

EU Welfare Directive 'Draconian'

"It is important that any country imposing legislation on the egg industry must take into account the latest scientific research and not require unrealistic changes that are not only costly, but also damaging to the industry. The IEC supports strict animal welfare guidelines, but not changes recommended without any scientific evidence that improves welfare." — Brian Ellsworth, IEX Chairman.

The International Egg Commission (IEC) has attacked the EU Directive laying down standards for laying hens as being 'draconian' and 'based on insufficient research'. "It will remove consumer choice and result in many consumers on low incomes no longer having access to an important low-cost source of protein," said IEC Chairman, Brian Ellsworth.

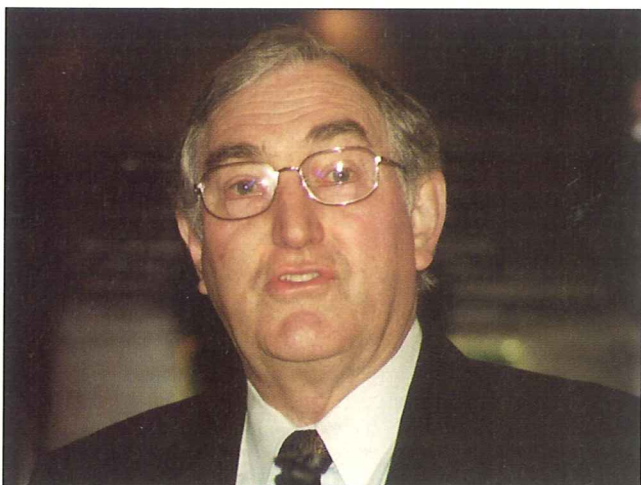
The IEC cannot support Council Directive 1999/74/EC, laying down minimum standards for the protection of laying hens in the European Union. In particular, the requirements on bird stocking density and a ban on the use of conventional laying cages by 2012, may not necessarily lead to improved bird welfare. Scientific evidence clearly shows that the health of both the bird and stockman are better with birds housed in cages.

Consumers of eggs throughout the world must be afforded the opportunity to make purchases of eggs produced from different systems of egg production. Eggs are an important source of protein and are currently affordable to all. The effects of this Directive

will be to remove in the EU, their choice of purchasing low-cost eggs which will disadvantage, in particular, those on low incomes at a time when most governments are actively seeking to increase the level of nutritional guidance.

In the opinion of the IEC, egg producers and their customers are best placed to determine the most appropriate type of housing, taking into account both the birds' welfare and health requirements. Significant progress has been made during recent years in both the design and construction of conventional cages, and with high levels of stockmanship, the majority of the birds' welfare needs can be met by the conventional cage. In addition, the separation of the bird from its droppings allows the production of hygienically produced bacteria-free eggs. The utilisation of controlled-environment housing allows agricultural workers to perform their tasks in a clean and healthy environment.

To legislate against these normal practices is draconian. The IEC believes that there should be unrestricted market access for eggs and egg



Brian Ellsworth, IEC Chairman



Over 100 delegates attended the IEC's Spring Meeting held in London, England in March.

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Ase Kringlebotn announced that Bergen Norway was to be the venue for the IEC's Annual Conference, 26-31 August, 2001.



Dr. Donald J McNamara of America's Egg Nutrition Centre was presented with the Denis Wellstead Memorial Trophy as the IEC's International Person of the year.

products between countries. Producers in certain countries should not be disadvantaged by over zealous welfare legislation that not only restricts production, but also increases the cost of the products to the consumer.

At the present time there is insufficient research to support the Directive's specifications for 'enriched' cages, and whether or not they will lead to an improvement in bird welfare. It is the IEC's view that considerably more research must be conducted into such cages, with particular emphasis on cage height, stocking density, and the provision of litter. If scientific research demonstrates bird welfare advantages, producers must be able to adapt existing cage systems, in order to keep any increase in capital and running costs to a minimum.

The new EU Directive is too restrictive and will lead to considerable disruption in international trade of eggs and egg products. Egg producers in the EU are required to meet standards that are not applicable to producers in non-EU countries. These standards involve considerable costs. As trade barriers are removed, this will result in loss of market share, as EU egg production is replaced by eggs and egg products produced elsewhere, and EU exports are made uncompetitive.

The IEC is composed of and represents the interests of 43 egg-producing countries in the world. As such, our members look to and expect leadership from the IEC that is responsible, of sound science, and facilitates the orderly production and marketing of eggs.

Despite not having regulatory authorities, the IEC burdens of responsibilities are substantial. We produce

one of the world's finest protein products and at an economical cost. 'Choice' and 'market driven' are extremely important in today's marketplace, yet meeting social needs is still a priority of the IEC and the world egg sector.

It is not just the effects of the Directive on EU countries. The egg industry is an important economic activity in all IEC countries. Legislators must take into account the latest results of scientific research and conduct further research where questions remain unanswered. This is a prerequisite before the EU or any other country adopts such restrictive legislation.

As an example of the egg industry recognising the importance of good animal welfare and positive husbandry methods, the USA has developed "Animal Husbandry Guidelines for US Egg Laying Flocks", based on the recommendations of a Scientific Committee, which was comprised of prominent scientists from across the USA. These guidelines were based on the support of scientific research and have been adopted by the USA egg industry.

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During the discussion following Brian Ellsworth's paper, Maria del Mar Fernandez Poza said that some 99% of the 40 million layers in Spain were kept in cages. Consumers there were not as concerned about

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animal welfare as in most of the other EU countries. "They are more concerned about food safety and prices than welfare," she added.

She went on to say that Spanish producers did not have the money to meet the costs involved in converting from conventional cages to any of the other alternatives. Hence, Spain did not agree with the EU position on production systems and she argued that animal welfare should not be linked with the safety of a food product. While she felt that producers needed to improve the image of eggs she was pessimistic about the future for the industry in Spain and maybe the EU.

Al Pope said that the American industry needed to thank the IEC for making it aware of the animal welfare issue and the information gathered from the meetings had helped them develop their own animal welfare guidelines. These had been drawn up after they had established a Scientific and Advisory Committee panel of the best scientists on animal welfare in the US had looked at the issues. Their conclusion had been that the health of the bird and bird carer was better with

conventional cages systems than any other production system.

The US viewed the proposed changes in egg production systems in the EU as taking away consumer choice. In his view the issues could be simply resolved by the proper labelling of the eggs. The recommendations of the Scientific & Advisory Committee (which included a welfarist) were adopted by United Egg Producers. Commenting on the criticism, which the industry faced from welfarists, he said, "There are hundreds of research papers and projects that can be used to substantiate our position. Science is on our side."

Frank Pace felt that the decision-makers knew little about the egg industry. In Australia they had faced similar problems to their European counterparts. But, they came up with the scientific evidence and the industry got together and presented the good things about layer management. He added, "Poor management can occur under any system, intensive or free range." He considered that the IEC was the perfect voice to speak for all poultrymen. **PI**



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