

# Support Bill SB690

Sponsored by Senator Lewis Young

## Marylanders deserve safer, affordable, more humane eggs

Due to enormous public opposition to confining farm animals in ultra-restrictive cages, it's now clear that the future of egg production is cage-free. SB690 would ensure that after a phase-in period, eggs produced or sold in Maryland come from cage-free operations that adhere to the egg industry's own guidelines. This bill will promote food safety, advance animal welfare and provide a business-friendly regulatory framework.

## Increases animal welfare and lowers food safety risks

The majority of hens in the United States egg industry are confined in barren cages so small they can't even flap their wings. These conditions are not only cruel for the birds, but cage systems have been associated with higher rates of Salmonella, a disease which can be deadly—especially in young children and the elderly. Evidence indicates that cage-free systems reduce Salmonella risks.

## Reflects Maryland voters' support of cage-free legislation

A 2023 poll conducted by YouGov found that seventy-six percent of Maryland voters support their legislator voting in favor of the cage-free reforms contained in SB690.

## Only impacts the layer industry

This measure does *not* impact any other sector of animal agriculture, such as Perdue or any other broiler chicken producer. SB690 also will not apply to small farmers with flocks of fewer than 3,000 birds.

## Keeps costs down

The difference in production cost between cage and cage-free housing systems is minimal; it's estimated to be less than one cent to a few pennies per egg. Since cage-free eggs will become the norm, the cost of cage-free eggs will actually *decline* since grocery stores currently charge an artificial premium for these eggs.

Egg industry data shows that egg prices in California—which has a nearly identical law prohibiting the sale of eggs from hens in cages—changed by less than a penny per egg once the law was implemented. In addition, there are hidden costs from inhumane confinement - increased cruelty and food safety risks. It's animals and consumers who are currently paying those hidden prices.

## Adopts industry-written standards

The guidelines written in SB690 for cage-free systems require between one and 1.5 square feet for birds depending on the specific system used. Maryland's more than 2 million egg-laying hens would be able to perform important natural behaviors like flapping their wings, walking, perching, dustbathing and laying eggs in nest boxes. The standards are based upon guidelines written by the United Egg Producers.

## Reflects commercial egg-buyers' demand for change

This measure codifies where the market is already going. For example, Target, Costco, McDonald's, Burger King, Denny's, IHOP, Arby's, Panera Bread and Taco Bell all are either 100% cage-free or have a plan in place to reach 100% cage-free. Almost all of these companies are going to get to cage-free before or by SB690's 2025 deadline. So, this bill will keep Maryland farmers competitive in an evolving market.

## Provides certainty and clear deadlines

While the market is definitely headed in the direction of cage-free, Maryland can improve the lives of 6 million hens per year by setting clear, enforceable deadlines for this change.

Typical cages used in the egg industry, where hens are virtually immobilized.



Commercial cage-free systems where hens have the ability to flap their wings, walk and perch.

