



United Egg Producers

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NATIONAL CAGE-FREE EGG PRODUCTION REQUIREMENT WOULD BE AN ENVIRONMENTAL DISASTER, NEW STUDY WARNS

WASHINGTON (October 6, 2009) – A requirement that all eggs in the U.S. be produced in non-cage systems could be an environmental disaster, a new study warns.

Regular eggs are better for the environment than cage-free eggs, says a new study by Promar International, a Washington, D.C. based agricultural economic consulting firm.

“Regular eggs have smaller environmental and carbon footprints than cage-free eggs, in part because chickens in cage-free systems eat 15-25 percent more food to produce the fewer, smaller eggs,” explains the study’s author, Tom Earley of Promar International.

“An all-cage-free U.S. egg industry would gobble up an additional 3 billion pounds of corn and soybean meal compared to the amount of feed required for chickens laying ‘regular’ eggs,” stated Earley.

“Additionally, 580,000 more acres of cropland would be needed just to grow the additional corn and soybeans needed for an all-cage-free egg industry, with the potential for increases in air and water pollution from the farming of those 580,000 acres, the additional fertilizers and pesticides needed for those crops, plus the transportation and processing of those crops,” Earley added. “All these new costs would increase demand for fossil fuels.”

Animal rights groups are pushing for requirements that all eggs produced in America be “cage-free.” Bans on modern cage housing systems already are being implemented in California over the next 5 years and are pushing for bans in several other states. Similar bans are being implemented in Germany next year and in many European countries in the next few years.

Such a ban in the U.S. would not necessarily improve the health or welfare of chickens and could have negative consequences for the environment as well as endangering food safety and increasing government spending and consumer costs, says the study’s author.

“Regular eggs require less land, less feed, and less energy than do their cage-free counterpart,” Earley said.

“The modern cage system permits better control of air quality and has been shown to better protect the health and welfare of the chickens than cage-free and free range.”

Earley also stated that it doesn't make sense to abandon the modern sanitary cage system and if you do there are a lot of consequences, intended or not, to the environment, to government spending, to imports and potential food safety, as well as consumer costs.

Gene Gregory, president of United Egg Producers, a national cooperative and trade association representing American family egg farmers which commissioned the study, said "The modern, sanitary cage system that America's egg farmers use today along with our animal husbandry guidelines provide for the very good care of our chickens and their welfare, and is considered humane by the scientific community including the American Veterinary Medical Association. Now that we can see all of the other benefits to the environment, to consumers and government spending, it makes us even more committed to protecting the consumers' rights to choose which type of eggs they buy: regular eggs, cage-free, free range, organic or others."

According to the study, restricting shoppers' choices to only cage-free eggs available would increase consumers' costs by \$2.6 billion annually, a 25 percent increase, because of the higher cost for cage-free eggs.

Federal spending for food assistance programs would increase by \$169 million annually, the study says, if the government could only purchase cage-free eggs because those eggs cost much more.

The study also highlights that 7 billion eggs would be imported each year, primarily from Mexico, if U.S. egg farmers are forced to switch only to cage-free egg production. That amounts to almost 25 eggs per person and could increase the risk for food safety and food security.

If all commercial egg farmers had to convert their modern hen houses into cage-free facilities, it would cost them a combined \$7.5 billion, Earley estimates. This includes the cost of converting the modern sanitary cage system used to produce almost 95 percent of all eggs in America to cage-free, as well as the cost for the extra land needed. Almost all commercial egg farms are family-owned farms or farmer co-ops; only one is a public company.

About United Egg Producers

United Egg Producers (UEP) is the nation's leading farmer cooperative for U.S. egg farmers, representing 97 percent of U.S. egg farmers, whose members produce eggs including modern cage production, cage-free, free range, organic and other specialty eggs. UEP is based in Alpharetta, GA. To learn more about the egg industry visit www.uepcertified.com.

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