

Motion 12

Individual Member Motion: Animal Welfare

This meeting notes that Co-op members value animal welfare and expect that the animals raised for Co-op products have good lives under ever-improving welfare standards. Our Co-op has made significant progress towards improved standards for Co-op chickens over the past two years, noting the decrease in stocking density on chicken farms that supply Co-op to give chickens more space.

This meeting also notes that Co-op is supplied each year with over 10 million chickens, 98% of which are fast-growing Frankenchickens - breeds that have been scientifically proven to suffer more from heart attacks, organ failure, white striping, lameness, and ammonia burns than slower growing breeds, even when given more space.

This meeting believes that our Co-op should continue to improve the welfare of chickens raised for meat and requests the Board to consider phasing out the sale of fast-growing breeds of chickens and transitioning to slower-growing breeds, ensuring that all chickens sold align with our core value of compassionate treatment towards animals.

This meeting also requests the Board to consider setting a timeline for transitioning to slower-growing breeds of chicken and report on chicken welfare improvements at the next AGM.

Board Response:

Our Co-op is committed to improving animal welfare across the whole supply chain. Following the member motion that was passed at our AGM in 2023, we launched our “Space to Thrive” commitment. This moved to lower stocking density across all fresh chicken lines in February 2024, which was nine months earlier than planned.

Since then, we were one of the first retailers to extend this commitment to breaded and ready to eat products, which represents a significantly higher proportion of the chicken that we sell. We are working with our suppliers to adopt the latest technology such as AI assisted cameras, which help farmers identify and resolve any welfare issues. These actions put us significantly ahead of most other retailers on chicken welfare.

Slower growing breeds of chicken require more barns to be built, putting farmers under additional pressure where the planning process for building new barns is challenging and expensive. While we are pleased that other retailers are joining our Co-op and committing to lower stocking density for their chickens, this only puts further pressure on farmers who already have reduced space on their farms.

A move to a slower growing breed would also cost tens of millions of pounds, which would result in an increase in the price of chicken in our stores. At a time when consumer confidence is low and there is a tough economic climate, we are acutely

aware of the need, and our responsibility, to provide our members and customers with well sourced, quality products at a good value price point.

For our commitment to animal welfare more broadly, the annual Business Benchmark for Animal Welfare report ranked Co-op as the third highest overall UK retailer, ahead of all big four supermarkets, and the discounters.

We have done so whilst continuing to support British farmers, both through our 100% British sourcing commitments and by giving farmers and suppliers greater certainty and stability through longer committed supply contracts across protein and dairy. We work closely with all of our suppliers and farmers to continually improve animal welfare. However, we also recognise the serious challenges that British agriculture is currently facing, and have recently increased the price we pay farmers for milk.

The Board shares our members' passion for animal welfare. We are proud of the progress that has been made over recent years and are committed to continuing to explore all opportunities to improve standards across our supply chain. However, in doing so, we also need to consider the impacts on British farming, on the environment and on the prices our members and customers pay. The Board does not believe that adopting slower growing breeds is the right thing for our Co-op at this time.

The motion is being proposed to the AGM as an advisory motion, which means that, if it is passed, it will not be binding. The Board is however keen to ensure that members have the opportunity to vote on motions brought by members on the issues that matter to them. The Board is therefore making no recommendation to members as to whether they should support this motion.