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### **Motion from Individual Members – Animal Welfare**

This meeting notes that the Co-op Group already recognises how important it is to members that the animals raised for food in Co-op products have good lives and aims for a pioneering approach to animal welfare, meaning welfare practices for pigs and egg-laying hens set a precedent for other retailers.

This meeting also notes with concern that conditions for chickens raised for meat have fallen behind. Chickens are the most farmed animal in the UK, including an estimated 51 million supplied to Co-op each year, and that only 3% of chickens supplied to Co-op are raised to higher welfare standards. Practices must improve so these forgotten animals avoid needless suffering.

This meeting believes that our Co-op should improve welfare standards for chickens and requests the board to consider adopting the Better Chicken Commitment in full. If adopted, this would mean that Co-op would be by 2026:

- Implement a maximum stocking density of 30kg/m<sup>2</sup>.
- Adopt breeds of chicken that meet the RSPCA Broiler Breed Welfare Assessment Protocol.
- Meet improved environmental standards.
- Demonstrate compliance via third-party auditing and public progress reporting.

This meeting also requests the Board to report on chicken welfare improvements at the next AGM.

### **More information on our Motion**

#### **Supporting Statement:**

As a membership of animal lovers, we want to know that the animals we raise for food are treated well. Historically, our Co-op has challenged the status quo to champion animal welfare with pride and with action.

In the 1990s, Co-op took the brave step of breaking the law to be the first retailer to label the living conditions of egg-laying hens. Co-op was then the first retailer to only use free-range eggs across all our products in 2010. Now almost all pigs supplied for Co-op products are raised to higher welfare RSPCA standards, and humane slaughter requirements are applicable across all branded and own label products.

But more must be done to improve the lives of chickens raised for meat. Despite being the most farmed animal in the UK, their welfare has been severely overlooked. According to our Co-op's Sustainability Report 2021, chicken is Co-op's highest selling meat product. But only 2% of chickens supplied for own brand products are raised to higher welfare standards, compared to nearly 100% of pigs.

Chickens raised for meat live short lives characterised by their suffering. Readily-used breeds have been genetically selected for rapid growth beyond natural proportions, resulting in "Frankenchickens" that often collapse under their own weight. These unhealthy breeds use almost 7 times more critically important antibiotics than slower growing breeds. Too many birds are confined to one barn for reasonable mobility, and they are forced to breathe abrasive air tainted by ammonia-saturated litter. This cruelty is not accidental or even merely negligent. It is accepted under Red Tractor certification.

Our Co-op follows the 'Five Freedoms' code for animal welfare. But sadly, the basic conditions delivered by leading British suppliers for UK supermarkets fail to provide these freedoms. Every chicken should be able to live without discomfort, to express normal behaviour, and to be free of pain, injury, and distress. Co-op's supplier does not currently provide us with chickens that experience these basic freedoms. However, this supplier has committed to provide chickens raised to a higher welfare standard to other retailers who request it.

So this fortunately means our Co-op is in an optimum position to adopt the Better Chicken Commitment in full. Over 350 companies across Europe have already committed, including UK retailers Marks & Spencer and Waitrose. In 2022, Marks & Spencer started to sell higher welfare chicken across their entire range, 4 years early with no extra costs to consumers. Given that we share the same supplier, this is a suitable proof of concept for what our Co-op can achieve.

The Better Chicken Commitment provides a solution that balances the needs of animals with realistic business goals. But most importantly, our holistic vision is about co-operating for a fairer world, and there is no reason why we cannot make our world fairer for animals too. Providing better lives for animals is part of our Co-op's history. By giving better lives to chickens, it can continue in our legacy.

### **Co-op Board Response:**

This motion asks us to consider adopting the Better Chicken Commitment in full and report on chicken welfare improvements at the next AGM. Food provenance is very important to our customers and members, who want to buy meat that they know has been produced to high animal welfare standards. As a leading ethical retailer, animal welfare is a priority for us, and Co-op is a proud supporter of British Farming and the high welfare standards our country delivers.

All of our fresh chicken meets or exceeds industry and Government-approved standards, be that Red Tractor or RSPCA Assured and we also have our own strict welfare policies. Our Free-Range chicken already meets the 'Better Chicken Commitment' standard, and our core ranges comply with standards on stunning, compliance with legislation and environment enrichment.

We are acutely aware that in the current economic climate, it is more important than ever that we provide our members and customers with good value, high quality, responsibly sourced chicken. We also know that welfare forms part of a broader view on value for our customers.

We remain committed to driving improvements in animal welfare and your Board therefore supports the motion to report on chicken welfare improvements at the next AGM. Your Board will also continue to consider how we can enhance chicken welfare, including any opportunities to adopt elements of the Better Chicken Commitment, whilst recognising the need to offer good value to customers. We have already identified a number of areas where we can make meaningful improvements within the current chicken sourcing standards and we are working at pace on these areas with our suppliers.