

# **BLOG: WORLD EGG DAY – IS IT REALLY A BETTER LIFE FOR *ALL*?**

**Cheslyn Ceaser, 14 October 2022**

*If an egg is broken by an outside force, life ends. If broken by an inside force, life begins*’ - Anonymous

## **INTRODUCTION**

This year, the 14<sup>th</sup> of October marks World Egg Day. This day is heralded by many as a day on which we celebrate what is considered one of the most popular sources of animal-based protein on the planet: eggs. In 2022, the theme for World Egg Day as prescribed by the International Egg Commission (IEC) is “Eggs for a better life”, which is said to “shine a spotlight on the impact egg consumption has on improved nutritional and environmental outcomes, leading to better lives for all”.<sup>1</sup> Conventional eggs however, and those who are involved in the process to bring these to people - chickens - are subjected to myriad cruel practices. This cruelty has removed chickens’ ability to live natural and normal lives and flourish as sentient beings. The theme of “a better life for all” thus undoubtedly excludes the hens who are confined, forced to lay eggs, and ultimately killed, as well as the baby chicks who are discarded as “waste” by the egg industry.

This blog will discuss the origins of World Egg Day and highlight a few of the many animal welfare and wellbeing related issues inherent in the current egg production system. It will highlight that positively there is growing advocacy and work being done and a global movement towards cage free chickens and eggs, which has been receiving tremendous attention. This movement is shifting the way in which chickens are housed, treated, and ultimately protected. Lastly, this blog will speak to Animal Law Reform South Africa’s (ALRSA’s) specific work in this area including exciting research towards better legal protection for chickens and more accountability for those producing eggs in South Africa.

## **WHAT IS WORLD EGG DAY?**

World Egg Day was first celebrated in 1996 at a conference in Vienna by the IEC, and since then has been celebrated every year on the second Friday of October. Since 1996, many countries

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<sup>1</sup> Retrieved from <https://www.internationalegg.com/resource/celebrating-eggs-for-a-better-life-this-october/#:~:text=IEC%20Digitalisation%20Series-.World%20Egg%20Day%202022%3A%20Celebrating%20Eggs%20for%20a%20better%20life,eggs%2C%20which%20improve%20lives%20worldwide> (accessed on 08 October 2022).

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around the world have participated in the celebration of eggs in various creative ways including cooking creative egg-based meals, social media celebrations, competitions, digital campaigns and even festivals held to celebrate eggs globally.<sup>2</sup> This tradition continues, with over 100 countries across the world celebrating the day in 2021.

As mentioned, the theme for this year is “Eggs for a better life” and it emphasises the importance of eggs to improve nutritional and environmental outcomes, on the premise that egg consumption would lead to better lives for all. CEO of the World Egg Organisation (WEO), Julian Madeley, stated that “World Egg Day is all about recognising the humble egg as an incredibly unique source of protein and essential nutrients, all within an accessible and affordable package.” He further states that “This year, we also want to highlight other important attributes of eggs, such as their low environmental footprint and how they are at the heart of so many rural livelihoods around the world”.<sup>3</sup>

Widely, eggs are viewed as a popular, cheap, environmentally friendly source of protein which everyone can afford and access, from those in less affluent rural communities to those on the higher end of the financial spectrum. Eggs are regarded as such a successful and important commodity, that the IEC has been working on what it calls “Vision 365”. According to the IEC, this vision entails a “10-year plan to unleash the full potential of eggs by developing the nutritional reputation of the egg on a global scale. With the whole industry’s support, this initiative will enable us to build on the reputation of the egg based on scientific fact, positioning eggs as an essential food for health” (emphasis added). Furthermore, the IEC states that “[n]utritionally and economically, the egg has always been unbeatable, and now is the perfect time to promote the power of the egg as an affordable, nutritious, and low impact food source”.<sup>4</sup> The overall goal of this Vision 365 initiative is to double egg consumption by 2032.<sup>5</sup>

## THE EGG INDUSTRY AND ANIMAL INTERESTS

World Egg Day and efforts to further promote the egg production industry and increase consumption of eggs, however, fail to mention the many negative issues relating to them and their

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<sup>2</sup> Retrieved from <https://www.news18.com/news/lifestyle/world-egg-day-2021-all-you-need-to-know-about-its-history-purpose-and-theme-4300127.html> (accessed on 08 October 2022).

<sup>3</sup> Retrieved from <https://www.internationalegg.com/resource/celebrating-eggs-for-a-better-life-this-october/#:~:text=IEC%20Digitalisation%20Series-.World%20Egg%20Day%202022%3A%20Celebrating%20Eggs%20for%20a%20better%20life,eggs%2C%20which%20improve%20lives%20worldwide.> (accessed on 08 October 2022).

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.internationalegg.com/our-work/vision-365/> (accessed on 08 October 2022).

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

production. These issues range from animal wellbeing concerns to environmental impacts of the egg industry and intensive farming, to social impacts relating to workers to potentially negative health impacts, to name a few.

Looking more into the wellbeing and welfare of the chickens implicated in these industries, some may not be aware of many harmful practices done to the hens who lay these eggs, nor to the baby male chicks who are ruthlessly killed in the industry, because they are not “useful” or economic. However, when thinking of eggs and the industry, we cannot simply separate the chicken from the egg. In South Africa, the egg industry is the fourth-largest animal production industry in the country. Furthermore, the country’s per capita consumption of eggs is at 140 eggs per annum.<sup>6</sup> Across the world, approximately 7.5 billion hens lay eggs at a commercial scale and supply various supermarkets, restaurants and fast-food chains, and the hospitality industry with eggs annually.<sup>7</sup>

Many of these 7.5 billion hens have been cross-bred and genetically manipulated to produce roughly 300 eggs per year. This is approximately 120 more eggs annually than they would have been laying 50 years ago.<sup>8</sup> The result of this, is a depletion of their bodies’ nutrients and frustration and fighting between hens, among other issues. This high volume of egg-laying further shortens their lifespan from 6-8 years for backyard flocks to 2-3 years for those housed in the commercial system.<sup>9</sup>

As recently as 2022, researchers have found that much like dogs and cats, chickens enjoy playing and find pleasure in running around, jumping, playing with other chickens and even enjoy playing with toys such as fake worms<sup>10</sup> – akin to your cats or dogs favourite toy. This type of playing has been stated to be a measure of coping with the stress chickens experience in their unnatural environment.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Retrieved from <https://www.farmersweekly.co.za/animals/poultry/egg-production-get-it-right-from-the-start/#:~:text=Eggs%20are%20the%20fourth%2Dlargest,safe%2C%20top%2Dquality%20eggs> (accessed on 13 October 2022).

<sup>7</sup> Retrieved from <https://thehumaneleague.org/article/global-cage-free-progress-report> (accessed on 13 October 2022).

<sup>8</sup> Retrieved from <https://www.four-paws.org.za/campaigns-topics/topics/farm-animals/laying-hens> (accessed on 13 October 2022).

<sup>9</sup> Retrieved from <https://livestock.extension.wisc.edu/articles/life-cycle-of-a-laying-hen/#:~:text=Lifespan%20of%20a%20hen,production%20decreases%20after%20this%20time>. (accessed on 13 October 2022).

<sup>10</sup> Retrieved from <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41598-022-17617-x> (accessed on 13 October 2022).

<sup>11</sup> Retrieved from <https://sentientmedia.org/young-chickens-play-study/> (accessed on 13 October 2022).

But chickens in the egg industry, are largely confined to “battery cages”. Battery cages are cages designed for the housing of layer hens for the entirety of their lifetimes.<sup>12</sup> In addition to this caged confinement, layer hens and chickens are subjected to numerous industry practices which cause harm and limit these chickens from experiencing a natural and normal life.

These harmful practices include (among others):

### **Culling of Male Chicks**

- 0 Male chicks from breeds raised for egg production are regarded as unsuitable for egg production. This is due to their inability to lay eggs, unlike their female counterparts. Furthermore, due to their slow growth rate and low breast meat yield, they are regarded as “waste”. As a result, male chicks are culled minutes after hatching. When the next generation of egg-laying hens hatch, these chicks are sorted according to their gender. Female chicks are then raised to lay eggs, while the newly hatched male chicks are placed on a conveyer belt and ground up alive in a macerator.<sup>13</sup> Instances of hatcheries dumping unhatched eggs, deformed eggs and male chicks at landfills and dumping sites resulting in more severe well-being violations on these animals.<sup>14</sup>

### **Beak Trimming**

- 0 The chicken’s beak is a complex sensory organ with numerous nerve endings. It not only serves to grasp and manipulate food items but is also used to manipulate non-food objects while exploring, drinking, and preening. Beak trimming is a practice in which a portion of a hen’s beak is removed. This may result in hen’s remaining chronically in pain and impact a hen’s ability to use its beak.<sup>15</sup> For commercial egg laying hens, their beaks are trimmed either at a day old or up to 7 days of age, with a hot blade and often without anaesthesia.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Retrieved from <https://thehumaneleague.org/article/battery-cages> (accessed on 13 October 2022).

<sup>13</sup> Retrieved from <https://www.ciwf.com/farmed-animals/chickens/egg-laying-hens/welfare-issues/> (accessed on 08 October 2022).

<sup>14</sup> Retrieved from <https://nspca.co.za/farm-animal-protection/hatcheries/> (accessed on 13 October 2022).

<sup>15</sup> Retrieved from <https://www.ciwf.com/farmed-animals/chickens/egg-laying-hens/welfare-issues/> (accessed on 08 October 2022).

<sup>16</sup> Retrieved from [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/325161/FAWC\\_opinion\\_on\\_beak\\_trimming\\_of\\_laying\\_hens.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/325161/FAWC_opinion_on_beak_trimming_of_laying_hens.pdf) (accessed on 19 October 2022).

## **Battery Cage Confinement**

- 0 Often regarded as one of the cruelest factory farming practices - of the abovementioned 7.5-billion-layer hens, roughly 90% of them are confined to what is known as battery cages.<sup>17</sup> These cages can hold up to ten chickens at once with no room for these animals to stand upright or spread their wings without hitting the walls of their confinement. These metal cages further offer no soft floor surface and result in severe injury of hens such as twisted ankles. The average space allowance per bird in a typical battery cage is less than a letter-size sheet of paper. The cages usually have a sloping wire mesh floor and are kept in rows stacked several tiers high.
- 0 Each shed typically houses tens of thousands of hens this way, and the largest sheds can contain more than a hundred thousand birds. These buildings are typically artificially lit and ventilated.
- 0 The result of this confinement means caged hens may never experience natural light, fresh air, or get to walk on solid ground in their entire lives and do not leave their cages until they are gathered for slaughter.<sup>18</sup>

These cruel practices are harmful to animal welfare and wellbeing, as evidenced by several conditions that the practices cause:

## **Osteoporosis (brittle bones) in Layer Chickens**

- 0 Modern commercial hens have been bred to produce large numbers of eggs. This large amount of egg production places extreme pressure on hens' bodies. One of the effects this has is the depletion of the hens' store of calcium and has resulted in high levels of osteoporosis (brittle bones) and fractures in hens. Restricted movement because of confinement in cages have further contributed to osteoporosis in hens.<sup>19</sup>

## **Feather Pecking**

- 0 Hens often lose a large proportion of their feathers due to damage from the sides of the cages they are confined in and pecking from other frustrated hens. To prevent feather

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<sup>17</sup> Retrieved from <https://nspca.co.za/farm-animal-protection/hatcheries/> (accessed on 13 October 2022).

<sup>18</sup> Retrieved from <https://www.civf.com/farmed-animals/chickens/egg-laying-hens/welfare-issues/> (accessed on 08 October 2022).

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

pecking in hens, chicks often have part of their beaks cut off without an anaesthetic resulting in tremendous pain being experienced by the animal.<sup>20</sup>

These practices and resulting conditions are not mentioned, highlighted, or discussed on days such as World Egg Day and remain hidden behind closed doors, often by the same industry who advocate for an increase in production and consumption of chicken and eggs.

In South Africa, no national legal standard in relation to animal welfare for egg-laying hens has been set with emphasis on their treatment. In 2021 however, a process of a draft, non-binding standards for their “welfare” was initiated by the South African Bureau of Standards (SABS).<sup>21</sup> Unfortunately, this draft standard allows the use of battery cages until 2039.

Despite a lack of regulation to protect egg-laying hens, awareness of these harmful practices and the general ill-treatment of chickens in the egg industry has been increasing. This awareness has led to initiatives, campaigns, and research in respect of alternatives to these practices. The initiatives, campaigns and research have taken place globally with more and more stakeholders, animal organisations and everyday consumers taking a stand against the continuance of these kinds of practices.

## **GLOBAL SHIFT– TOWARDS CAGE-FREE CHICKENS AND EGGS**

To counteract gross animal violations that take place in the production of eggs, various animal protection organisations are fighting back through various tools. These range from legal tools, to creating public awareness of this industry, to engaging with various stakeholders in the industry to improve animal protection for egg laying chickens. Various alternatives to battery cages are explored, including free-range, barn and even cage-free systems.<sup>22</sup> Although legally undefined, cage-free systems typically house hens on a littered barn floor or in aviaries with multiple tiers including a litter floor. This system allows hens to express their natural behaviours more freely. Such behaviour includes stretching and flapping their wings, running, and flying. Most notably, cage free systems would allow layer hens to lay their eggs in nests. These are important steps in the right direction; however, they still do not meet the inherent needs of these animals to live a life of flourishing that they deserve. In addition, plant-based alternatives to eggs have been increasingly

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Retrieved from <https://www.sapoultry.co.za/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/2022-SAPA-COP.pdf> (accessed on 13 October 2022).

<sup>22</sup> Retrieved from <https://www.ciwf.com/farmed-animals/chickens/egg-laying-hens/welfare-issues/> (accessed on 08 October 2022).

welcomed by consumers who seek an alternative to supporting this industry. Examples of such alternatives include Oh My Crack – Vegan Egg,<sup>23</sup> Orgran Vegan Easy Egg,<sup>24</sup> and JUST EGG<sup>25</sup> - all available nationwide. Although at a higher price in comparison to chicken eggs, with more people consuming such products and increase in demand, the pricing for these products will decrease.

One tool advocates are using to transition the industry away from cage systems towards a cage-free system is by getting them to agree to certain “commitments” where stakeholders across the spectrum agree to at a very minimum – to do better for chicken. Two commitments have been growing in recognition and popularity amongst animal welfare organisations and various stakeholders, the “Better Chicken Commitment” and the “Cage-Free Commitment” respectively. These commitments arose from consumers becoming increasingly concerned about animal protection and where their food comes from with reports in the US finding that consumers were willing to pay at least one US dollar more for a “more ethical poultry product”.<sup>26</sup>

## **BETTER CHICKEN COMMITMENT**

The Better Chicken Commitment<sup>27</sup> was originally a set of welfare standards developed by animal organisations in the United States of America. This commitment is regarded as the leading set of standards for chicken welfare driving the food industry towards improved welfare practices. With time, this commitment has become an increasingly global commitment with the development of a European version and the “Australian-New Zealand Better Chicken Commitment”.

Although these commitments vary slightly from region to region, they share the same basic requirements: namely a shift to healthier and more natural breeds of chickens; more space afforded to chicken inside sheds; the improvement to chicken environment, with the inclusion of natural light, perches to rest on and objects to play with; less handling and stress at slaughter and public accountability and transparency through reporting. The envisioned outcome of this commitment is that chickens raised under these standards will have more space to move around, get off their dirty litter and rest on perches; they will be able to see daylight instead of spending 20 hours daily under artificial lighting. Ultimately, this commitment envisions the breeding of chicken with the

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<sup>23</sup> <https://veganprotein.co.za/index.php/Oh-My-Crack-Vegan-Egg-p442770835>

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.faithful-to-nature.co.za/orgnan-vegan-easy-egg>

<sup>25</sup> <https://offtheglutenpath.co.za/just-folded-egg-patties/>

<sup>26</sup> <https://betterchickencommitment.com/why/> (accessed on 08 October 2022).

<sup>27</sup> <https://betterchickencommitment.com/> (accessed on 08 October 2022).

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health of the bird in mind instead of the stocking of these chickens and their by-products such as eggs as units for profits.<sup>28</sup>

## CAGE-FREE COMMITMENT AND THE OPEN WING ALLIANCE

Globally, thousands of corporations have already made animal welfare commitments to end the use of battery cages.<sup>29</sup> This is, in large part, due to the continued efforts of the Open Wing Alliance (OWA).<sup>30</sup> Founded in 2016, the OWA is a global coalition of organisations around the world working together towards the end of chicken abuse worldwide. The first step of the OWA is to eliminate the use of battery cages by the industry. It aims to achieve this by engaging with various stakeholders and working with these stakeholders to develop, release and enforce their respective cage-free policy.<sup>31</sup> Currently the OWA consists of 80 member organisations in 63 countries worldwide<sup>32</sup> and thanks to their continued work, more than 2000 companies have announced corporate welfare policies to go cage-free.<sup>33</sup>

Examples of this policy shift include global cage-free commitments from Toridoll,<sup>34</sup> Chatrium Hotels & Residence<sup>35</sup> Planato Ovos,<sup>36</sup> Pague Menos Group,<sup>37</sup> RIU Hotels & Resorts,<sup>38</sup> and Green

<sup>28</sup>Retrieved from <https://animalsaotearoa.org/2022/07/07/new-chicken-standards-nz/> (accessed on 08 October 2022).

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> <https://openwingalliance.org/organizations>

<sup>31</sup> <https://openwingalliance.org/organizations>

<sup>32</sup> Retrieved from <https://openwingalliance.org/impact> (accessed on 08 October 2022).

<sup>33</sup> Retrieved from <https://thehumaneleague.org/article/global-cage-free-progress-report> (accessed on 08 October 2022)

<sup>34</sup> Toridoll is a Japanese Holdings Company that operates restaurants including Wok to Walk, Marugame Udon, and Boat Noodle. Toridoll has committed to sourcing 100% cage-free eggs in all its locations around the world by 2030, except for in Japan, where it will begin with transitioning 10 stores to cage-free by the end of 2022, 3% of stores by 2023, with subsequent annual increases thereafter. Retrieved from <https://www.toridoll.com/en/csr/environment/animal-welfare/index.html> (accessed on 08 October 2022).

<sup>35</sup> Chatrium Hotels & Residences is a hospitality company with 7 locations across 3 countries, has announced a cage-free commitment for all owned and franchised operations. This commitment is in alignment with Chatrium's 'Think First Think Earth' initiative to contribute to communities where they are located. Commitment available at <https://www.chatrium.com/media/chatrium-hotels-residences-transitions-to-a-cage-free-egg-supply-chain> (accessed on 08 October 2022).

<sup>36</sup> Planalto Ovos has adopted a commitment to keep their egg farms cage-free and to never make investments in conventional facilities. Retrieved from <https://www.planaltoovos.com.br/diferenciais> (accessed on 08 October 2022).

<sup>37</sup> Pague Menos Group operates with 34 stores and are a high-end market in São Paulo, Brazil. Commitment available at [https://www.linkedin.com/posts/paguemenos\\_supermercadospaguemenos-fazsuavidamelhor-activity-6973714874308677634-BrqR?utm\\_source=share&utm\\_medium=member\\_desktop](https://www.linkedin.com/posts/paguemenos_supermercadospaguemenos-fazsuavidamelhor-activity-6973714874308677634-BrqR?utm_source=share&utm_medium=member_desktop) (accessed on 08 October 2022).

<sup>38</sup> RIU Hotels & Resorts is a Spanish hotel chain with recognized national and international success. We estimate that this commitment will impact 375,000 hens and help the cage-free movement build momentum in countries where there are less resources for cage-free work like Bulgaria, Turkey, Tunisia, Morocco, Jamaica, the Bahamas, Aruba, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Panama, Cape Verde, Mauritius, St. Martin and Sri Lanka. Commitment available at <https://www.riu.com/riusponsible/en/sustainable-measures/> (accessed on 08 October 2022).

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Me.<sup>39</sup> Other major companies such as Subway, Burger King, Sodexo, Compass Group, Accor Hotels, Metro AG and Marriot International have also made global cage-free pledges.<sup>40</sup> Metro, Canada's 5th largest retailer, became the first major retailer in the country to publicly recognise the Better Chicken Commitment and report progress toward its attainment.<sup>41</sup>

## ANIMAL LAW REFORM SOUTH AFRICA AND PROTECTING CHICKENS

As an organisation, we at Animal Law Reform South Africa proceed from the premise that all animals are sentient beings with intrinsic worth and deserve legal protection as such. This view extends to the protection of chickens involved throughout the egg industry – from the female hens who lay the eggs, to the baby male chicks who are culled, to everyone in between. As an organisation that envisages a society whose laws, courts and enforcement agencies advance the protection and well-being of humans, non-human animals, and the environment, we oppose the current violations of animals' interests as well as the failure to recognise the intrinsic value of these animals. We are furthermore extremely concerned about the impacts of this industry on the environment and human rights. There is a lack of governance and enforcement of the industry as well as a lack of accountability for those who are involved.

We have previously worked on securing greater protection for chickens implicated in the egg industry through for example our submissions on the Draft Regulations Regarding the Grading, Packing and Marking of Eggs Intended for Sale in the Republic of South Africa<sup>42</sup> in 2019. In our submission, we highlighted the need for hens not to be housed in battery cages on top of one another as it is an inhumane and unhygienic environment for the animals. Furthermore, we called for transparency in the labelling of egg containers with clear indication that the eggs are “Cage Eggs” or “Free Range Eggs” or “Barn Eggs”. Lastly, we called for a policy level decision on the phasing out of cages for egg producing hens with reference to foreign jurisdictions banning the use of cages altogether.<sup>43</sup> Our submission together with others, resulted in the publication of Draft

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<sup>39</sup> Green Me, a Mexican company that owns two restaurants, located in Mexico City and Puebla, decided to announce a cage-free egg commitment. Green Me also committed to always have plant-based options available in their menu. Retrieved from <https://www.instagram.com/p/CjDeSvpuZyW/?hl=en> (accessed on 08 October 2022).

<sup>40</sup> Retrieved from <https://www.poultryworld.net/poultry/layers/companies-continue-to-meet-cage-free-commitments/> (accessed on 08 October 2022).

<sup>41</sup> Retrieved from <https://corpo.metro.ca/en/corporate-social-responsibility/products-services.html#procurement> (accessed on 08 October 2022).

<sup>42</sup> Draft Regulations Regarding the Grading, Packing and Marking of Eggs Intended for Sale in the Republic of South Africa published on 31 May 2019, Notice 289 of 2019.

<sup>43</sup> In the USA, this has been done in States such as Washington, California and Massachusetts. Retrieved from <https://blog.humanesociety.org/2019/05/breaking-news-washington-governor-signs-historic-law-to-end-cage-confinement-of-egg-laying-hens.html> (accessed on 08 October 2022).

Regulations Regarding the Grading, Packing and Marking of Eggs Intended for Sale in the Republic of South Africa<sup>44</sup> which requires eggs to be labelled according to Cage / Free-range and Barn. This is a very positive step forward for both animals and consumers in respect of eggs and egg-laying hens.

In 2021 we commented on the Draft Code for Chicken Welfare, SANS 1758 relating to Poultry Welfare and stated “Chickens are sentient creatures, and a growing body of science illustrates this. Around the world, jurisdictions are moving towards more humane treatment, which includes the banning of cages. Despite being referred to as a ‘welfare’ code, the document does little to promote the welfare of these animals” and “[t]he use of cages must be banned as a matter of urgency and replaced by non-cage systems”.

In July of this year, ALRSA released the *Working Paper: Barriers to the Transformation of South Africa’s Food System: Can the Law be a lever for Change?*.<sup>45</sup> This Working Paper aims to assist in the process of redefining and transforming the South African food system by contextualising the interdependence of the major role players in the food industry, highlighting challenges with its current regulation, and offering potential legal and policy interventions that mitigate the harmful social, environmental, health-related, economic, and ethical effects of South Africa’s current system of intensive animal agriculture. The Working Paper notes that not only does intensive animal agriculture have major impacts on the environment<sup>46</sup> it has highly negative implications on animal welfare and disregards animals’ natural life cycle and facilitates various abuses to animals.<sup>47</sup>

## ALRSA AND OWA - THE CORPORATE ACCOUNTABILITY PROJECT

In December 2021, ALRSA joined the Open Wing Alliance as one of its South African members and one of its few legally focussed organisations. On this World Egg Day, we are proud to officially announce, in partnership with the OWA, our upcoming project relating to “*Corporate Accountability Chicken Welfare Standards of the Companies Providing your Favourite Foods – Laying Down the Facts*”. The report emerging from the project, to be released in May 2023, aims to compel corporates and

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<sup>44</sup> Draft Regulations Regarding the Grading, Packing and Marking of Eggs Intended for Sale in the Republic of South Africa published on 31 May 2019, Notice 289 of 2019.

<sup>45</sup> M. Makonese, F. Muchadeyi, and A.P. Wilson, *Working Paper: Barriers to the Transformation of South Africa’s Food System: Can the Law be a Lever for Change?*, Animal Law Reform South Africa, 2022.

Available at: <http://www.animallawreform.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Working-Paper-Food-Systems.pdf>

<sup>46</sup> According to the report, Intensive Animal Agriculture contributes significantly to global warming through emissions of greenhouse gases of methane and nitrous oxide, and displacement of biomass carbon on the land used to support livestock.

<sup>47</sup> M. Makonese, F. Muchadeyi, and A.P. Wilson, *Working Paper: Barriers to the Transformation of South Africa’s Food System: Can the Law be a Lever for Change?*, Animal Law Reform South Africa, 2022.

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relevant stakeholders to disclose information relating to their supply chains and practices relating to chickens. Specifically, it aims to improve transparency to raise public awareness around, and educate the public on, farmed animal issues in South Africa, particularly animal cruelty, the lack of, and inadequacies with, regulation and oversight, consumer protection issues, intersections with environmental and human harms, and others. This report will assist consumers with making more informed food choices and will help the momentum to gain further cage-free commitments from South African retailers, restaurants, and major brands.

This report will further delve into six pillars we consider imperatives in accessing corporate accountability. These pillars are: animal welfare; environment; consumer protection; corporate and business; food safety and health; and social and rights. Within these pillars we will analyse these topics, the legislation, policies, and strategies of each pillar in relation to the egg industry and the chickens impacted by such industry. Furthermore, this report will provide a ranking criterion for current standards of welfare and compliance with law and policy in the country by relevant stakeholders across the egg industry, including well-known and lesser-known suppliers, producers, and retailers.

The report will serve as a first of its kind resource for non-profit organisations, consumers, industry, and activists to find important statistical data and information more easily on law, standards, policy, and practices relevant to South Africa. We hope that in time and subject to continuity, the report's annual updating will form a baseline which other OWA members, animal protection organisations, and NGOs can utilise including to pursue commitments and move forward the cage-free movement.

While we realise that when an animal is in any sort of confinement is unacceptable, as their wellbeing and ability to flourish is negatively impacted, incremental change is essential. Increased protection afforded to animals is a step in the right direction of the very long road towards better welfare for chickens in the egg industry.

## CONCLUSION

The growing global success of better protection, including welfare for chickens was spurned by the IEC in their Vision 365, which states that: "As an industry, we are facing a very real and urgent threat. The ideological views of powerful and well-funded activists, multinational food companies, NGO's and food start-ups are building a strong anti-livestock narrative within international United Nations organisations and consumer groups." It is concerning but unsurprising that the industry

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sees NGOs and alliances such as ALRSA and OWA as a threat. However, we play an important role in ensuring that the interests of nonhuman animals, animals and the environment are protected and that corporates are held to account.

Our view, shared globally by many NGOs, various stakeholders, activists, multinational food companies, food start-ups and, importantly, an ethical egg consumer is simple:

**An egg is not worth the abhorrent conditions and extreme suffering including cruelty and neglect for the chickens implicated in the industry.**

**Nor is it worth the environmental or human impact caused.**

The status quo of battery cages, culling of male chicks and other mutilations and negative effects on these animals **must** change if we are to truly achieve “A Better Life for All”.

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