

1/22/2024

Good Afternoon Chair Feldman, Vice-Chair Kagan and Members of the committee -

My name is Ferrell Santacroce, I live in Salisbury, Maryland. I'm here today to ask that you support a free range standard of care that actually requires more mobility for hens than the cage-free requirements considered in this bill.

I work for a large chicken egg and meat production company on the Eastern Shore. My typical day starts at 4am, managing 4 houses. These houses are approximately 380 feet, a little longer than a football field. Each house has 30,000 birds. I'm responsible for maintaining the temperature, air quality, feed management and collection. Something that surprises a lot of people when they enter the houses is that it doesn't really smell bad. The type of bedding is somewhat self-cleaning and bedding is changed out frequently. Unfortunately, any type of animal management includes some mortality. From my experience with battery cage and free range production, there is less mortality from the birds self mutilating, parasite infections with free range egg production.

Occasionally a small section of the house will get an upper respiratory infection. We don't use antibiotics or steroids, so lavender and eucalyptus are pumped into the air for relief. The eggs collected are on raised platforms. What's on the outer shell is really no dirtier than dirt on vegetables from your garden. All the houses are inspected weekly from certified inspectors. That inspection includes air quality, sanitation, feed/diet quality and there are big points for the overall comfort and health of the birds. I have never witnessed the same kind of care required for caged birds. I have witnessed far more suffering in caged hens than free range.

Thank you for listening today and I respectfully ask the Senate Education, Energy and the Environment Committee to favor humane and sustainable egg production and support SB193.