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A Year of Wins for Farmed Animals

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A Year of Wins for Farmed Animals

Advocates won progress on cages, plant-based policies, and much more...

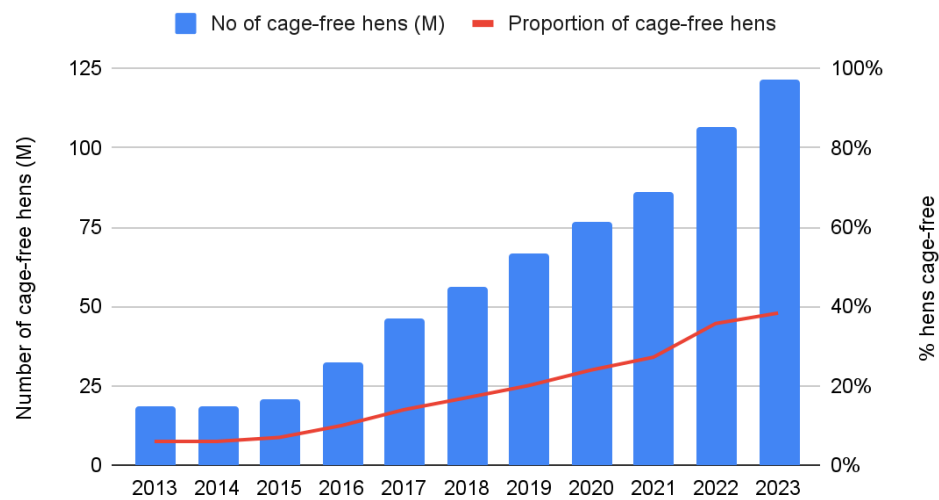
DEC 14, 2024

It's been a tough year for farmed animals. The European Union shelved the world's most ambitious farm animal welfare reform proposal, plant-based meat sales sagged, and the media panned cultivated meat while Italy banned it. But advocates for factory farmed animals still won major gains — here are ten of the biggest:

Wins for the winged. Advocates won 130 new corporate pledges to eliminate cages for hens or the worst abuses of broiler chickens. This progress has now expanded well beyond the West: recent wins include cage-free pledges from the largest Asian restaurant company and the largest Indonesian retailer. That's mostly thanks to the work of the 100+ member groups of the Open Wing Alliance, who now campaign across 67 countries. We estimate that, if fully implemented, pledges secured to date will reduce the suffering of about 800 million layer hens and broiler chickens alive at any time.

Cages canceled. A fair question has long been whether these pledges will be implemented. So far, they mostly have been: 1,157 corporate pledges are now fully implemented, 89% of the pledges that came due by last year. As a result, 39% of American hens, 60% of European hens, and 80% of British hens are now cage-free, up from just 6%, 41%, and 48% respectively a decade ago. There's still a lot more work to do to hold companies accountable to their pledges. But globally 220 million more animals are already out of cages thanks to this work.

US Cage-Free Hens



Source: USDA reports.

Pigs Supreme. The US Supreme Court upheld California’s Proposition 12, which bans the sale of eggs, pork, and veal from caged animals and their offspring. This ruling also protects seven other similar state laws. Once fully implemented, these laws will collectively require about 700,000 pigs and 80 million hens be raised cage-free. Advocates are now fighting a last-ditch effort by pork producers to overturn the Court’s ruling, and have already mustered the support of over 210 members of Congress for our side.

Plant-based policies. Denmark unveiled the world’s first state action plan to promote plant-based eating, including plans to promote plant-based foods in schools and support innovation in alternative proteins. South Korea said it would soon unveil one too. The European Parliament called for an EU-wide “action plan for increased EU plant-based protein production and consumption.”

Meaty milestones. For the first time, the COP28 climate summit served mostly vegetarian meals. The UN Environment Program released the first-ever UN report on the potential of alternative proteins. New data showed that only 20% of Germans now eat meat every day, down from 34% eight years ago. Half of all US restaurants now offer a plant-based alternative, up from a third five years ago.

Cultured policymakers. US regulators approved the nation's first sales of cultivated meat. Japan's Prime Minister pledged support for the nation's cellular agriculture industry. Germany pledged €38M to promote alternative proteins, while Catalonia (Spain), Israel, and the UK funded more research. Alternative proteins have now attracted over a billion dollars in public funding committed to research and infrastructure globally.

Alternative aspirations. Major German retailer Lidl pledged to double the share of its range of proteins that are plant-based by 2030. The second largest Dutch retailer, Jumbo, set a goal for 60% of its protein sales to be plant-based by the same year. Both began their efforts by slashing the price of their own plant-based brands to parity with meat. So too did Germany's largest retailer, Kaufland. Eight of France's largest food companies, including Carrefour and Unilever, jointly pledged to generate €3 billion in sales from plant-based products by 2026.

Creature comforts. Denmark's government agreed to help phase out fast-growing broiler chickens, who suffer from chronic pain. The US Department of Agriculture announced new guidance to weed out fake "animal welfare" claims on products and strengthened animal welfare standards for organic products. And the UK government advanced a long-awaited live export ban.

Crustacean codes. The UK's largest seafood business, Young's Seafood, adopted one of the world's first crustacean welfare policies, as did UK retailers Waitrose and Marks and Spencer. This year's Global Shrimp Forum featured its first-ever session on shrimp welfare. The Shrimp Welfare Project has now reached agreements with shrimp producers to ensure pre-slaughter stunning for over a billion shrimp annually.

Fish, finally! The EU established the world's first reference center for fish welfare. Two of the world's biggest aquaculture sustainability certifiers, the Aquaculture Stewardship Council and Friends of the Sea, moved forward with mandatory animal welfare standards. We estimate that, once implemented, these standards will improve the welfare of two to six billion fish alive at any time.

None of this progress just happened. Almost all of it came thanks to the tireless work of advocates, enabled by the generosity of donors. Many of both read this newsletter. So let me say: I'm deeply grateful for all you do.

We face a mighty challenge: ending the abuse of more sentient beings than humans who have ever lived on earth. We do so with few resources: all advocacy for farmed animals globally has a combined budget smaller than the New York Metropolitan Museum of Art. And yet we've already achieved progress for *billions* of sentient beings.

I know this work can be emotionally-draining, discouraging, even infuriating. Everything we do feels small compared to the scale of suffering before us. And yet you keep working and donating, with patience, generosity, and compassion, to help those who can't help themselves. The best people always have.

Thank you. And happy holidays.



Each one of the billions of farmed animals is an individual. This one's name is Bouloche, he's French, and he has unusually scraggly ears. Credit: Jo-Anne McArthur / We Animals Media.