

Eggs from Caged Hens: Putting MA Families at Risk

Higher rates of Salmonella contamination from battery cage facilities

Confining chickens in cages so small they can barely move threatens human health. Decades of research demonstrate higher rates of the bacteria *Salmonella* in cage operations than cage-free operations. Leading food retailers, restaurant chains, and foodservice providers, including McDonald's, Burger King and Starbucks, are switching exclusively to cage-free eggs.

The Act to Prevent Cruelty to Farm Animals would simply require that eggs sold in Massachusetts come from hens who have enough space to extend their limbs, meaning that cage facilities will shift to a cage-free model. This commonsense measure will help protect the health of Massachusetts residents.



Health threat

Numerous factors likely contribute to the higher rates of *Salmonella* in cage operations. When hens are crammed so tightly together, pathogens can quickly spread. Additionally, the constant stress and inability to exercise may weaken their immune systems.

Salmonella kills more Americans and sends more people to the hospital than any other foodborne pathogen. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) estimates that 142,000 illnesses each year are caused by consuming eggs contaminated with *Salmonella*. The agency states “Egg-associated illness caused by *Salmonella* is a serious public health problem.”

More than a dozen scientific studies have found that cage operations are significantly more likely to harbor *Salmonella* than cage-free facilities. The European Food Safety Authority (EFSA)—using the best available data comparing *Salmonella* infection risk between different hen housing systems—found significantly higher *Salmonella* rates among caged hens. The egg industry itself acknowledges the problem, with one poultry trade journal admitting, “*Salmonella* thrives in cage housing.”

Cooking is no guarantee

Because *Salmonella* can infect the ovaries of hens, eggs from infected birds can be laid with the bacteria essentially prepackaged inside. *Salmonella* can survive various cooking methods, including sunny-side-up, over-easy, and scrambled, according to research funded by the American Egg Board.

Reforms needed

Prominent consumer advocacy organizations including the Consumer Federation of America and the Center for Science in the Public Interest have called on the egg industry to switch to cage-free production.

The Center for Food Safety (CFS), which has endorsed Massachusetts’ Act to Prevent Cruelty to Farm Animals, stated in a 2014 amicus brief “caged hens have consistently presented a higher risk of *Salmonella* than cage-free hens, indicating a strong connection between cages and pathogen contamination.” The non-profit concluded “...the fact remains that in terms of potential *Salmonella* contamination, eggs from caged hens are simply more dangerous than their cage-free counterparts.”