

# EU CAGED RABBIT FARMING INVESTIGATION

2024



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## Executive summary

EU legislation on the welfare of animals on farm states that, where an animal is continuously confined it must be given the space appropriate to its physiological and ethological needs in line with established science[1].

It is not possible to provide for such needs in any commercial caged system[2]. Despite this, around 300 million farm animals per year, including hens, pigs, ducks, geese, calves and quail, are closely confined in caged systems each year in the EU. These systems severely limit or prevent the expression of a range of highly-motivated natural behaviours, such as hopping or stretching.

This number also includes around 70 million farmed rabbits, including breeding animals and their offspring, who are reared for meat.

A 2024 Compassion in World Farming investigation into caged rabbit farming in the EU has found rabbits in cramped and often crowded conditions, with barely enough space to conduct a single normal hop. Most cages have insufficient height for rabbits to rear up on their back legs, an important part of vigilance behaviour. Some individually caged rabbits are in cages so small that they cannot even do a full horizontal stretch. Both breeding and older fattening animals were found isolated in individual cages, contrary to their social nature.

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[1] European Commission, 1998. Council Directive 98/58/EC on the protection of animals kept for farming purposes. <https://eurlex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX:31998L0058>

[2] Compassion in World Farming, 2021. Scientific Briefing on Caged farming.

[https://www.ciwf.org.uk/media/7446651/150603\\_ciwf-february-2021-scientific-briefing-on-caged-farming.pdf](https://www.ciwf.org.uk/media/7446651/150603_ciwf-february-2021-scientific-briefing-on-caged-farming.pdf)



**The investigation found rabbits crowded together or isolated in small cages, all with insufficient height and floor-space to perform natural behaviours.**

Aside from nesting material for nursing does, no additional straw, hay, or gnawing material were observed in any of the farms visited. Notably, one doe was observed consuming straw provided for nesting. Rabbits were found gnawing at the bars of their cage, a typical abnormal behaviour associated with the lack of provision of gnawing materials and with social isolation. Several fattening rabbits were found with bad ear lesions, in some cases with part of the ear missing, presumably as a result.

The great majority of rabbits were housed on wire floors which can lead to pressure sores or hock lesions in breeding rabbits, as was observed.

Compassion urges the European Commission to deliver on its 2021 commitment to ban caged farming for all species, and to lay down minimum standards that ensure the physiological and ethological needs of animals can be met.

For rabbits, this should include:

- **minimum space allowances to provide for natural behaviour, such as hopping and stretching;**
- **platforms to jump up on and rest;**
- **combined with a lack of height restriction to permit for vigilance behaviour;**
- **hiding places;**
- **comfortable flooring without wire mesh for foot health;**
- **the provision of hiding places for the feeling of security;**
- **and gnawing materials and fibrous feeds such as hay or straw to maintain teeth and gut health.**

Does should have access to nesting material and systems which allow at least partial group housing of does whilst ensuring their welfare needs should be the norm are met.

## Investigation key findings

The investigation into caged rabbit farming in the EU has found rabbits kept in cruel conditions that lack provision for even their most basic behavioural needs. This includes rabbits being:

- **crowded into small cages**
- **in cages with such severe height restrictions, they are unable to rear up onto their back feet – a highly-motivated natural behaviour**
- **individually housed, both growing and breeding individuals, despite being social animals**
- **housed in such cramped conditions, in some cases, that they don't have space to stretch out**
- **deprived of gnawing materials to grind down their constantly growing teeth**
- **kept on uncomfortable wire floors**



Breeding rabbits isolated and confined in very small cages without the option to rise and stretch upwards on their back feet. The rabbit on the right enjoys a very brief moment of freedom when the cage top is lifted up.



**Growing rabbits, crowded into a small cage.**



**Breeding rabbit in cage so cramped s/he would not be able to stretch out fully horizontally as well as vertically.**



**Able to stretch, but still very closely confined.**



**Rabbits are social animals, but older finishing rabbits and does were individually housed.**

## Welfare consequences of cages observed

The investigators documented:

- **many rabbits chewing at the bars of their cages**
- **ear lesions in rabbits kept in confinement. In some cases, parts of the ear was missing**
- **pressure sores on breeding rabbits**

Abnormal behaviours such as bar chewing and ear chewing may be explained by the lack of gnawing materials observed in the cages. European Food Safety Authority (EFSA), 2020, reports that one of the main effects of a lack of suitable materials for the expression of gnawing behaviour is a redirection of gnawing behaviour to the cage or even to each other [3].

There is good evidence that such behaviour may be associated with social isolation. EFSA, 2020, cites research which suggests a sevenfold increase in abnormal behaviours, including bar chewing, in rabbits confined individually compared with those kept in pairs.



**Dead rabbit with wound caused by ear biting. Rabbits need materials to gnaw on, such as hay, straw, vegetables or wood blocks, and can turn on each other in their absence.**



**Doe resorting to consuming bedding material provided for her kits. Material like hay or straw should be provided as feed and gnawing material.**



**Breeding rabbit gnawing the bars. A lack of gnawing blocks and social isolation can both lead to this abnormal behaviour.**

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[3] EFSA AHAW Panel (EFSA Panel on Animal Health and Welfare), Saxmose Nielsen S, Alvarez J, Bicout DJ, Calistri P, Depner K, Drewe JA, Garin-Bastuji B, Gonzales Rojas JL, Gortázar Schmidt, Christian, Michel V, Miranda Chueca M\_A, Roberts HC, Sihvonen LH, Spooler H, Stahl K, Velarde Calvo A, Viltrop A, Buijs S, Edwards S, Candiani D, Mosbach-Schulz O, Van der Stede Y and Winckler C, 2020. Scientific Opinion on the health and welfare of rabbits farmed in different production systems. EFSA Journal 2020; 18(1): 5944, 96 pp. <https://doi.org/10.2903/j.efsa.2020.5944>



**Long periods of lying on wire floors can result in foot sores in does, for which this one is being treated.**

### **Pressure sores**

Wire is an uncomfortable surface to stand and lie on, especially for older, larger breeding rabbits. Our investigators obtained footage of a large doe being treated for pressure sores on the hocks. In this case a plastic mat was provided, but rather too late. EFSA, 2020, reports that abrasive wire mesh can favour micro-traumatic lesions which can become infected and develop into sores.



**A plastic mat has also been placed in this doe's cage to reduce pressure on her sores. Better flooring could have avoided this problem in the first place.**



## Lack of space

The confinement observed by the investigators is extreme, with rabbits having insufficient space:

- to exercise meaningfully
- To perform even a single full-length hop, EFSA suggests the length of a hop is up to 70cm, depending on rabbit size; and that the Council of Europe recommends that rabbits kept for experimental purposes should be able to complete three consecutive hops.
- to raise themselves on their hind feet to perform normal vigilance behaviour. Rabbits were observed lifting their heads up to the top of the cage whilst still in a crouching position. On occasions where the cage tops were briefly opened by farm personnel to give investigators a clearer view of the rabbits, animals immediately lifted themselves well above the cage surface to get a clearer view.
- to put a safe flight distance between themselves and passing humans should they feel fearful. Several rabbits were observed to race against the back of the cage and then do a circle in a vain attempt to escape from close human proximity.



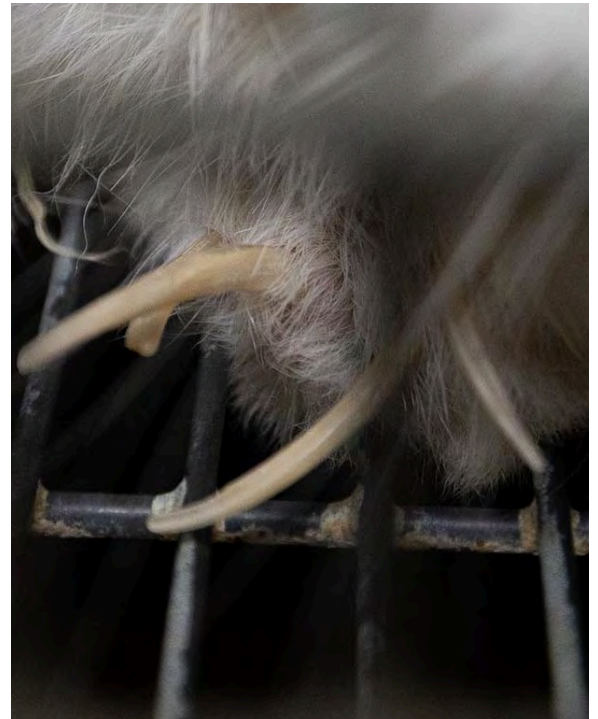
Rabbits were found in cramped cages in all countries investigated. Maternity cages in Poland.



**Cramped cages in Italy.**



**Male rabbit trying to escape to the back of the cage. Cages do not have sufficient space for rabbits to establish a safe flight distance.**



**Naturally, rabbits would wear down their growing claws with exercise or scratching on a hard surface. In a cage system they can grow too long.**



**Rabbit with skin/fur condition on face.**



**Doe with fur missing on back of neck.**

**Rabbit with thin fur. Whilst she has used some fur to line her nest, this level of loss isn't thought normal.**

## Other welfare issues observed

### Rabbits panting due to heat stress

Rabbits were observed panting heavily in two farms due to high temperatures. EFSA, 2020, states that rabbits are very sensitive to high temperatures; as fur animals they have limited ability to eliminate excess body heat.

### Does with missing fur

On one farm, several does were observed with part of their fur missing over much of their body. Two were observed with hair missing down one side of the body.

One of the rabbits was seen tugging at the fur of the rabbit next to her. Two others were observed with some missing on the face and an apparent skin condition. Another was missing fur at the back of her neck.

Does can lose fur for a range of good reasons. They pluck some of their fur out to line the nest for their kits. Rabbits also moult. Nevertheless, veterinary advice is that neither is likely to explain the poor level of fur cover and its distribution in these rabbits. Whilst fur loss in a few rabbits might not be the result of bad management or welfare, poor welfare can have this result. Fur loss can be self-inflicted and it can be caused by parasites or infection. There are many possible causes of skin disorders.

In one farm, rabbits were observed unable to hold their heads up, possibly due to injury, infection, a neurological condition, or possibly caused by parasites. They were in need of veterinary attention.

The quality of handling rabbits varied, with some relatively gentler treatment and some rough treatment, for example as they were moved between cages. One farmer demonstrated the process by which one male buck rabbit is “prepared” for collection of semen by roughly catching and placing another male in front of him and held in place whilst he is mounted. He reported that female rabbits are also used in a similar way to “warm up” the male.



**Rabbits unable to hold head up.**



**Male rabbit held in place to be mounted to prepare for collection of semen for artificial insemination.**

# Rabbit farming in the EU

## The numbers

There is limited data available about the extent of rabbit farming within the EU, but according to a 2017 EU Commission report[4], around 119 million rabbits were farmed and slaughtered each year commercially in 2016 plus an additional 61 million in backyard farms.

Since then, the EU has not published data on rabbit numbers, but data it has published via the CIRCABC dashboards on tonnage of rabbit meat produced suggest that by 2022, numbers had declined to within 70-80 million per year.

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[4] European Commission, 2017. Commercial rabbit farming in the European Union. Accessible via <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/5029d977-387c-11e8-b5fe-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>





This is consistent with data published by FAO, which estimates that the European Union produced 76,805,000 rabbits in 2022. This is down from its estimate of 129,576,000 for 2016. The FAO's data are based on official data where available and estimates where it is not. It must be noted that FAO publishes figures for a limited number of countries, presumably due to the lack of official data; thus, its overall estimate must be considered very much an estimate. However, it is in the same ballpark as estimates which can be imputed from EU figures for the weight of rabbit meat produced. Table 1 includes data for the number of rabbits farmed in the EU. Where FAO quotes official figures, these are listed for the most recent year available. Elsewhere, the 2016 data from the 2017 EU report is listed.

The FAO estimates that, in 2016, nearly 130 million rabbits were slaughtered for food. This compares with the 2017 EU report's estimate of 119 million for commercial rabbits and for 180 million rabbits including backyard production. We are therefore assuming that official data reported by the FAO refers only to commercial production, mostly in cages, except for Lithuania, Luxembourg and Romania, for which all production quoted in the EU 2017 report was backyard production; and for Poland, Greece and Cyprus where official figures for rabbit production exceed the commercial estimate in 2017.

It is possible that some backyard production will also be in cages, though more likely that much will be in wooden hutches with bedding such as straw. It must be noted that hutches are also commonly very restrictive of rabbit behaviour.

# Number of rabbits reared commercially in EU countries

Our estimate is that around 70 million farmed rabbits are kept in cages each year across the EU.

Data from the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) shows that around 77 million rabbits are farmed for meat in the EU each year (76,805,000 in 2022).

## Rabbits reared commercially in EU countries each year and estimated caged

Country	Number of rabbits	Source	Source year	Est. number caged	Notes
Czechia	260,000	National data	2019	250,000 (around 95%)	Plus 4.6 million backyard
France	15,966,000	FAO	2022	Around 14 million (around 90%)	
Italy	14,507,537	National data	2023	Majority Alternative systems are rare	vetinfo.it
Netherlands	1,900,000	National data	2023	380,000 (20%)	
Poland	2,200,000	National data	2023	Many	Central Statistical Office based on kg meat conversion
Spain	33,308,000	FAO	2022	Over 30 million (no known alternatives)	

## Number of rabbits reared each year for food in EU countries (caged estimate unknown)

Country	Number of rabbits	FAO source	Latest year	Notes
Austria	130,000	Imputed value	2017	
Bulgaria	2,805,000	Imputed value	2017	
Cyprus	346,000	Official figure	2017	Mostly backyard
Estonia	8,000	Imputed value	2017	
Greece	1,518,000	Official figure	2019	Mostly backyard
Hungary	4,128,000	Official figure	2019	
Latvia	23,000	Official figure	2018	
Lithuania	155,000	Official figure	2018	Backyard
Luxembourg	14,000	Official figure	2018	Backyard
Romania	85,000	Official figure	2018	Backyard
Slovakia	2,500,000	Estimated value	2017	

FAO data for rabbit production in the following countries is not available post 2016: Belgium, Croatia, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Ireland, Malta, Portugal and Slovenia.

The 2017 EU report suggested that 94% of the 119 million rabbits then farmed in commercial systems were in cages (of which 85% in conventional and 9% “enriched” cages), with around 6% in park systems or pens. For individual countries, it should be noted that higher welfare systems were in use for 60% of rabbits farmed in the Netherlands, 40% in Hungary and 3-4% each in France in Italy. It was assumed that Spanish farmers continued to use traditional caged systems.

Dutch government statistics [5] don't give figures for production, but state that 32,000 does are kept in 30 Dutch rabbit farms. On this basis, we assume that around 2 million rabbits are farmed per year. Most are kept in higher welfare park systems for the Belgian market. They are slaughtered in Belgian or French abbatoirs, so will appear in statistics for those two countries. According to data from ITAVI, it is thought that 11% of French rabbits are now farmed in higher welfare systems.

Applying these figures to the number of animals currently farmed suggests that around 66 million rabbits are in cages in those countries.

Given that several million rabbits are also farmed in the countries for which the EU did not have estimates for caged production, Compassion believes that around 70 million commercially farmed rabbits are kept in cages representing around 90% of the total.



**Up to 70 million rabbits are farmed every year in caged systems.**

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[5] CBS, Dutch national statistics agency, 2024 : <https://www.cbs.nl/nl-nl/cijfers/detail/81302ned?q=konijn>



## Findings by country

### Italy

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The investigators visited four farms, where they found rabbits:

- **crowded into small cages**
- **lacking vertical space, unable to rear up onto their back feet**
- **some housed in such cramped conditions that they don't have space to stretch out**
- **individually housed, both growing and breeding individuals, despite being social animals**
- **without provision of gnawing materials to grind down their constantly growing teeth**
- **rabbits, including breeding animals, kept on uncomfortable wire floors**

The investigators documented:

- **rabbits chewing at the bars of their cages**
- **pressure sores amongst breeding rabbits**
- **rabbits panting due to heat stress**
- **several does in one farm with a possible skin condition, some with fur missing**
- **rough treatment and forcible mounting in demonstrating the procedure for collecting semen for artificial insemination**

Explanations for these have been discussed earlier.

# Findings by country

## Italy

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**Isolation in tiny cages. Cramped conditions. Insufficient height to rear up on their hind legs.**

In one farm, part of the procedure for collecting semen for artificial insemination was demonstrated. One male rabbit was roughly taken out of his cage, placed in front of another and held down whilst the second one mounted him. The farmer stated that does were also used to “warm up” the males. Prior to this procedure being carried out, the attempted escape behaviour of the male about to be caught to be forcibly mounted was notable.

One of the farms had experimented with at least two kinds of enriched cage. These had more vertical space, permitting the rabbits to get up on their hind legs, and platforms which the rabbits could jump up and down on. There was additional horizontal space, but not enough for the rabbits to complete consecutive hops. The cages still had wire floors though some, not all, had small plastic mats added to reduce discomfort. Although enriched cages often have added gnawing blocks, none were observed. Enriched cages are an inadequate improvement on conventional barren cages; they still fail to meet the welfare needs of rabbits.

**All the pictures in this section came from Italian farms.**

# Findings by country

## Italy



Rabbits are motivated to lie in contact with each other. Cage-gnawing is common in rabbits kept isolated and where gnawing materials are not provided.



Doe with fur missing on side.



Rabbit in enriched cage. Not so cramped, but natural behaviour still severely limited.



Doe with fur missing on back of neck.



Pressure sores being treated in this doe. Caused by long periods of sitting on wire floors without the opportunity for relief.



Male rabbit held in place to be mounted to prepare for collection of semen for artificial insemination.

All the pictures in this section came from Italian farms.

## Findings by country

### Poland

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The investigators obtained footage from two industrial farms with barren cages where they observed:

- **fattening rabbits crowded into cramped cages**
- **cages so small rabbits could not retreat to a safe flight distance**
- **cages with insufficient height to allow rabbits to lift themselves onto their back feet**
- **breeding rabbits individually housed in cages with very limited space for movement**
- **uncomfortable wire floors**

The lack of gnawing blocks resulted in ear damage to several rabbits, some with parts of their ears missing, caused by chewing.

The investigators also found:

- **two rabbits unable to hold their head up. This might be a neurological condition. It could be due to injury or infection. These rabbits should have received veterinary attention**
- **a dead fattening rabbit with a badly chewed ear.**

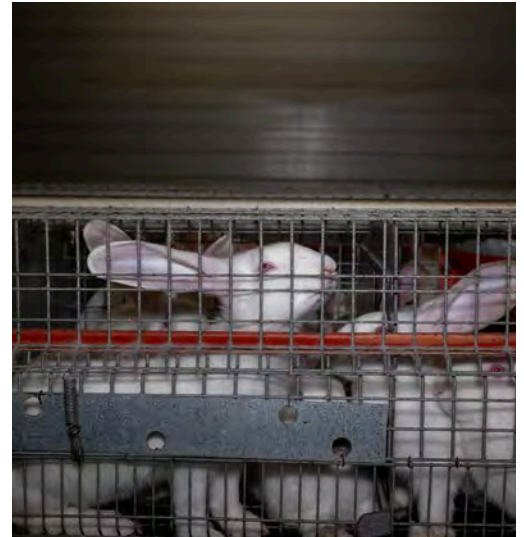
Explanations of these have been discussed earlier.

# Findings by country

## Poland



Does with young in large Polish caged farm.



Growing rabbits, crowded into a small cage.



Isolated in small cages, with minimal freedom of movement and unable to rear up on their back legs to perform normal vigilance behaviour.



All the pictures in this section came from Poland.

# Findings by country

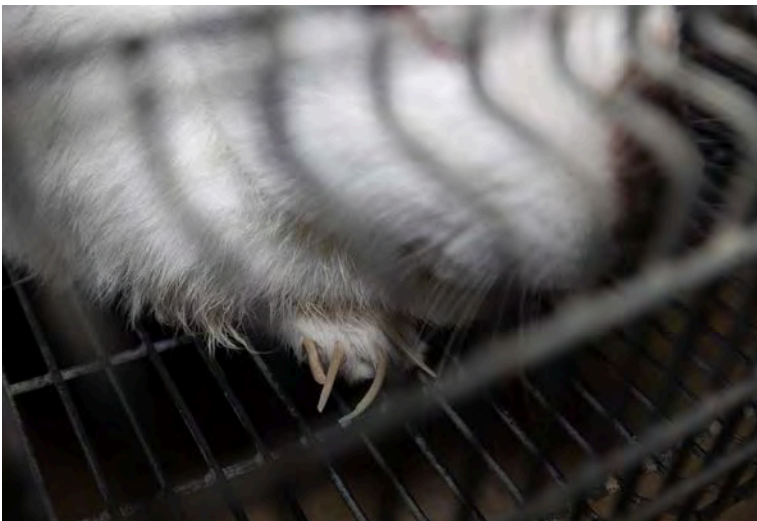
## Poland



Several rabbits with damaged ears. A lack of materials to gnaw can result in rabbits gnawing at the bars of the cage and on each other.



Young kits sheltering behind their mothers. Without hiding places, cages don't provide a sufficient flight distance for nervous rabbits.



In a cage system, claws continue to grow without being worn down by exercise and scratching on solid surfaces.



Rabbit with possible injury or neurological condition, unable to hold head up.

All the pictures in this section came from Poland.

## An overview of cages – other species and the numbers across the EU

Around 300 million animals are caged each year in farms in the European Union including:

- **nearly 152 million laying hens in 2023 [6]**
- **around 70 million rabbits [7]**
- **up to 10 million sows [8]**
- **approximately 30 million ducks and geese [9] raised for foie gras production**
- **over 100 million quail kept for meat and eggs [10]**
- **11 million or more dairy calves born each year kept in individual pens for up to eight weeks after birth [11]**

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[6] European Union, CIRCABC, 2024. EU market situation for eggs  
<https://circabc.europa.eu/sd/d/18f7766e-e9a9-46a4-bbec-94d4c181183f/0%20Circa%20%20egg%20no%20links.pdf>

[7] Calculated from a range of sources including European Commission, 2017, *op cit* using FAOSTAT data (2024) for numbers of farmed rabbits

[8] Calculated from a range of sources using Eurostat data for sow numbers

[9] Estimated from a range of sources including industry websites

[10] We estimated over 160,000 laying quail based on the findings of previous Compassion investigations, but these investigations found that a large number of Italian caged quail are also kept for meat

[11] Estimated from data re systems in Marcéet et al, 2010 and Staněket et al, 2014 and Eurostat data on numbers of dairy cows, 2024

As quoted earlier, European farm animal legislation requires that:

***“The freedom of movement of an animal, having regard to its species and in accordance with established experience and scientific knowledge, must not be restricted in such a way as to cause it unnecessary suffering or injury.***

***Where an animal is continuously or regularly tethered or confined, it must be given the space appropriate to its physiological and ethological needs in accordance with established experience and scientific knowledge.” [12]***



**No caged system provides sufficient space for the ethological needs of any farmed animal.**

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[12] European Commission, 1998. Council Directive 98/58/EC on the protection of animals kept for farming purposes. <https://eurlex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX:31998L0058>



Despite this legislation, cage systems do not provide sufficient space to prevent unnecessary suffering or to provide for the ethological needs of any farmed animal. Sows kept in stalls or farrowing crates are so restricted they cannot even turn around. Rabbits are sometimes unable to stretch out fully and generally do not have sufficient height to rear up onto their back feet or to perform a single full-length hop [13]. Quail have insufficient vertical space to perform their natural escape behaviour of flying up to safety, so they hit their heads on the roof [14]. For calves in pens, lack of space combined with social isolation restricts play and interaction with other calves, which is important for their social and mental development [15]. Even an “enriched” cage for hens, given its 45cm height, provides insufficient vertical space for wing flapping[16] and prevents the birds from perching high.

For all animals kept in cage systems, proper exercise, whether walking, running, jumping, bathing or flying, is severely restricted and often impossible.

In addition to issues associated with space, animals kept in cage systems are often deprived of other basic behavioural requirements. Hens in enriched cages are not provided with suitable material for dust-bathing and only minimal provision is made for scratching behaviour. Caged quail are provided with neither. Caged ducks and geese, kept for foie gras production, are not provided with water for bathing and preening[17]. Rabbits, as was found in this investigation, are generally not provided with gnawing materials. Sows in farrowing crates are commonly not provided with nesting material.

A detailed exposition of the scientific case against cages can be found in Compassion’s *Scientific Briefing on Caged Farming* available online [18].

**In short, caged systems cannot provide for the welfare needs of farmed animals and should be phased out.**

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[13] EFSA (2005) Scientific Report of the Scientific Panel on Animal Health and Welfare on the impact of current housing and husbandry systems on the health and welfare of farmed domestic rabbits. Annex to The EFSA Journal, 267: 1-31.

[14] Gerken, M; Mills, AD (1993) Cited in: Buchwalder, T; Wechsler, B (1997) The effect of cover on the behaviour of Japanese quail (*Coturnix japonica*). *Applied Animal Behaviour Science*, 54: 335-343.

[15] Jensen, M.B., Vestergaard, K.S., Krohn, C.C. and Munksgaard, L. (1997) Effect of single versus group housing and space allowance on responses of calves during open-field tests. *Applied Animal Behaviour Science*. 54, 109-121.

[16] Mench, J.A. and Blatchford, R.A., 2014. Determination of space use by laying hens using kinematic analysis. *Poultry Science*, 93(4), pp.794-798.

[17] Rochlitz, I. and Broom, D.M., 2017. The welfare of ducks during foie gras production. *Animal Welfare*, 26(2), pp.135-149

[18] Compassion in World Farming, 2021. *Scientific Briefing on Caged Farming*.

[https://www.ciwf.org.uk/media/7446651/150603\\_ciwf-february-2021-scientific-briefing-on-caged-farming.pdf](https://www.ciwf.org.uk/media/7446651/150603_ciwf-february-2021-scientific-briefing-on-caged-farming.pdf)

## Legislation for rabbits

Whilst there are European Council Directives specifically to protect some minimum welfare requirements of calves, hens, pigs and broiler chickens, there is no specific legislation protecting the welfare of rabbits across the EU. Belgian law bans cages for growing rabbits and requires the provision of platforms, tunnels, gnawing equipment and a more comfortable lying area [19]. Austria, Sweden, Germany and the Netherlands have some specific additional protections for rabbit welfare.

Rabbits are covered by general legislation, Council Directive 98/58/EC, protecting the welfare of animals kept for farming purposes which requires as stated above, that where animals are confined, their physiological and ethological needs are met [20].

It is clearly not possible for this provision to be met in any system which keeps rabbits in a cage, preventing, as it does any, rabbit from performing reasonable exercise including the performance of a single full-length hop. It prevents them from securing a safe flight distance from passing stock people. The barren cage even prevents rabbits from rearing up onto their hind limbs or from scanning the distance from a vantage point; and some rabbits are kept in cages in so small they are unable to stretch out horizontally.

Despite the requirements of the Directive, the vast majority of rabbits are kept in systems which clearly do not meet its specification.

**A ban on cages is necessary to ensure that the intention of the general legislation is met.**

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[19] Belgium, 2014. Arrêté Royal relatif au bien-être des lapins dans les élevages. Moniteur Belge [C - 2014/24303], 60861-60864.

<http://environnement.wallonie.be/legis/bienetreanimal/bienetre004.html> (accessed 11.01.21)

[20] European Commission, 1998. Council Directive 98/58/EC on the protection of animals kept for farming purposes. <https://eurlex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX:31998L0058>

## Providing for the needs of rabbits

The mental well-being of rabbits depends on provision for their behavioural as well as physical needs. Systems which have the potential to provide for the welfare needs of rabbits should include:

- **minimum space allowances to provide for natural behaviour, including a minimum pen length to permit rabbits to perform consecutive hops**
- **no height restriction (e.g.: no cover for the pen)**

- **platforms for rabbits to hop onto to enable them to get a vantage point**
- **the provision of hiding spaces**
- **the provision of gnawing materials and fibrous feeds such as hay or straw**
- **the provision of comfortable flooring**

Does should have access to nesting material and systems which allow at least partial group housing of does, whilst ensuring their welfare, need to be the norm.



## The alternatives

A range of alternative systems are described and illustrated in the 2020 EFSA report [21] as well as in the wider the scientific literature.

These include:

- 1. Park systems:** small, elevated enclosures with no height restriction so the rabbits can reach up to their full height, and dimensions of at least 180 x 100 cm which permits successive hopping. Platforms, tubes for hiding, and gnawing material such as wood blocks, hay/straw, or vegetables such as carrots are generally provided.
- 2. Pen systems:** Large indoor slatted or solid floored open-top pen systems house larger numbers of growing rabbits than park systems and therefore offer the rabbits more unrestricted available space to play and hop, and have the potential for more complex enrichment and environmental choice. Pen systems typically include platforms, hiding spaces (ranging from simple tubes to large artificial burrow systems), and gnawing material (gnawing blocks, compressed forage blocks and hay racks). Pen systems with at least some solid flooring offer the possibility of providing the rabbits with bedding material such as straw, while adding a wintergarden to a pen system gives the rabbits more space, access to natural light and fresh air, while still offering protection from the elements, and the opportunity to choose between an indoor and an outdoor climate.
- 3. Outdoor and organic systems:** Outdoor systems provide the rabbits with access to a mobile outdoor run with vegetation or to a range. To be considered cage-free, mobile outdoor systems ought to provide the rabbits with sufficient horizontal space to perform consecutive hopping and unrestricted vertical space to rear up, and free access to the vegetation underneath. Outdoor systems provide a more stimulating environment for the rabbits, including the opportunity to dig and graze on vegetation, while free-range systems offer the rabbits a large area to explore.

The welfare potential of any system can be further improved by the provision of additional space, covered resting areas (with entrances like a burrow system), more varied and complex enrichment, wintergardens, and access to range.

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[21] EFSA, 2020 *op cit*



Platform and hiding areas. ©Kanaal Z



Rabbit hiding in tube. Rabbits naturally rest in burrows. ©Kanaal Z



Floor pen with platforms.



Platform in elevated pen with straw dispenser and wooden block to encourage normal gnawing behaviour. ©Kanaal Z

## Conclusion

Cage systems cannot meet the physiological and behavioural needs of farmed animals, including rabbits, as required by general legislation. The EU should legislate to ban cages for rabbits and all other farmed animals including hens, pigs, ducks, geese quail as well as requiring group housing for calves of all ages.

Minimum standards should be laid out for all species to ensure that their welfare needs can be met.



END THE  
CAGE AGE

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### COMPASSION IN WORLD FARMING INTERNATIONAL

River Court, Mill Lane,  
Godalming, Surrey,  
GU7 1EZ, UK

**EMAIL:** [supporters@ciwf.org](mailto:supporters@ciwf.org)

**WEB:** [ciwf.org](http://ciwf.org)

**TEL:** +44 (0)1483 521 953

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