

Dear Ministers,

An official legal definition of free range eggs that would provide certainty for consumers and improve hen welfare is long overdue and definitely welcome. Whilst the Government has released the Draft Information Standard for Free Range Egg Labelling, the contents are very concerning. I find this draft to be extremely vague and lacking guidance thereby opening up many loopholes.

It is imperative that the Information Standard provides consumers with certainty. This could be achieved by tightening the exceptions for providing access to the outdoor range so that access cannot be denied on a routine basis. A requirement that regulators consider the following, when determining what constitutes 'meaningful and regular access', should also be included.

- Flock size and stocking densities inside the barn
- Size of openings relative to the number of hens
- Placement of physical structures and architecture inside the barn
- The condition of the outdoor range including providing adequate shelter, foliage and vegetation
- The extent to which hens actually access the range.

In summary I strongly believe that the 10,000 hens per hectare stocking density is excessive, and that a preferred limit of 1500 hens as proposed by the RSPCA is more in accordance with community expectations. As a consumer I want certainty as to whether the free range eggs I am purchasing do indeed come from hens with access to a quality outdoor range and that reflect good hen welfare.

Thank you for your time and I look forward to a positive outcome.

Yours Faithfully

Tracey Hicks