Frequently Asked Questions about SB 193/HB 357

How will SB 193/HB 357 help Marylanders have access to safer, affordable, more humane eggs?

On many egg factory farms, hens are crammed into cages so small the birds can't spread their wings. Each bird is given less space than the dimensions of an iPad on which to live her entire life. She's forced to eat, sleep, and defecate in the same space and is denied almost everything that is natural to her. These conditions are cruel to the animals and increase the spread of diseases, like Salmonella, which can then sicken people.

Retailers often charge an artificial premium for a carton of cage-free eggs. Because of this artificial premium, lower income Maryland residents have a harder time purchasing cage-free eggs. Since cage-free eggs will become the new standard under SB 193, that artificial premium will go away. Retailers will market cage-free as their "value" egg to draw customer foot traffic, just like they do today with eggs from caged hens. So, this bill will give more access to safer food for Maryland families.

How will SB 193/ HB 357 impact the cost of eggs?

For shifting to cage-free production, estimates vary between less than one cent to a few pennies per egg. In fact, when McDonald's announced it was going cage-free, it stated it won't raise prices at all. More than 200 of the country's largest food companies have committed to switching to a 100 percent cage-free egg supply. This includes Burger King, Costco, Unilever, General Mills and Aramark, along with Maryland-based Sodexo and Marriott.

What are the food safety and public health risks of caging birds?

Extensive research[1] shows that locking hens in cages increases the risk of Salmonella contamination, a bacteria that can be lethal, especially in children and the elderly. Leading consumer advocacy organizations including the Center for Science in the Public Interest and Center for Food Safety have supported cage-free reforms.

Is SB 193/HB 357 in line with cage-free legislation in other states?

SB193/HB 357 aligns with other states. Over the past several years, red, blue and purple states have passed similar measures, including Arizona, California, Colorado, Oregon, Washington, Nevada, Michigan, and Massachusetts. Utah and Rhode Island have also passed cage-free egg standards. These measures all garnered strong bipartisan support.

How is SB 193/HB 357 farmer-friendly?

SB 193/HB 357 contains the egg industry's own cage-free standards. The United Egg Producers' modest guidelines on cage-free systems allow hens to perform important natural behaviors like flapping their wings, walking, perching, dustbathing and laying eggs in nest boxes. SB193 is based on these guidelines.

SB 193/HB 357 is farmer-friendly by providing market and regulatory certainty. It also contains an exemption for small and family farmers with flocks fewer than 3,000 birds. Additionally, the bill only applies to egg-laying hens, not broiler chickens (i.e., birds who are used for their meat).

How do cages compare with cage-free facilities?

Welfare aspects of housing systems for hens		
	Barren Battery Cage	Cage-Free Barn/Aviary
Typical space per bird	67 in	144-216 in
Walking	Constrained	Free expression
Running	Not permitted	Free expression
Jumping	Not permitted	Free expression
Flying	Not permitted	Free expression
Perching	Not permitted	Free expression
Exploratory behavior	Not permitted	Free expression
Dustbathing	Not permitted	Free expression
Foraging	Not permitted	Free expression
Nesting	Not permitted	Free expression
Exercise	Not permitted	Free expression
Group size	Smallest	Large
Air quality	Variable and dependent on management	Variable and dependent on management
Bone strength	Weak	Strong
Bone fractures	Less common during laying, but more common when removed from cages at depopulation	Common during the laying period, but less common during depopulation
Fatty liver hemorrhagic syndrome	More common	Less common
Fear	More fearful	Less fearful
Trapping injury	More potential	Less potential
Mortality	Variable and dependent on strain and beak trimming status	Variable and dependent on strain and beak trimming status

*Chart compiled by the Humane Society's lead scientist

[1] See: D. R. Jones, J. Guard, R. K. Gast, R. J. Buhr, P. J. Fedorka-Cray, Z. Abdo, J. R. Plumblee, D. V. Bourassa, N. A. Cox, L. L. Rigsby, C. I. Robison, P. Regmi, and D. M. Karcher. 2016. Influence of commercial laying hen housing systems on the incidence and identification of Salmonella and Campylobacter. Poultry Science 95:1116–1124; De Vylder, J., S. Van Hoorebeke, R. Ducatelle, F. Pasmans, F. Haesebrouck, J. Dewulf, and F. Van Immerseel. 2009. Effect of the housing system on shedding and colonization of gut and internal organs of laying hens with Salmonella Enteritidis. Poult. Sci. 88:2491–2495; Denagamage, Thomas; Bhushan Jayarao, Paul Patterson, Eva Wallner-Pendleton, and Subhashinie Kariyawasam. 2015. Risk factors associated with salmonella in laying hen farms: systematic review of observational studies. Avian Diseases 59(2):291-302.