

Dear Debbie

We would like to send you our congratulations on your new role as the Chair of the Co-op. We are confident that you will follow in the footsteps of Allan Leighton by continuing to put the membership first and championing the co-operative movement across the UK.

I am sure you are aware that members submitted a motion around animal welfare at the 2023 Co-op AGM. The motion asked the board to give better lives to the chickens raised for meat in Co-op's supply chain, requesting the board to adopt the Better Chicken Commitment. This would include giving chickens more space on farms and stopping the sale of Frankenchickens on Co-op shelves.

To give a quick overview, 98% of the chicken sold on Co-op's shelves are Frankenchickens. This breed of chicken is genetically selected to grow unnaturally big and unnaturally fast in order to maximise profit margins. But the true cost of this breed is the suffering. Frankenchickens are likely to collapse under their own weight and to experience organ failure and heart attacks, alongside a myriad of other health problems. They also require up to 5 times the amount of antibiotics as slower growing breeds. Frankenchickens, and the intensive conditions in which they are reared, provide the perfect breeding ground for treatment-resistant diseases, which poses a huge threat to global biosecurity in a world that is still recovering from the last pandemic.

As Co-op members, we voted in favour (almost unanimously) of improving welfare standards for chickens. During the AGM, we heard that the Co-op would be decreasing the stocking density of chickens raised for meat in the Co-op's supply chain. We believe that this was a very positive step forward, but we also heard from Allan Leighton and Matt Hood that our Co-op would continue to stock Frankenchickens at the same rate for the foreseeable future.

We were disappointed by this decision (which was announced even before the final result of the vote) especially as there have been so few business focused motions submitted by members in recent years. The Co-op's food team has since doubled down on this decision in an interview streamed during recent Join In events in December. This update to members included upsetting language around climate catastrophe used to justify not improving the lives of suffering animals, which we believe was unnecessary.

The motion from the last AGM requests the board to report back with an update on chicken welfare at the upcoming AGM in May. As active Co-op members, we are hoping to hear positive news. We want our Co-op to agree to shift away from the cruel practice of raising Frankenchickens for meat and be the pioneer in animal welfare that is written so proudly in our sustainability reports. We are not expecting changes overnight, but we want to hear a commitment from the board that our Co-op will be leading the way for a better future for farmed animals.

We are proud to be Co-op members. As such, we want to make sure that we are constantly working towards improvements to our practices so the world becomes a better place. But the Co-op is supposed to be a co-operative, where we get to have our say in how the business is run. If our opinions are not taken seriously by the board, what does this say for democracy at the Co-op?

Debbie, as Co-op members, we urge you to be an advocate for giving Co-op chickens better lives. Stepping into your new role, you have the opportunity to steer our Co-op in the right direction and prove that this is an organisation of true democracy and stellar ethics. With your support, 50 million animals each year will experience happier and healthier days, which is exactly the kind of principles we want to see from our new leadership.

Kind regards,

The Co-op membership undersigned: