

28<sup>th</sup> August 2019

Dear Constituents,

Thank you for contacting me about the welfare of farm animals.

I understand your concerns on this matter. I am proud that the UK has some of the highest standards of animal welfare in the world. There is comprehensive legislation to uphold these standards, as well as guidance on how best to protect the welfare of specific animals living on farms, such as hens, pigs and cattle. The Government has already banned cages or close confinement systems where there is clear scientific evidence that they are detrimental to animal health and welfare.

The new statutory Code of Practice for the Welfare of Laying Hens and Pullets came into force in August 2018. The Code provides improved and up-to-date guidance on welfare legislation and reflects the latest scientific and veterinary advice. I am also aware that all major supermarkets have said they will stop selling eggs from hens kept in enriched cages by 2025.

On pig welfare, the aim is to get to a point where traditional farrowing crates are obsolete and where any new system protects the welfare of the sow, as well as her piglets. As I understand it, important steps have been made on the use of free farrowing systems, but more advances are needed before compulsory replacement of farrowing crates can be recommended.

The Government is committed in making the UK a world leader in protection of animals as we leave the EU. Legislation has now been introduced to Parliament which will increase maximum penalties for animal cruelty from six months' to five years' imprisonment and statutory welfare codes are being updated. These codes strengthen guidance on how to meet the needs of livestock animals and enhance their welfare.

Ministers are also committed to making any necessary changes to UK law in a rigorous and comprehensive way to ensure animal sentience is legally recognised once the UK leaves the EU. I understand that the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs is engaging with relevant organisations and authorities to enhance its policies on this issue further.

I will of course try to attend the Humane Society International event on 3 September subject to my Parliamentary diary allowing.

I hope this comes as some reassurance and thank you again for taking the time to contact me.

Yours sincerely,



**Alok Sharma MP**