Majority of Brits strongly oppose the use of cruel farming practises to produce cheap food, poll shows

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A YouGov poll commissioned by animal protection charity Open Cages in December 2021 has found that a staggering 78% of British people oppose factory farming practises which cause animals to experience pain or suffering as a means of producing affordable food, with a majority strongly opposing.

Respondents were given examples of typical factory farm practises, such as breeding chickens to grow 400% faster than they did in the 1950s, leading to a slaughter age of just 35 days old, and keeping large volumes of animals inside large, crowded facilities for their entire lives.

The poll was conducted to explore how Brits balance concern for animal welfare with desire for affordable food. Higher prices are generally recognised as the main obstacle to improving farm animal welfare. Intensive animal farming is specifically designed to minimise the costs of rearing and slaughtering the animals.

Dozens of undercover investigations published in recent years have suggested that animal suffering is commonplace on British farms, contrary to the "high" welfare standards claimed by the big retailers and industry schemes like Red Tractor. Over 70% of farm animals in the UK are kept in intensive facilities.

Animal charities are urging food businesses to take note, arguing that these revelations strongly challenge a “common" industry justification of factory farming: that British consumers are too cheap to pay higher prices for animal products.

Open Cages CEO Connor Jackson comments: *“Over one billion chickens are raised for meat in Britain each year. 95% of them have been artificially bred to grow too big, too fast, leading to a plethora of painful welfare issues, whilst squeezed into factory farms by the tens of thousands. Very few people find these practices morally acceptable. So why do supermarkets like Morrisons continue using them? Behind the scenes, there's a common attitude of seeing consumers as too cheap to support a move to higher standards. This poll suggests that the vast majority of British consumers aren't interested in such a trade off: they don't want cruelty to be the price. It blows this outdated attitude out of the water.”*

“Consumers struggle to fully act on this belief because, in my opinion, the facts about how the animals on British shelves live are intentionally obscured by the retailers themselves. When Morrisons’ chicken is sold as "welfare assured" – even when it's not – consumers cannot make truly informed choices. On the contrary, when we know that the product in our hands is a product of animal suffering, it upsets us and we don’t want to support it. I hope retailers are taking note: whoever signs the Better Chicken Commitment next will have the support of the British people. Just like they're supporting the transition to cage free eggs.”

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Photos of UK factory farms can be accessed here. Please credit Open Cages.

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