

2022

THE HUMANE LEAGUE   
UNITED KINGDOM

STATE OF THE CHICKEN INDUSTRY  
*changing the face of the chicken industry*

## KEY POINTS

- This year has seen increasing progress as companies adopt the BCC, and Sainsbury's commitment to lower stocking densities hints at movement in the supermarket sector.
- However, only 2 of the UK's top 10 supermarkets are committed to the BCC.
- Over 333 companies in the UK and EU have committed to the BCC, an increase of 38% since the end of last year.
- Roughly 28% of the UK chicken supply is now committed, affecting around 300 million birds: if outstanding supermarkets committed it would be 89%.
- The BCC reduces disabling and excruciating pain in chickens by two thirds.
- A tough year for the chicken industry makes a stronger argument for change than ever before.
- Consuming fewer, better-raised chickens is the future.

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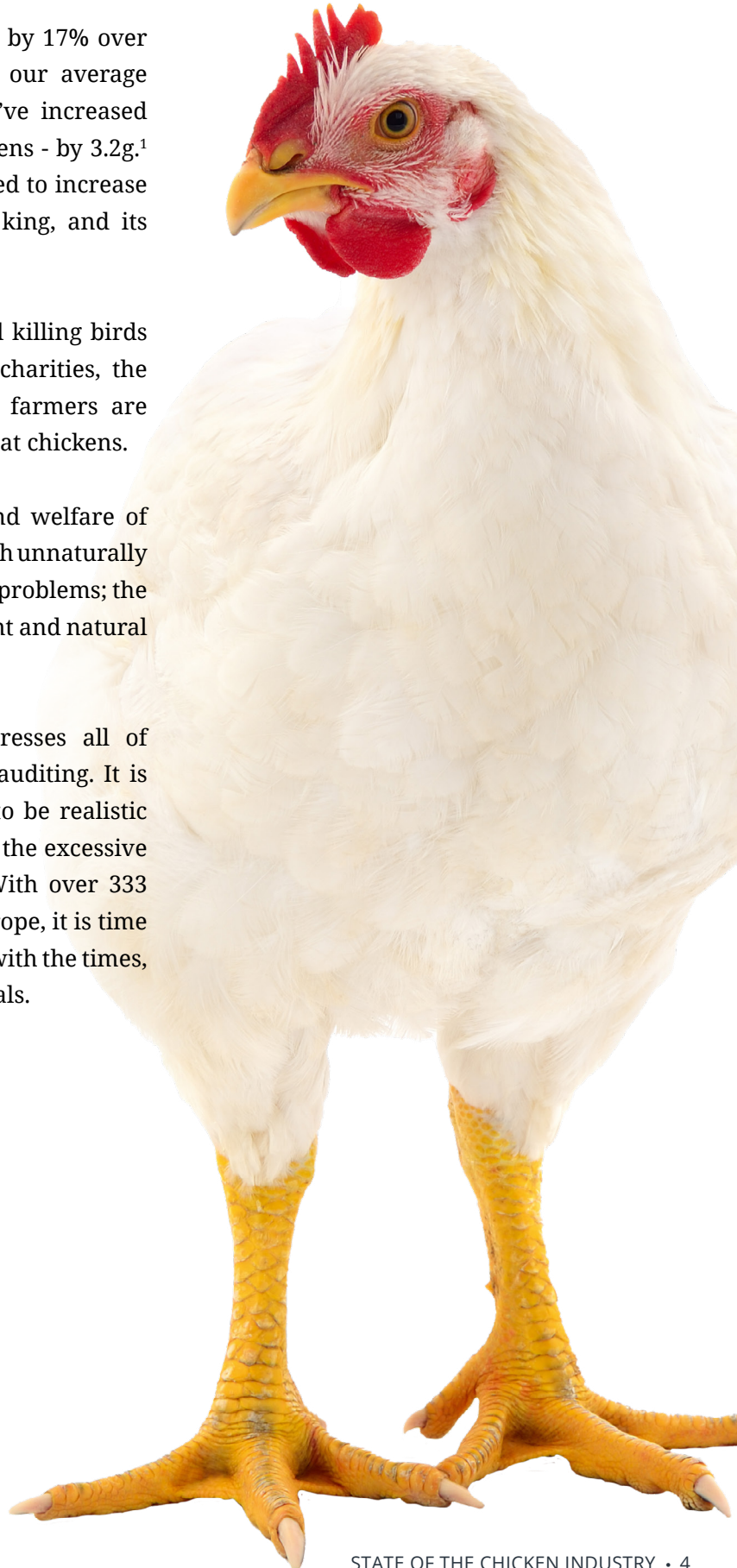
# INTRODUCTION

Britons have reduced their meat consumption by 17% over the last ten years. But while we've reduced our average daily consumption of red meat by 13.7g, we've increased our consumption of white meat - largely chickens - by 3.2g.<sup>1</sup> The intensive farming of chickens has continued to increase in Britain and Europe. Chicken meat is still king, and its popularity is growing.

However, the common methods of raising and killing birds are also coming under closer scrutiny from charities, the media and the public. More businesses and farmers are beginning to adopt more ethical policies for meat chickens.

The major factors undermining the health and welfare of contemporary meat chickens are their breed, with unnaturally fast-growth leading to a series of painful health problems; the amount of space they have; access to enrichment and natural light; and slaughter methods.

The Better Chicken Commitment (BCC) addresses all of these, as well as provisioning for third-party auditing. It is a policy designed by animal welfare experts to be realistic and achievable - it is a workable alternative to the excessive suffering caused by chicken farming today. With over 333 commitments to the BCC across the UK and Europe, it is time for those companies dragging their heels to get with the times, for the future of consumers, farmers and animals.



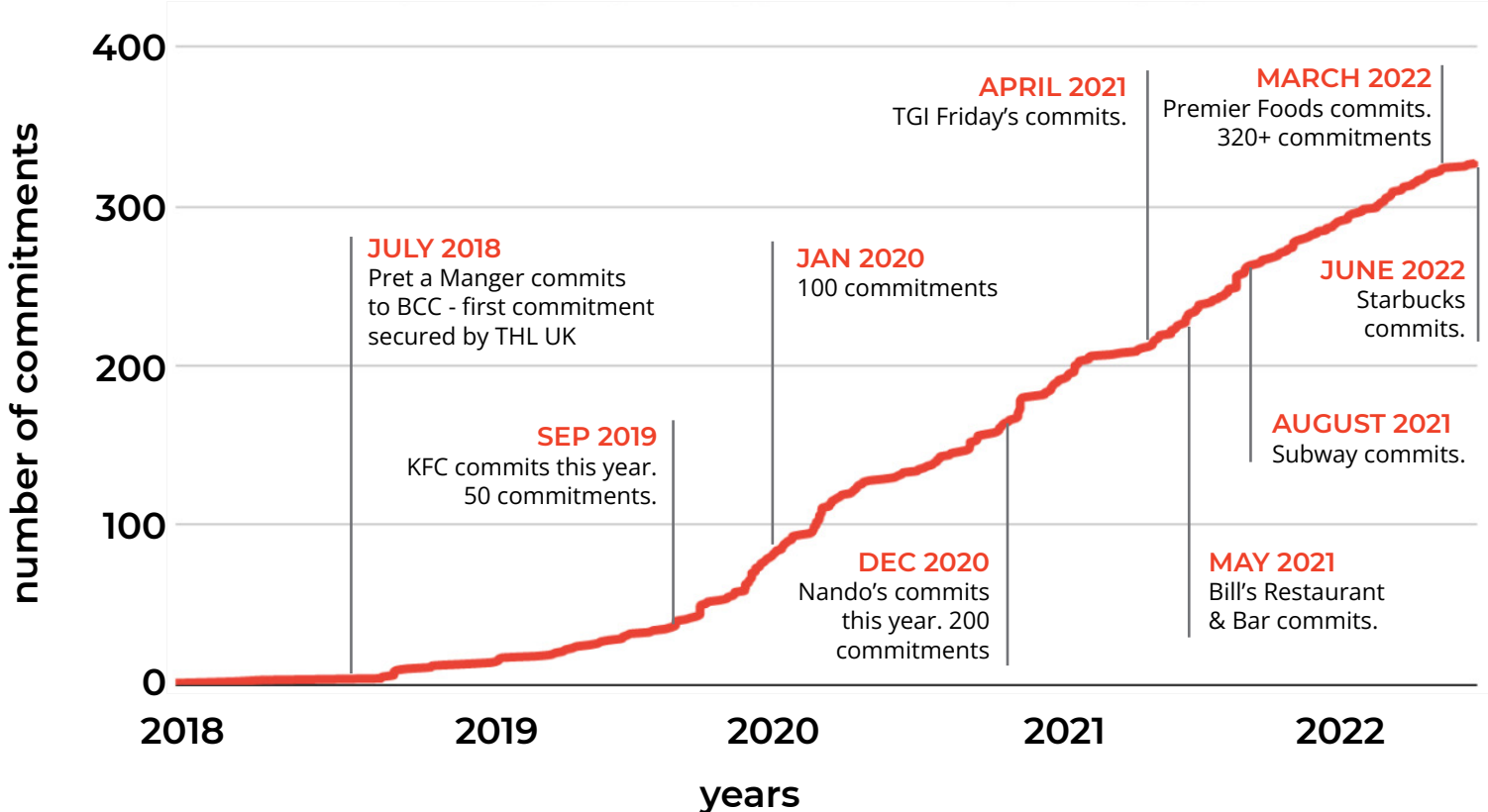
## CURRENT LANDSCAPE

2021-22 proved another challenging year for the chicken industry. Despite this, *signatories to the BCC have continued to boom, with a 38% increase in commitments*, from 240 companies committed in 2021 to over 333 in July of 2022.

In the UK today roughly 28% of chicken supply is now committed to meeting the higher welfare criteria of the Better Chicken Commitment by 2026,

a rise of 3% from last year, meaning *an additional 22.4 million birds per year will benefit from more space, better health and higher wellbeing* by the end of 2026.<sup>2</sup> Supermarkets are responsible for roughly 65% of the UK's meat chicken flock, and so they have disproportionate power to raise the bar for chicken welfare and make BCC chicken the norm in the UK. So far, they have largely refused the opportunity.

### BROILER CHICKEN COMMITMENTS IN EUROPE



## SECTOR BREAKDOWN

### FOOD SERVICE 100%

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Compass Group | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Interserve Catering |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Sodexo        | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SSP                 |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Aramark       | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Newrest             |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ISS UK        | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OCS Group           |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Elior Group   | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Apetito             |

### MEAL KITS 100%

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Hello Fresh | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Pasta Evangelists |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Gousto      | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Jane Plan         |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Abel & Cole | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Fit Kitchen       |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> COOK UK     | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Detox Kitchen     |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Riverford   | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Fit Kitchen       |

### MANUFACTURERS 80%

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Nestle       | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Nomad Foods       |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Danone       | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Continental Foods |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Kraft-Heinz  | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Premier Foods     |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Unilever     | <input type="checkbox"/> Samworth Brothers            |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Oetker Group | <input type="checkbox"/> Princes                      |

### RESTAURANTS 70%

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Greggs          | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Starbucks |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Pret A Manger   | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Subway    |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> KFC & Pizza Hut | <input type="checkbox"/> Costa Coffee         |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Nando's         | <input type="checkbox"/> Domino's Pizza       |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Burger King     | <input type="checkbox"/> McDonalds            |

### HOTELS 10%\*

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Accor                    | <input type="checkbox"/> Britannia Hotels         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Whitbread (Premier Inn)             | <input type="checkbox"/> Best Western             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Travelodge                          | <input type="checkbox"/> Marriott                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> InterContinental Hotels Group (IHG) | <input type="checkbox"/> Wyndham Hotels & Resorts |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hilton                              | <input type="checkbox"/> Jin Jiang (Raddisson)    |

### RETAILERS 20%

- |   |                                    |
|---|------------------------------------|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Waitrose        | <input type="checkbox"/> Morrisons |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Marks & Spencer | <input type="checkbox"/> Aldi      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Tesco                      | <input type="checkbox"/> Co-op     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sainsbury's                | <input type="checkbox"/> Iceland   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Asda                       | <input type="checkbox"/> Lidl      |

\*Accor remains the only top 10 hotel company to have committed, but now the world has opened up and business is returning more discussions are being had in that sector. We are confident of future progress.

- |   |
|---|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Committed |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yet to commit        |



# COMPANIES COMMITTED TO THE BCC



Waitrose



M&S  
EST. 1884

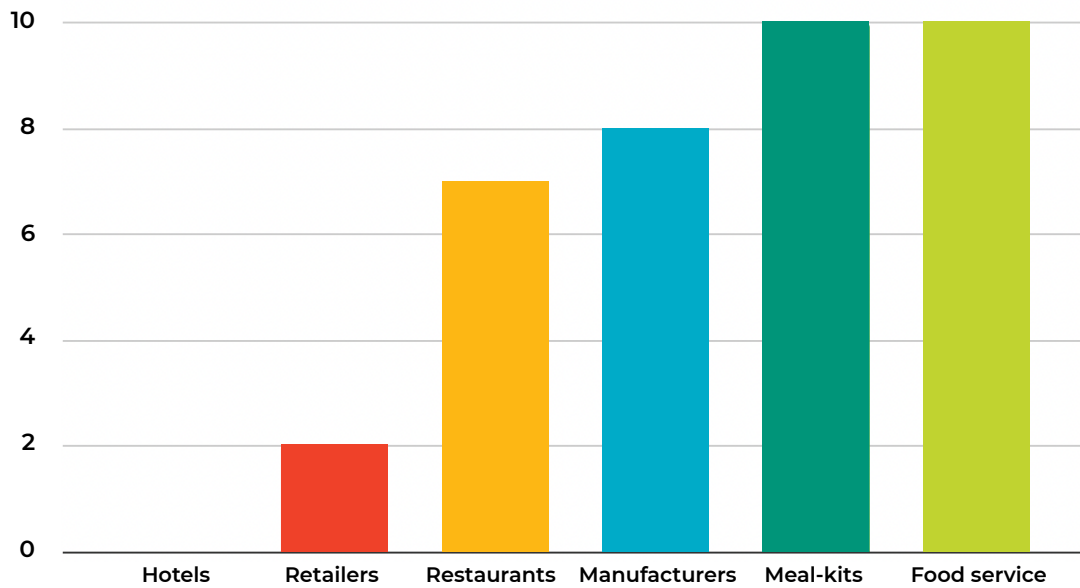


## MALCOLM COPLAND, COMMERCIAL DIRECTOR AT GREGGS:

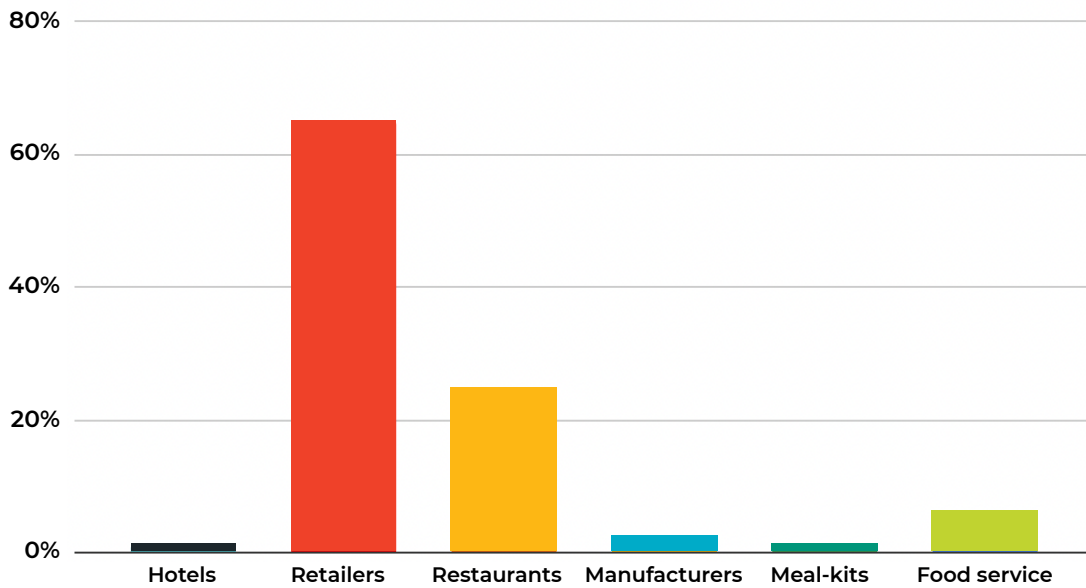
Initiatives like the Better Chicken Commitment not only provide us with a clear direction of travel, but they also help the industry to work together to reach shared goals – by creating a demand for slower-growing, higher welfare chicken, the BCC is making it less risky for suppliers of broiler chickens to reduce stocking densities and swap to slower growing breeds. And that means there is increased supply of higher welfare chicken.

# THE UK RETAIL SECTOR IN FOCUS

## NUMBER OF TOP TEN COMPANIES COMMITTED TO BCC BY SECTOR



## PERCENTAGE OF UK CHICKEN SUPPLY BY SECTOR



The UK retail sector accounts 65% of the country's chicken supply, far more than any other sector. If outstanding UK supermarkets signed up to the BCC then the percentage of the UK chicken supply committed to the policy would leap from 28% to 89%. The supermarkets have the power to remodel the UK's entire chicken industry into a less cruel system with animal welfare at its heart, yet refuse the opportunity - of the UK's 127 BCC commitments, only 2 were made by supermarkets.

Retailers as a whole have been outclassed by other sectors, with fast-food chains like Burger King and Subway proving more progressive regarding animal welfare than trusted supermarkets. A petition demanding that supermarkets stop selling suffering fast-growing breeds on [change.org](https://change.org) has amassed over 220,000 signatures.





## A MILESTONE: DEFRA SUBSIDIES

A victory for the BCC came this year when Defra publicly acknowledged the policy as the future of chicken welfare.

Implementing the BCC is now listed as a priority for broiler chickens in Defra's Animal Health and Welfare Pathway<sup>3</sup>, which highlights policies that "represent some of the best opportunities for improving animal health and welfare we have across each livestock sector."

This historic announcement drew media coverage from The Times and The Guardian, and was praised by animal charities. It will see the Government financially supporting farmers transitioning to the BCC.



## CASE STUDIES

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### SAINSBURY'S

Sainsburys, the second largest supermarket in the UK, announced a new welfare policy for meat chickens in April 2022, providing all birds used for Sainsbury's own-brand products with 20% more space than industry standard. This amounts to a stocking density of 30 kg/m<sup>2</sup>, the same requirement as the BCC. In fact, this change means Sainsbury's chickens are meeting five of the BCC's six requirements. The retailer, which made profits of around £730 million in 2021, has shouldered the cost of the change rather than passing it onto consumers. These changes are certainly positive.

However, Sainsbury's have refused to change the breed of the bird, and will continue to rely on fast-growing chickens. This represents a huge missed opportunity. The BCC includes a change in breed as a requirement because breed is of central importance to welfare, being a primary cause of suffering in modern chicken farming and correlated with higher rates of painful diseases and mortality. Providing extra space is less impactful if the birds struggle to walk because of the lameness brought on by rapid growth.<sup>4</sup>

In a study conducted by the RSPCA, groups of slow-growing and fast-growing chickens were raised with 80% more space than industry standard plus enrichments, and the fast-growing birds still displayed significantly worse welfare outcomes across dimensions of mortality; leg, hock and plumage health; and muscle diseases.<sup>5</sup>

From one perspective Sainsbury's providing an estimated 120 million chickens a year with more space is a victory for animals, but from another perspective condemning hundreds of millions of these birds a year to live in bodies which constrain their movement and damage their health is a grave disappointment. We hope that this policy is the first step on a path towards the BCC.

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### SUBWAY

After previously committing to higher welfare standards in the US, fast food chain Subway, the world's largest quick service restaurant chain, signed up to the BCC in August 2021. The commitment is for all of its European supply<sup>6</sup>, and was only made after a sustained campaign that started at the end of 2019. The campaign included a petition which gained over 200,000 signatures;

our 'Corporate Cruelty Award' that supporters and the public voted for Subway to win, and protests in the UK and across Europe in partnership with other animal protection organisations.<sup>7</sup>

***We estimate that this commitment will improve the lives of around 27.2 million chickens per year.***



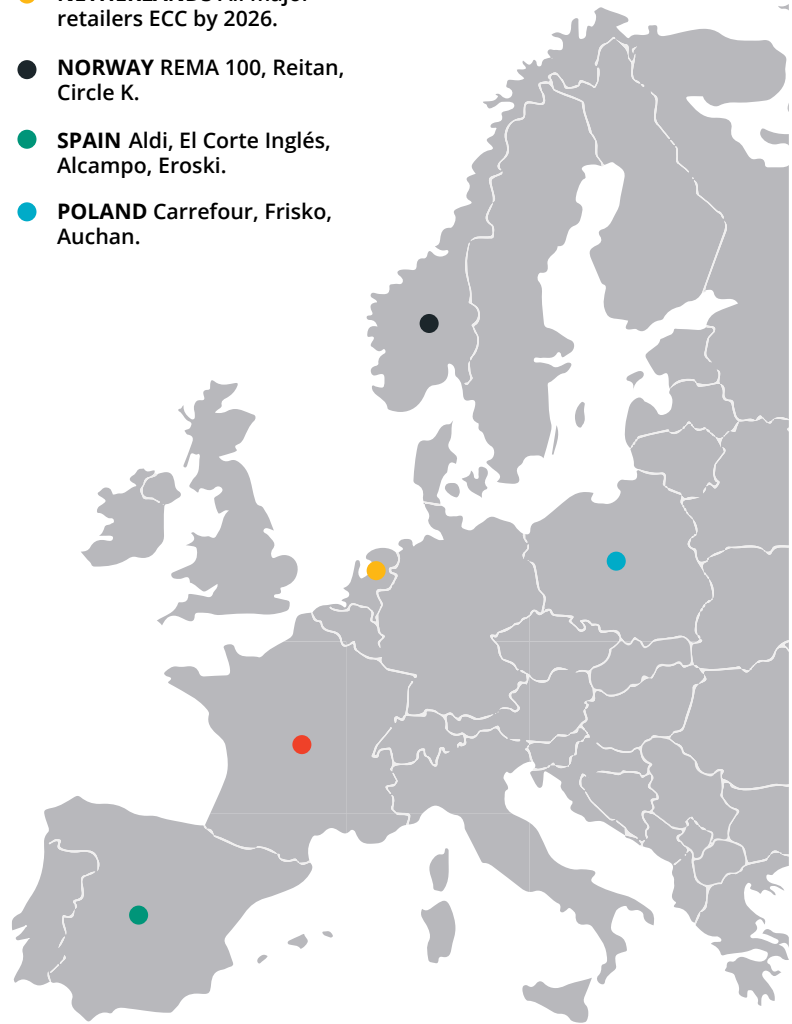
# EUROPEAN RETAILERS

Pre-dating the BCC, Dutch animal protection organisation Wakker Dier ran a campaign highlighting the plight of the ‘Plofkip’ - the exploding chicken - bringing chicken welfare to the forefront of the consumer’s mind and eventually leading to all major retailers signing up to the Beter Leven 1 star standard.<sup>8</sup> This is a Dutch broiler standard that even exceeds the ECC with a requirement for Wintergardens, a small covered outdoor space for the chickens to use.

In our last report we looked into the outstanding progress made in France, where all major retailers have signed onto the European Chicken Commitment (the ECC is identical to the UK’s BCC) with many moving beyond it, providing 20% of their flock with access to the outdoors. This is not the only positive movement we see around Europe.

Progress is happening in other countries too. In Norway, leading poultry producer and retailer REMA 1000 hold 32% of the fresh and frozen chicken market, and committed to the ECC in June 2020. They are joined by others in the country such as Reitan and Circle K. Carrefour, Frisko and Auchan are all committed in Poland, and in Spain Aldi, El Corte Inglés, Alcampo and most recently Eroski have signed onto the BCC.

- **FRANCE** All major retailers ECC compliant by 2026 - 50% of French chickens affected.
- **NETHERLANDS** All major retailers ECC by 2026.
- **NORWAY** REMA 100, Reitan, Circle K.
- **SPAIN** Aldi, El Corte Inglés, Alcampo, Eroski.
- **POLAND** Carrefour, Frisko, Auchan.



### UK LEGISLATION

Current UK legislation fails to protect the wellbeing of the one billion chickens the country farms for meat. The law does not mandate adequate space, light and enrichments for these animals the legal maximum stocking-density of 39 kg/m<sup>2</sup>, around 17 birds per square metre, is cramped and stressful for the animals.<sup>9</sup>

***However, existing laws are also not being properly implemented.***

The Humane League UK filed a judicial review in August 2021 against Defra, objecting to the Government allowing the farming of fast-growing chicken breeds, which we argue is unlawful.

The case rests on a clause in the Welfare of Farmed Animals Regulations (WOFAR) 2007 which states -

***Animals may only be kept for farming purposes if it can reasonably be expected, on the basis of their genotype or phenotype, that they can be kept without any detrimental effect on their health or welfare.***

Studies have repeatedly shown that fast-growing chicken breeds suffer from more health problems and diminished wellbeing compared to slower-growing birds. As their genes are the cause of these detrimental effects, we argue their use contravenes this law.

We also argue that the threshold for the ‘trigger system’ for chickens, whereby a report is sent to Defra if a vet observes poor welfare conditions at a farm, is set too high.<sup>10</sup> The current system, which only generates a report if the rate of welfare

problems is ‘exceptionally high’ or mortality is ‘unusually high’, is at odds with the WOFAR legislation. The law says a vet should create a report when discovering signs ‘consistent with poor welfare’, not consistent with welfare six to three times worse than average.

Finally, by operating this unlawful system we believe Defra is falling foul of competition law, violating the principle of equal treatment by allowing businesses who profit from raising fast-growing chickens unlawfully to maintain a competitive advantage over farmers using those slow-growing breeds in keeping with the law.

Defra has acknowledged the welfare problems with fast-growing breeds, and throughout the judicial review did not present one piece of science to suggest they could be kept without detriment.

The decision not to permit the judicial review is currently being appealed, and, even if unsuccessful, has generated more awareness of the legal framework around fast-growing chickens through features in The Times, The Observer, Euronews and The Daily Express.

# RECENT SCIENTIFIC STUDIES SUPPORT THE IMPACT OF THE BCC AND SLOWER-GROWING BREEDS ON BROILER WELFARE.

### WELFARE FOOTPRINT PROJECT

Use of Slower-Growing Breeds<sup>11</sup>

The Welfare Footprint Project developed a Cumulative Pain Framework<sup>12</sup> to investigate the amount of time broilers spend in pain; comparing research on the fast-growing strains used in conventional production (e.g. Aviagen Ross 308, 708, Cobb 500) with the slower-growing breeds required by the BCC (e.g. JA 987, 787, Ranger Gold). They looked at the duration and intensity of pain associated with the main welfare challenges and categorised them as being either *Annoying, Hurtful, Disabling or Excruciating*.

#### Conclusions:

- The study conservatively estimates that slower-growing breeds experienced a 66%, 24%, and 78% reduction in the time spent in Disabling, Hurtful and Excruciating pain, respectively.
- This is primarily due to a reduction in lameness, heart and lung disorders (ascites and sudden death syndrome), behavioural deprivation and heat stress. The adoption of slower-growing broiler strains under the BCC standards had a net positive effect on the welfare of broiler chickens.
- It is estimated that slower growing breeds spend at least 66% less time in the most severe forms of pain, disabling and excruciating pain - those considered to make life not worth living.

### WELFARE FOOTPRINT PROJECT

Use of Controlled Atmosphere Killing Systems<sup>13</sup>

Utilising the same Cumulative Pain Framework and pain-defining categories (*Annoying, Hurtful, Disabling and Excruciating*) the Welfare Footprint Project also examined the welfare impact of electrical waterbath stunning, the most commonly-used stunning method; and multi-stage controlled atmosphere stunning with CO<sub>2</sub>, a commonly-used gas killing method permitted by the BCC.

#### Conclusions:

- Overall the study found that the transition from electrical waterbath stunning to correctly-implemented multi-stage CO<sub>2</sub> systems would substantially reduce the average time a broiler chicken spends in the most intense and acute pain.
- This is due to the excruciating pain that derives from live scalding in electrical systems and the disabling pain associated with inversion and live shackling of injured birds, electric shocks, and pain associated with neck cutting in birds that remain conscious.
- In CO<sub>2</sub> stunning systems it is important that gas exposure time and concentrations are sufficient to ensure that birds do not regain consciousness after leaving the stunner, with risks of exposure to prolonged acute pain. Therefore CO<sub>2</sub> systems must adopt mechanisms to guarantee the effectiveness of the gas stunning method.



# CRANSWICK INVESTIGATION

Between May and June of 2021 animal protection charity Open Cages investigated four farms in East Anglia owned by Cranswick Farms, a Morrisons supplier. What they found exemplified how fast-growing chickens live and suffer in practice. Open Cages summarised the findings:

- Chickens were found completely or almost unable to walk. Many were filmed with deformed and twisted legs, frantically flapping their wings and collapsing in pain.
- A thin bird can be seen with its back covered in dried, bloody wounds. The animal has an open wound on their chest and was found keeled over on its back, unable to stand. The chest wound is likely a result of being trampled.
- Blackened dead bodies were found left to rot on multiple sites, on one farm forming a pile surrounded by flies.
- Hundreds were covered in filth and suffering chemical burns from laying in their own waste.
- The conditions are so crowded that in their last weeks these birds have no more space on average than an A4 sheet of paper each.<sup>14</sup>

While some of these issues could be addressed by better management, like the presence of numerous dead birds, mostly such abuses are features of the birds' breeding. The animals' lack of mobility is due to their rapid growth rate, as are the burns they receive as a consequence. The crowding would also be solved by adopting the BCC, which requires a minimum stocking density of 30 kg/m<sup>2</sup>, as opposed to the legal limit of 39 kg/m<sup>2</sup>.

Investigations like this reveal the serious moral failings of current practices in the chicken industry, and exposes them to a wider audience. The investigation received extensive coverage in Sky News, The Daily Mirror and ITV News.



## CHALLENGES

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A number of challenges have faced the UK chicken industry this year, often combining to put the industry under strain.

Labour shortages<sup>15</sup> have been caused by a number of factors like Brexit (labour has left the country) and Covid-19 (sickness and time off). These issues have often led to producers becoming inwardly focused, resulting in a lack of engagement with companies.

Companies also cite rising energy costs as a persistent issue and barrier to change.<sup>16</sup> Some businesses are expecting energy costs to rise as drastically as 300%. Some businesses are apparently on the verge of administration.

### IMPACT OF UKRAINE WAR

#### EXPORTS:

The war in Ukraine has been disruptive to the UK chicken industry, as all exports of chickens and grain from that country have ceased.

MHP, the largest poultry and feed company in Ukraine, produces 2.5 million to 3 million tons of grain per year. Ukraine is a significant producer and exporter of grains, especially wheat, corn and barley, as well as sunflower oil.<sup>17</sup> The interruption of these Ukrainian exports will lead to rising costs of chicken feed in the UK.<sup>18</sup>

Together, Ukraine and Russia export approximately 30% of the world's wheat exports (a quarter of globally traded wheat<sup>19</sup>) and account for 20% of the world's corn exports, according to the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO).<sup>20</sup>

The conflict has also created logistical problems in the supply chain of synthetic fertilisers, most of which is used to grow animal feed for industrial meat production.<sup>21</sup> Fertiliser prices have risen with the surging price of natural gas, the main ingredient for nitrogen fertilisers, which now threatens supplies.<sup>22</sup>

#### INFLATION:

Overall, the conflict is estimated to have contributed a 15% increase in UK food prices this year. The disruption to the free flow of trade has caused logistical problems for producers in sourcing from their suppliers and as well further down the chain.

For example, the input costs of producing chicken such as feed has soared, with prices from the farm gate rising by almost 50% in a year.<sup>23</sup>

#### MALCOLM COPLAND, COMMERCIAL DIRECTOR AT GREGGS:

Although the pandemic and the war in Ukraine have disrupted supply chains, we remain just as committed to improving welfare measures and minimising the stocking density of the chickens reared to supply us. We have set a maximum stocking density of 38Kg per square metre – which goes beyond EU and UK legislation – but have chosen to go further by steadily increasing the proportion reared at 30Kg per square metre or less. Our ambition is for all chicken supplied to us to be raised in these conditions by 2026 and we are now working in partnership with our core meat suppliers to try to achieve this.



## CHALLENGES

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### **BREXIT: INFLATION/LABOUR**

The UK's exit from the EU has had some negative repercussions on the chicken industry, due to less alignment on rules with food companies and bigger administrative burdens for farmers which has a knock on effect on producers and ultimately consumers.<sup>24</sup>

Brexit has also contributed towards the labour shortages plaguing UK chicken businesses. This means producers were unable to get flocks moved out at the end of the laying cycle, resulting in broilers being destroyed in houses, as there wasn't sufficient slaughterhouse staff to process them.<sup>25</sup>

### **COVID: LABOUR SHORTAGES AND BROILER WELFARE**

An AUSTRALIAN study<sup>26</sup> reviewed the impact of Covid-19 on intensive livestock industries, including chicken meat production, which faced a number of concerns such as; shortages of animal feed, supplies, reduced staff to maintain animal care and a reduced processing capacity. A reduced

processing capacity may have put animals at risk of overcrowding with a backlog of animals at farms leading to the need for humane destruction.

Broiler chickens were identified as being particularly vulnerable due to their targeted and intensive weight gain, with increased potential for health problems if they are not killed at the scheduled age.

This was clear during the CO2 shortages of Autumn 2021 where a welfare crisis was narrowly averted. If fast-growing chickens are not slaughtered at 35 days old, in a few days they will have grown well beyond the legal stocking limit of 39kg/m<sup>2</sup>, crowding out barns as animals grow to painful and unsustainable sizes. Although this shortage was unrelated to Covid, it illustrates how brutal the effect on animals can be when vital supply chains are interrupted - and how fast-growing chicken farming is particularly prone to welfare emergencies.



Photo: Andrew Skowron • Open Cages | Image representative of typical factory farm





**MALCOLM COPLAND, COMMERCIAL  
DIRECTOR AT GREGGS:**

“At Greggs, our aim is always to be the customers’ favourite food to go brand, whilst also being a responsible business – and that means avoiding the abuse or exploitation of animals. Our commitment to farm animal welfare is part of the Greggs Pledge and our Farm Animal Welfare Strategy is driving improved standards over time.

Our customers are increasingly aware of issues around farm animal welfare, and we want to show them that we are doing more to ensure the animals in our supply chain are treated humanely. By signing the Better Chicken Commitment, we made a public statement about our intent; we made it clear that this is an issue of importance to us. Our ambition is for all chicken supplied to us to be raised in these conditions. and we are now working in partnership with our core meat suppliers to try to achieve this.



**JAKE PICKERING, SENIOR MANAGER,  
AGRICULTURE, WAITROSE.**

“We want to continue to lead the way on farm animal welfare, it’s what our customers expect and what our farmers are passionate about. We owe farm animals a good life and this should be an ambition across the entire food sector. Customers expect high standards and we have proved we can offer good value for money while treating farmers and animals fairly. This isn’t just the case for our more premium products but across all our fresh, frozen and ingredient chicken.

## Comment from Sean Gifford, *Managing Director,* *The Humane League UK*



### THE BCC: A POLICY FOR HARD TIMES

This year the chicken industry has been rocked by a number of critical challenges. Existing problems of labour shortages and inflation were exacerbated by Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the subsequent rises in feed and energy costs. Even well before this, in October 2021, chicken industry tycoon Ranjit Singh Boparan declared that the twenty year "binge" on cheap chicken prices was over.<sup>28</sup>

Consumers feel boxed-in by soaring fuel and food costs. Inflation casts a dark cloud over all of us, but particularly the poorest in society. Yet polling has demonstrated that all members of our society value animal welfare, with support remaining consistent across income brackets. With this in mind, our economic problems must not be treated by compromising British values or integrity. Costs must not be cut by making farming more cruel, but by making higher welfare alternatives more accessible. Only major supermarkets and the Government can conspire to make this happen.

The great danger is that the chicken industry sees these economic threats and retreats, becomes inward looking, short-sighted, or complacent. Despite the many challenges thrown at the chicken industry this year, it would be wrong to think that intensifying chicken farming, or clinging onto the status quo, are viable options. Investigations have repeatedly shown the horrific suffering endured by standard fast-growing chickens. Are supermarkets really telling us that this is the only way they can provide us with affordable food? When profits were up their shareholders got lavish bonuses, while executives ignored the hundreds of millions of beings needlessly suffering in their supply chain. As mentioned, the Better Chicken Commitment has been endorsed by Defra this year: it has been rubberstamped by public officials as a practical

and ethically superior farming policy. Companies such as M&S and Waitrose have committed to sourcing BCC chicken only, and report back glowingly.

In April 2022 Sainsbury's announced a new welfare policy that we estimate will affect somewhere in the region of 120,000,000 meat chickens per year. It meets five of the BCC's six requirements, and is a sign of progress in the retail sector.

However, Sainsbury's is not changing the breed of the birds - a huge oversight, which will leave a vast source of suffering in their supply chain uncorrected. Nonetheless this change is promising, and the fact that Sainsbury's has shouldered the cost of the change, instead of passing it onto struggling consumers, deserves praise.

It is becoming increasingly obvious to wider sections of the population that the supermarket price tag on cheap chickens does not reflect the true cost of raising these birds. Supermarket chains have profited off wholesome marketing campaigns which have belied ugly truths - such as those Morrisons and Cranswick were hiding in their sheds.<sup>29</sup>

Cruelty isn't chicken farming's only secret - pollution from intensive farms in Wales has wrecked the river Wye, to name one example, and antibiotic use

in farm animals is still too high, prompting fears over the evolution of antibiotic-resistant bugs. On top of this, there is the disease risk birds carry, and while avian influenza is currently not dangerous to humans, history informs us that this may not remain the case.

A corporate animal welfare policy which does not include meat chickens is no policy at all. Roughly 1.1 billion chickens are slaughtered each year in the UK, compared to 14.9 million sheep, 10.6 million pigs or 2.8 million cows.<sup>30</sup> Meat chickens account for 92% of all the land animals killed in this country; an average of 35 of these animals are killed in the UK every second of every day.<sup>31</sup>

Therefore, all food businesses which claim to care about animal welfare whilst lacking a progressive welfare policy for meat chickens are simply not credible. In spite of a well-intentioned but inadequate move from Sainsbury's and the continued success of the BCC at M&S and Waitrose, the supermarkets have remained disappointing in their aversion to reforming animal welfare. They refuse to help the hundreds of millions of birds kept and killed on their watch. Where they once pioneered animal welfare with cage-free eggs,

supermarkets have been left in the dust on meat chickens as the likes of fast-food outlets and even pet food companies have quickly outclassed them.

Despite the challenges the chicken industry and consumers have endured, animals should not be punished by forces outside of their control. Food businesses, especially supermarkets, are the biggest reason why nearly one billion chickens are kept in painful and squalid conditions, being seemingly inspired only by a thirst for profit and a race to the bottom on pricing.

Chicken producers can maintain profits by demanding higher prices for fewer birds, and changes should be paid for by highly profitable supermarkets with the aid of state subsidies. Changing to the BCC would provide the British consumer with the welfare standards they expect and provide the animals with a life closer to the one they deserve. To borrow a slogan from Dutch animal charity Wakker Dier, the future is 'Less meat, better meat.' It is time to re-envision how chickens are raised, farmed and consumed and create a new deal with consumers, retailers and producers - a new deal that the Better Chicken Commitment represents.



## CONCLUSIONS

Although this year has seen the chicken industry face many challenges, the Better Chicken Commitment is continuing to make progress. Major restaurants like Subway have committed alongside food manufacturers like Premier Foods. Sainsbury's, the second largest UK supermarket, has invested in upgrading its chicken welfare, despite its continued reliance on cruel fast-growing breeds. Defra will provide financial support to help accelerate the policy's success.

It will take sustained engagement and campaigning to get the supermarket sector to join, who remain more guilty than anyone for propping up an outdated and cruel status quo, which pushes animal welfare to its very brink, and beyond it. Thanks to pioneering research from the Welfare Footprint Project, we now know that the BCC reduces the time a chicken spends in the most severe categories of disabling and excruciating pain by an average of 66%.

Despite difficulties in the global economy, despite international crises and Covid's long shadow, the BCC marches on. A future where animals are raised more humanely is both desirable and attainable, and the BCC is a policy that any company can be proud to put their name to.

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