



**To:**

Frans Timmermans, Executive Vice-President for the European Green Deal  
 Valdis Dombrovskis, Executive Vice-President for an Economy that Works for People  
 Věra Jourová, Vice-President for Values and Transparency  
 Stella Kyriakides, Commissioner for Health and Food Safety  
 Janusz Wojciechowski, Commissioner for Agriculture  
 European Commission  
 Berlaymont, Rue de la Loi 200  
 1000 Brussels

27 April 2021

Dear Executive Vice-Presidents Timmermans and Dombrovskis,  
 Dear Vice-President Jourová,  
 Dear Commissioners Kyriakides and Wojciechowski,

**Ending the use of cages in animal farming**

We represent civil society in the sectors of environmental protection, public health, sustainable farming and food, rural livelihoods and citizens' interests. We are writing to add our voices to the call to end the use of cages in EU agriculture.

The 'End the Cage Age' European Citizens' Initiative received **1.4 million** verified [signatures](#) from citizens from every EU member state. 'End the Cage Age' is only the sixth Initiative ever, and the first for farmed animals, to meet EU requirements for this participatory democracy tool. The signatures exceeded the minimum thresholds in 18 member states, making it equal first for this of all the valid Initiatives so far. This outstanding civic mobilisation was the result of outreach by a coalition of [over 170](#) organisations and federations across Europe.

There is overwhelming [scientific evidence](#) that caging animals causes suffering, yet every year in the EU over **300 million animals** are still caged for part or all of their lives. Caged hens have only the space of about an A4 sheet of paper, denying them the ability to perform basic needs such as wing-flapping and dustbathing. Rabbits are sometimes unable to stretch up or out fully and generally do not have enough space to perform a single hop. Almost all adult female pigs spend nearly half of every year inside crates, in which they cannot even turn around; they have to give birth and nurse their piglets through the metal bars.

Caged animal farming is a **central prop of industrial animal agriculture**, which not only causes massive animal suffering but is a major contributor to the public health, climate, biodiversity and rural employment crises:

- The rise in intensive and unsustainable farming is a key factor driving the increasing emergence of zoonotic diseases, as highlighted by a recent UNEP [report](#).
- Industrial animal farms cause air [pollution](#), among others, which is an important [cofactor](#) increasing the risk of mortality from COVID-19.
- Overconsumption of animal products, enabled by caged farming, is a major factor in driving the global health crisis. For example, consumption of red meat has been [associated](#) with stroke, type 2 diabetes and certain cancers. [Unhealthy diets](#) pose a greater risk to morbidity and mortality than does unsafe sex, and alcohol, drug, and tobacco use combined.
- Our food system contributes to about a quarter of all greenhouse gas emissions, according to [IPCC](#). A diet rich in plant-based foods and with fewer animal source foods confers both improved health and environmental benefits, concluded the [Lancet Commission](#).
- Approximately [30%](#) of the total human-induced biodiversity loss is related to farm animal production. Intensive meat and dairy production is a major [driver](#) of deforestation, dead zones in the oceans and degradation of freshwater bodies globally.
- The industrialisation of animal agriculture leads to a consolidation of agribusiness companies and threatens the [livelihoods](#) of smallholder farmers.

The public overwhelmingly favours improving the welfare of farmed animals. An official Eurobarometer [public opinion poll](#) found that **94% of EU citizens believe that protecting the welfare of farmed animals is important** and 82% think farm animals should be better protected than they are now.

While the EU has been slow to take action, **EU member states** have [taken the lead](#). Austria, Belgium, Czechia, Denmark, Germany, Luxembourg, Slovakia and Sweden have phased out, or are in the process of phasing out, some of the worst systems for caging farmed animals.

The call to end the use of cages in animal farming is supported by more than [140 scientists](#), including world-renowned ethologist and conservationist **Dr. Jane Goodall**. In a letter, the scientists point out that '[s]cientific research shows that cages have inherent severe disadvantages for animal welfare' and 'in each case commercially viable alternatives exist that provide better welfare'.

Most recently, representatives from the **business sector** [commended](#) the aims of the 'End the Cage Age' European Citizens' Initiative and highlighted that the 'revision of animal welfare legislation presents the ideal opportunity for a legal basis to end the use of cages in the EU', starting with ending cages in the laying hen industry, and 'supporting farmers in the transition'.

A recent [report](#) from the **European Parliament's research department** confirmed that a cage-free future is possible, recommending that the EU adopt legislation such as a ban on cage housing. In

addition, the **Institute for European Environmental Policy** has [found](#) that a transition to cage-free farming can be a win-win for animals, the environment and small scale farmers.

During the [public hearing](#) of the 'End the Cage Age' European Citizens' Initiative on 15 April this year, Members of the European Parliament overwhelmingly expressed their support for the Initiative.

We therefore ask you **to phase out the use of cages in farming by revising EU Directive 98/58/EC** on the protection of animals kept for farming purposes, in order to bring it in line with the latest science, the expectations of the EU public, and to help address the inter-related public health, rural employment, environmental and animal welfare crises linked to **caged animal farming as a central prop of industrial animal agriculture**.

**In order to provide a level playing field for EU farmers and protect the quality of EU products, the EU should also ban imports which do not meet EU animal welfare and environmental standards.**

Yours sincerely,

Hannes Lorenzen, President, Agricultural and Rural Convention

Clara Behr, Head of Policy and Public Relations, Biodynamic Federation Demeter International

Jeremy Wates, Secretary General, European Environmental Bureau

Nikolai Pushkarev, Policy Coordinator Food Systems & NCD Prevention, European Public Health Alliance

Nicole Polsterer, Sustainable Consumption and Production Campaigner, FERN

David Sánchez, Director of EU Affairs, Food & Water Action Europe

Jagoda Munić, Director, Friends of the Earth Europe

Magda Stoczkiewicz, Deputy Director, Greenpeace

Eric Gall, Deputy Director, IFOAM Organics Europe

Shefali Sharma, Director, Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy Europe

Paola Hernández Olivan, Projects Officer, Mensa Cívica

François Veillerette, President, Pesticide Action Network Europe

Floriana Cimmarusti, Secretary General, Safe Food Advocacy Europe

Marta Messa, Director, Slow Food Europe

Judith Hitchman, President, Urgenci