

Westminster Hall Debate about the animal welfare standard of hospital food



Objective

Research published by the RSPCA and Campaign for Better Hospital Food has found that hospital food in England is produced to shockingly low standards of animal welfare, and that there are stark regional differences in the animal welfare standard of patient meals ([see here](#)).

The Government can address this situation by requiring hospital food in England to meet mandatory animal welfare standards. The Westminster government is only responsible for hospital food policy in England and not in Wales or Scotland, where responsibility is devolved to the Welsh and Scottish governments.

In this Westminster Hall Debate Neil Parish, MP for Tiverton and Honiton and Chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group for Animal Welfare, will call on the Government to set new binding standards for hospital food which would require all eggs to be cage-free, and for all chicken and pork to meet RSPCA welfare standards as a minimum.

Why are mandatory standards needed?

Government attempts to set animal welfare standards for hospital food using voluntary measures have failed. A report¹ by Sustain: the alliance for better food and farming estimates that, in the last ten years alone, government has spent more than £54 million of taxpayers' money on issuing guidance to hospitals to encourage them to improve the quality of hospital food they serve, including the animal welfare standard of its production. Despite this expenditure, the animal welfare standard of hospital food remains as bad as ever.

Why RSPCA welfare standards for chicken and pork, and cage-free eggs?

RSPCA accreditation ensures that food has been produced from animals which have been reared to welfare standards exceeding legal minimum requirements and certifies that they were cared for and enjoyed a good quality of life.

The introduction of mandatory standards to guarantee that hospital chicken and pork meets RSPCA welfare standards, and that eggs are cage-free, is an affordable way to ensure that chickens, pigs and hens which have been reared for patient meals are given a happy life. It would also ensure that hospital food reflects the ethical concerns of British shoppers who, in a report by the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) last year, specified the welfare of chicken, pigs and hens as an increasingly important influence on their purchasing habits².

¹ Yet more hospital food failure - the bill rises to £54m and still counting
www.sustainweb.org/publications/?id=181 www.sustainweb.org/pdf/GFFOM_Hospital_Food_Second_Report.pdf

² The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) found that 75% of UK households said that the animal welfare standard of egg and chicken meat production is an "important issue". Defra, Attitudes and Behaviours around Sustainable Food Purchasing, April 2011.

While RSPCA Freedom Food certified chicken, pig meat and cage-free eggs may cost more than alternatives produced from animals reared to no welfare standards, they remain affordable for hospitals to buy. In fact, figures from the retail sector show that RSPCA Freedom Food chicken, pork and cage-free eggs can sometimes be cheaper. For example:

- RSPCA Freedom Food barn eggs from Sainsbury's cost the same as cage eggs from Tesco and ASDA.
- Sainsbury's RSPCA Freedom Food chicken thighs and drumsticks are 22% cheaper than Sainsbury's chicken and thighs which meet Farm Assured Standards.

Facts and figures you may like to use during the debate

1. Hospital food should lead by example

It is very disappointing that the animal welfare standard of hospital food has fallen behind those standards adopted by supermarkets, and even the fast food industry. For example, with animal welfare becoming an increasingly important consideration for consumers, more than half of eggs produced in the UK are now cage-free³, and Sainsbury's, Waitrose, M&S, the Co-operative and even McDonald's⁴ have banned cage eggs altogether⁵.

2. Mandatory animal welfare standards would improve quality of hospital food ingredients

Mandatory animal welfare standards will help to improve the quality of ingredients used in hospital food. This is especially important when you consider that one in every ten meals served to patients (approximately 82,192 meals a day) are returned to the kitchen uneaten⁶ and six out of ten patients rely on their families to bring them food because they don't like what they are served in hospital⁷.

3. Mandatory food standards should be extended from 'central government' to hospitals

If the Government has introduced mandatory Government Buying Standards for food served in central government, it should surely extend mandatory food standards to hospitals, where they are needed most.

4. Food which meets higher animal welfare standards may also be more nutritious

While most people buy higher animal welfare food because of their concern for animals and not because they believe it is more nutritious, there is evidence to suggest that meat, dairy and eggs from higher welfare farming contain less fat, as well as more healthy omega-3 fatty acids and antioxidants, than animal products from factory farm systems⁸.

³ Government statistics show that 48% of all eggs produced in the UK are laid by caged hens: www.defra.gov.uk/statistics/files/defra-stats-foodfarm-food-eggs-statsnotice-120802.pdf

⁴ Dishing out failing food standards - comparing Government Buying Standards to those of McDonald's www.sustainweb.org/publications/?id=197

⁵ A full list of organisations which have been given a 'Good Egg' award by Compassion In World Farming for going 'cage-free' is available at: www.ciwf.org.uk/good_egg_awards/english/winners/default.aspx

⁶ 'Protected mealtimes failing as nine million hospital meals go uneaten', Ssentif Intelligence press release, 10 October 2011, www.ssentif.com/archive/4_oct2011.shtml

⁷ Soil Association, 'First Aid for Hospital Food' www.soilassociation.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=2p%2fanl11%2b6o%3d&tabid=1311

⁸ For more information please read Compassion In World Farming's report, *Nutritional benefits of higher welfare products*:

www.ciwf.org.uk/includes/documents/cm_docs/2012/n/nutritional_benefits_of_higher_welfare_animal_products_report_june2012.pdf.