



Department  
for Environment,  
Food & Rural Affairs

Dame Angela Eagle DBE MP  
Minister of State

Seacole Building  
2 Marsham Street  
London  
SW1P 4DF

T: +44 (0) 3459 335577  
E: [correspondence.section@defra.gov.uk](mailto:correspondence.section@defra.gov.uk)  
W: [gov.uk/defra](http://gov.uk/defra)

Russell Borthwick  
Chief Executive  
Aberdeen & Grampian Chamber of Commerce  
The Hub, Exploration Drive, Aberdeen Energy Park  
Bridge of Don, Aberdeen, AB23 8GX  
[heather.morrell@agcc.co.uk](mailto:heather.morrell@agcc.co.uk)

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26 May 2026

Dear Russell,

Thank you for your letter of 27 March to the Secretary of State about the ban on cages for laying hens. I am replying as the Minister responsible for this policy area and I apologise for the delay in doing so.

As you are aware, Defra launched a UK wide consultation on laying hen cage reform on 12 January 2026, which closed on 9 March.

In preparation for the consultation, the government carried out an assessment of the potential impact of the proposed reforms to laying hen welfare policy on the competitiveness and viability of UK egg producers and, as part of the consultation, sought views on that assessment. The consultation also sought additional evidence on how the proposals will affect egg production costs and levels of imports and exports. The government is now analysing the responses and will take into account yours and your members feedback in preparing to publish a response.

The government shares the public's high regard for our high welfare standards at home and, while rightly exploring areas where these standards can be further enhanced, recognises the potential for increased divergence between domestic standards and those of significant global exporters. As set out in the UK's trade strategy, the government will always consider whether overseas produce has an unfair advantage and, where necessary, will be prepared to use the full range of powers at our disposal to protect the UK's most sensitive sectors.

The government recognises that animal welfare is a global issue and will continue to work internationally to champion high standards of animal welfare and promote best practice.

In relation to imports from Ukraine, in January, the UK announced it had agreed to extend the liberalisation of eggs and poultry for a further two years, until 31 March 2028.

The UK remains as committed as ever to supporting Ukraine in its hour of need. Russia's unprovoked and illegal invasion has impaired Ukraine's ability to export goods and disrupted its usual supply chains and transport routes. That is why it is so important that the UK has temporarily liberalised the remaining tariffs and provided needed economic support to Ukraine.

The government has, however, raised concerns regarding the divergence of welfare standards with Ukraine directly. Ukraine is actively making steps to improve its animal welfare standards, despite the ongoing war. As of 1 January 2026, new animal welfare standards for livestock came into effect in Ukraine, including on improving housing and treatment for livestock.

The UK will continue to engage with Ukraine on this issue, alongside monitoring trade flows and market conditions throughout the period of temporary liberalisation, and maintain regular engagement with the UK poultry and egg sectors.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Angela Eagle". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

**DAME ANGELA EAGLE DBE MP**