EU confirms 2012 date for ban on raising hens in small battery cages

Animal Welfare / Animal Welfare
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BRUSSELS, Belgium -- A European Union-wide ban on keeping laying hens in small battery cages will, according to this story, come into force as planned in 2012, the European Commission said Tuesday. The commission pointed to a new report showing the ban will benefit animal welfare benefits without significantly harming farmers' incomes.

"There is scientific and economic support for the ban on conventional battery cages," EU Health Commissioner Markos Kyprianou was quoted as saying.

EU nations agreed in 1999 to phase out the cages by Jan. 1, 2012, after lengthy campaign by animal rights groups who claimed that farming hens in small cages was cruel. After the deadline, laying hens will have be raised in the open air or barns, or be kept in cages of at least 750 square centimeters (116.28 sq. inches) per bird equipped with a nest, litter, perch and clawing board.

In a statement, the European Commission cited a report which said that cost of switching to the so-called "enriched cages" could be less than 1 percent per egg. The EU's executive branch said improving conditions for hens could boost sales, as consumers are increasingly concerned about animal welfare.

"This is the right decision for the welfare of millions of hens kept for egg production across Europe," said Sonja Van Tichelen, director of the Eurogroup for Animals. The Brussels-based federation of animal welfare organizations said some battery hens are currently kept in wire cages no bigger than a sheet of typing paper.

Some leading supermarket chains in Britain announced last week they were planning to phase out sales of eggs from battery hens before the ban.

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