on enriched cages for laying hens, followed by a consultation on the use of farrowing crates for pigs.

Caged egg farmers can use Defra's £22 million laying hen housing grant scheme to support the costs of transitioning to cage-free systems. Defra should also provide financial support from the farming subsidy budget for pig farmers wishing to transition away from the use of farrowing crates.



Update humane slaughter legislation to protect all sentient beings

 **Policy solution:** Introduce specific animal welfare at slaughter legislation for farmed aquatic animals

Fish are recognised as sentient beings under the Animal Welfare (Sentience) Act 2022, but unlike other animals, there are no regulations that specify how they must be slaughtered to ensure a humane killing.

Polling by Sapience in 2024 shows that 85% of the UK public believe the welfare of fish should be protected to the same or greater extent as other farmed animals.

The Animal Welfare Committee recommended in advice to the government in 2014 and 2023 the creation of minimum legal standards for the humane slaughter of farmed fish. The implementation of these rules, via secondary legislation, is vital to safeguard the welfare of the ~77 million farmed trout and salmon who are slaughtered annually in the UK.

Defra should therefore prioritise the development of these standards as a matter of urgency, in consultation with industry and NGOs.

JOIN THE LABOUR ANIMAL WELFARE SOCIETY

LAWS is an official Socialist Society affiliated to the Labour Party, dedicated to promoting animal welfare.

Scan the QR code to join or visit the website below.

