
Editorial

'The pros and cons of cages' presentation by Professor Ian Duncan at the World Poultry Congress in Montreal two years ago and subsequently published in Volume 57 No. 4 of this Journal, was a highly important contribution to the scientific discussion about the use of laying cages. Professor Duncan, a leading figure in research on poultry behaviour and welfare during the past 30 years, outlined the history of the development of the laying cage. He reviewed the main advantages and disadvantages of modern cage systems but was unable to reach a general conclusion, suggesting that it was up to the general public to decide what they consider of most importance.

While finding themselves in general agreement with Duncan's conclusions, Dr G. Heil and Dr D.K. Flock from Germany did not agree with on two points listed by him among the disadvantages. Specifically, that the lack of nesting opportunities resulted in severe frustration for many birds each time an egg is laid and that housing layers in cages results in a higher incidence of foot lesions. They have taken up these matters with him publicly by writing to this Journal. We are pleased to publish, unedited, both their letter and professor Duncan's reply.

The discussion about the future use of laying cages, especially in the countries of the European Union, is one of the most important questions facing the poultry industry. It is high time that poultry scientists regained the initiative in this debate in order that the subject is given proper objective scientific assessment. In recent years most of the public pronouncements on this topic seem to have been coming in the form of misinformation from animal welfare and consumer pressure groups or from vote-seeking politicians.

The 27th Poultry Science Symposium on 'The Welfare of the Laying Hen' organised by the UK Branch WPSA and scheduled for 17-20 July 2003 in Bristol, UK, could have a major influence on the future of commercial egg production in Europe.

Professor Wolfram and his colleagues from the Market Research Department in the Institute of Agricultural Policy at the University of Bonn make a highly significant contribution in their paper 'Impacts of stricter legal standards in the EU for keeping hens in battery cages.' They leave no room for doubt that the economic impacts of this legislative review could be catastrophic for the egg industry in Europe. Egg production and employment will fall and imports of eggs from countries outside the EU would increase. These cheaper, imported eggs will be produced in conventional laying cages.

This issue of the Journal should be published and distributed in time for the European Poultry Conference in Bremen, Germany, which expects more than 1000 delegates. The editorial staff of the Journal will all be there, and we look forward to meeting members of the World's Poultry Science Association and others attending this conference. We shall be pleased to discuss any aspect of the contents of the Journal and possibilities for future scientific contributions.

David Martin
Editor