

UK: not enough free-range eggs, NFU pleads with RSPCA

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Poultry farmers in Britain are struggling to meet the rapidly growing demand for free-range eggs, reportedly due to over-strict RSPCA standards on stocking density.



EU law orders a maximum stocking density of 2,500 birds per hectare for free-range laying hens. However, RSPCA Freedom Food regulation (adhered to by UK supermarkets) ensures that all UK free-range laying hens are stocked at no more than 1,000 birds per hectare, reports Farmers Guardian.

Compared to the EU, this is an extra burden on poultry farmers, says chief poultry adviser for the National Farmers Union (NFU), Robert Newbery. Consequently, farmers are prevented from expanding production to meet growing demand, and encouraging imports.

Newbery also stated that the NFU was in talks with the RSPCA over increasing the stocking density to 2,000 birds per hectare to allow British farmers to meet public demand for free-range eggs. "This is a good compromise between the RSPCA, NFU and EU position."

Farmers Guardian also reported that Alice Clark, an RSPCA farm animal scientist, said the group would listen to all new evidence.