


# THE HUMANE LEAGUE

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## CAGE-FREE EGGS

### *a brief primer*

Consumers and scientists agree: eggs from hens raised in cages are bad business.



**WHEN EGG-LAYING HENS ARE HOUSED IN CAGES, THEY SUFFER IMMENSELY**

**PACKED TOGETHER INTO BARREN CAGES THE SIZE OF FILING CABINET DRAWERS, THESE BIRDS SPEND THEIR LIVES UNABLE TO EXTEND THEIR WINGS OR EVEN STAND WITH THEIR HEADS RAISED.** Caged hens often develop osteoporosis and cage-layer fatigue—conditions that result in painful bone fractures and paralysis.<sup>1</sup> They are unable to perch, dust bathe, forage, nest, stretch, or simply *walk freely*, and the inability to engage in these most basic natural behaviors causes them extreme psychological distress.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>AB Webster, "Welfare Implications of Avian Osteoporosis," *Poultry Science*, 83 (2): 184-192, 2004.

<sup>2</sup> Sara Shields and Ian J.H. Duncan, "A Comparison of the Welfare of Hens in Battery Cages and Alternative Systems," *Impact on Farm Animals*, 18, 2009.

# 66%

## of shoppers surveyed

would increase purchases from a company focused on improving animal welfare

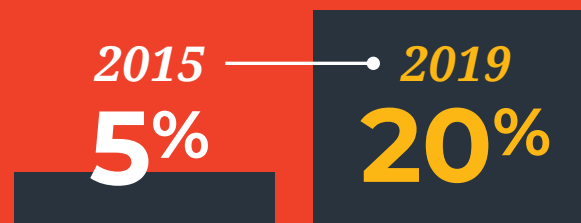
### CAGED SYSTEMS ARE CRUEL, ARCHAIC, AND UNNECESSARY.

And increasing numbers of consumers are becoming concerned about their continued use. According to a 2017 study by market research firm Packaged Facts, the majority of U.S. consumers indicated they were “more concerned” about the treatment of animals raised for food than they had been a few years before.<sup>3</sup> Similar research by retail giant Walmart revealed 77% of its shoppers were likely to increase their level of trust in a retailer whose policies improved the treatment of animals in their supply chain, and 66% were more likely to purchase their products.<sup>4</sup> These findings prompted Walmart to update its animal welfare policies and commit to sourcing 100% cage-free eggs by 2025.

Since then, hundreds of food companies have made similar commitments, acknowledging that the bottom line is no longer justification for subjecting animals to cruel confinement. Consumers demand better.

**CAGE-FREE IS MUCH MORE THAN A TREND—IT’S BECOMING THE INDUSTRY STANDARD.** Between 2014 and 2016, every major restaurant chain, food-service company, food manufacturer, and food retailer made a public commitment to their customers and stakeholders to phase out the use of cages for egg-laying hens in their U.S. supply chains. To date, over 400 companies have committed to sourcing 100% cage-free eggs by 2026 or earlier.

The egg industry is already shifting in response to the demand. Since 2014, the U.S. layer-hen flock has grown from roughly 5% cage-free to over 20% according to data from the USDA.<sup>5</sup> This means that tens of millions of hens will no longer have to endure a lifetime of confinement in a tiny cage.



Consumer demand is not the only driver of these industry shifts. Ballot initiatives in states across the country are also having an impact. Last year, Californians voted to ban the production and sale of caged eggs in the state by 2022. In 2016, Massachusetts passed a similar law with a landslide 78% of the vote. And this year, Oregon and Washington passed legislation banning caged eggs by 2024. In states where caged eggs are banned, all eggs sold will be required to be cage-free, regardless of where they are produced.

<sup>3</sup> David Sprinkle, “Heads Up on Humane in Meat and Poultry Industries,” Packaged Facts, April 18, 2017.

<sup>4</sup> The Times Editorial Board, “Wal-Mart’s Clout Buys Animal Welfare,” Los Angeles Times, June 1, 2015.

<sup>5</sup> Samara Mendez, “US Egg Production Data Set,” The Humane League Labs, August 12, 2019.



## reporting on cage-free progress



## reporting 100% cage-free



**CAGE-FREE COMMITMENTS ARE A GREAT START. BUT WHEN THEY GO UNFULFILLED, THESE COMMITMENTS LOSE THEIR MEANING,** deceive consumers and investors, and harm animals. This is why The Humane League is asking companies who have publicly pledged to transition to sourcing 100% cage-free eggs to *regularly report their progress*, even if they have not yet met their goals.

Fortunately, dozens of the nation's leading food companies are already doing this. Walmart, Starbucks, Kraft-Heinz, General Mills, Compass Group, Kroger, and many more have publicly disclosed the progress they've made toward their cage-free commitments. Other leading brands, including Taco Bell, Papa John's,

Shake Shack, and Hormel, are already sourcing exclusively cage-free eggs and openly share this information on their websites. Regrettably, however, several companies that have pledged to source all or nearly all cage-free eggs as early as the end of 2019 have refused to disclose whether they have made any progress toward their goal at all. Until they do so, these brands are misleading consumers and profiting from empty promises of higher animal welfare.

Change takes time. Transparency does not. Companies owe it to consumers and stakeholders to be open about their fulfillment of the public commitments they've made—especially when they directly impact millions of chickens' lives.

## *The solution is simple*

Food companies must be held accountable for following through with their cage-free commitments. This includes communicating publicly about their progress by reporting on the percentage of cage-free eggs in their supply chains while continuing to work to meet their deadlines.