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# Transitioning to Cage-Free: A Roadmap for Corporates in the Egg Supply Chain



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# 01

## Introduction

### 1.1

#### Background

The widespread use of cages in the egg industry has raised global welfare concerns. This has contributed to consumers becoming more aware of ethical sourcing and animal welfare, thereby driving change within the industry. An increasing number of food companies are committing to sourcing exclusively cage-free eggs on a global scale, with many of these companies actively operating in India.

This necessitates an active focus on transitioning supply chains to effectively implement cage-free commitments, supported by a robust ecosystem that facilitates this shift. As the third-largest egg producer globally, India still predominantly relies on caged systems, but the rising demand from both consumers and companies is gradually expanding the cage-free sector.

### 1.2

#### Objective and applicability

This comprehensive guide is targeted at corporate decision-makers, sustainability officers, supply chain managers and marketing professionals, and is aimed at guiding companies shifting their egg procurement from caged systems to cage-free egg sources. It aims to address the ethical and economic aspects and provides a step-by-step implementation plan. It includes successful case studies and resources to support the transition. In summary, it aims to enhance animal welfare, meet consumer demand for ethically produced food, and improve Environment, Social & Governance (ESG) practices while aligning company practices with global trends towards humane and sustainable food sourcing.

# 02

## The shift to cage-free: India's position in a global context

### 2.1

### Overview of India's egg industry

The Indian egg industry plays a crucial role in the country's agricultural sector.

India is the third largest egg-producing country in the world

Annual production in 2023-24 was 142.77 billion eggs

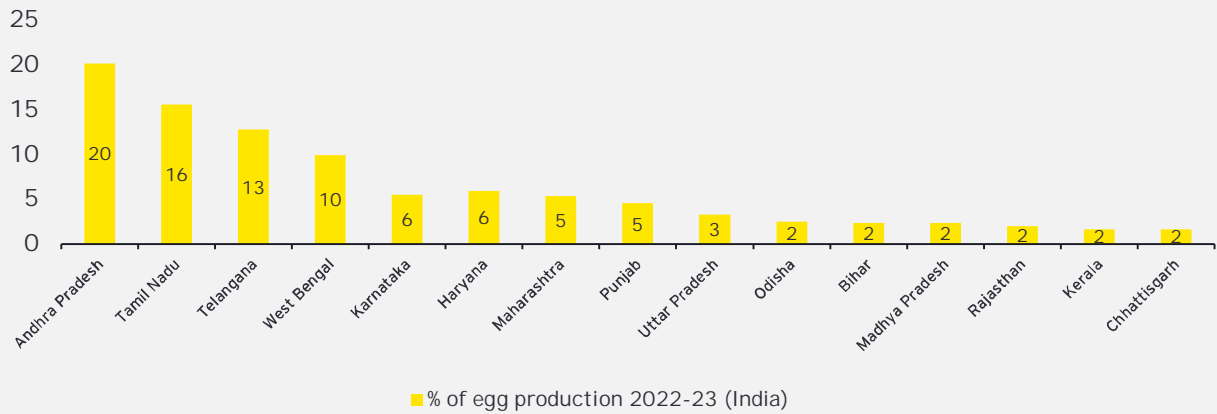
The domestic poultry market is valued at USD 30.46 billion (2,645.8 INR) in 2023 and is projected to reach INR 3,478 billion (2028)

Its growth is driven by a growing population, increasing disposable incomes, and evolving dietary habits

Figure 1: Ministry of Fisheries, Animal Husbandry & Dairying

It comprises a mix of the organized and unorganized sectors. The organized sector, which includes large-scale poultry farms and integrated producers, accounts for about 70% of total production. This sector is seeing increasing investments in technology and infrastructure to enhance productivity and ensure biosecurity. The unorganized sector, which includes backyard farming, consists of small-scale farmers who often operate using traditional methods and form a very small section of the egg industry in the country.

Percentage of egg production 2022-23 (India)



Source: Sandhya Keelery, "India: Egg Production Share by Major State | Statista," Statista, 2024, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1357100/india-egg-production-share-by-major-state/>.

## 2.2 Poultry housing systems

The scale of operations in this sector has significant welfare implications. Generally, hens in the egg industry are housed in two main forms of systems: caged and cage-free. In India, the commercial egg industry typically uses cages.

### 2.2.1 Conventional caged systems

Cages, often called battery cages or conventional colony enclosures, refer to barren wire mesh enclosures. These systems are popular as they allow many birds to be housed in smaller spaces, thereby increasing revenue.

However, from a welfare perspective, these cramped conditions severely restrict movement and prevent hens from engaging in natural behaviours like nesting, perching, dust bathing and foraging.

Such confinement has severe physical and behavioural consequences. Physically, hens in battery cages have been found to have high incidences of injuries such as foot damage, feather loss, broken bones, and foot lesions. High levels of stress in these conditions lead to suppressed immune systems, reduced lifespan, high mortality rates and lower overall productivity. The constant confinement also causes frustration, stress, and increased aggression, causing abnormal behaviours such as feather pecking and cannibalism.



Source: We Animals Media

### 2.2.2 Cage-free systems

In cage-free housing, hens are not restricted within cages and have space to move, spread their wings and usually have provisions to engage in natural behaviour. When these systems are well-designed and effectively managed, hens can express their innate behaviours, such as walking, perching, dustbathing, foraging, and laying eggs in nests.

These systems come in different forms, such as indoor barns, multilevel aviaries, and free-range/outdoor farms.



Source: We Animals Media



Aspect	Conventional Caged Systems	Cage-Free Systems
Space per Bird	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&lt;1 square foot indoors</li> <li>No space for natural behaviours</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.5 - 2 square feet indoors</li> <li>Increased freedom to exhibit natural behaviour</li> </ul>
Animal Welfare	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increased stress-related health issues such as feather pecking and cannibalism</li> <li>Restricted expression of natural behaviours due to confinement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reduced stress and health issues</li> <li>Exhibition of natural behaviours such as nesting and perching, leading to improved welfare</li> <li>Less prone to skeletal problems like osteoporosis</li> </ul>
Egg Quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Similar nutritional content</li> <li>Higher salmonella risk</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Perceived as a healthier option</li> <li>Slightly lower salmonella risk</li> </ul>
Environmental Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Challenges with waste disposal due to concentrated production</li> <li>Lower land and water use, higher energy use per egg</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Better waste management reduces environmental pollution</li> <li>Resource efficiency reduces environmental footprint</li> </ul>
Consumer Trust and Demand	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lack of ethics and animal welfare erodes trust, harming demand and profitability</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ethical practices enhance consumer trust and brand loyalty</li> <li>Rising demand for ethically produced products boosts sales and profitability</li> </ul>



Cage-free Practices: An Implementation Guide



## 2.3 Global shift towards cage-free systems

The global cage-free market is currently valued at US\$5 billion and is projected to reach US\$8.2 billion by 2032, growing at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 4.7%.<sup>1</sup> This shift is being propelled by a combination of factors, including the enforcement of stricter animal welfare regulations in many countries, corporate commitments to sustainable sourcing, and a rising preference for humane production systems.

The European Union (EU) has been a leader in this movement, introducing a complete ban on the use of conventional battery cages for laying hens in 2012. Even before the larger EU ban, several European countries recognized the cruelty inherent in battery cages, such as Switzerland, which banned cages in 1992, Germany, which completed its phase-out in 2006, and Norway, which did so in 2012.

While the United States does not have federal laws banning battery cages, several states have passed laws to phase them out such as Proposition 12 in California prohibits the sale of eggs that come from cages. Further, Massachusetts, Colorado, Michigan, Nevada, Oregon, Rhode Island, Utah, and Washington are a few examples of states that have enacted legislation to phase out cages, with deadlines ranging from 2023 to 2026. Several other countries have been a part of banning or phasing out battery cages to a certain degree including New Zealand, Australia, Canada, Bhutan, Iceland, and Israel.

In India, Section 11(1)(e) of the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, 1960, under Chapter III, explicitly addresses situations of cruelty. It states that: "If any person keeps or confines any animal in any cage or other receptacle which does not measure sufficiently in height, length, and breadth to permit the animal a reasonable opportunity for movement." This provision clearly indicates that the legislation prohibits keeping birds in cages that do not provide adequate space for them to spread their wings or move freely.

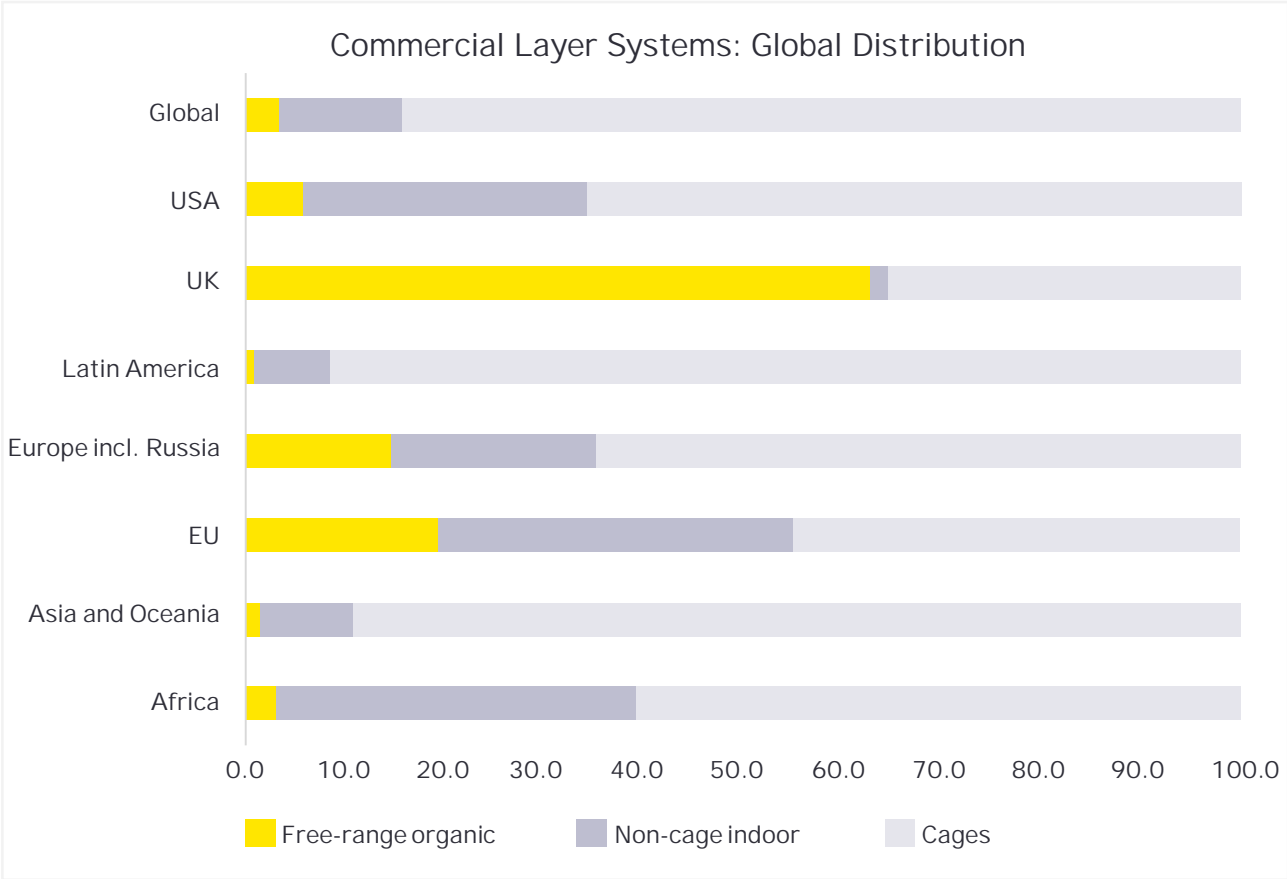


Figure 3: Estimated global proportions of commercial layers in free-range, organic, non-cage indoor, and cage systems across various countries and regions. (Source: [Compassion in World Farming, 2022](https://www.compassioninworldfarming.org/))

1. Market Data Forecast. "Cage-Free Eggs Market." Modified June 2024. <https://www.marketdataforecast.com/market-reports/cage-free-eggs-market>.

## 2.4 India's commercial cage-free sector

As established, India's poultry sector comprises of commercial poultry facilities, most of which use battery cages, and the unorganized sector with small backyard farms. However commercial cage-free farming, which utilizes modern technology, is still at a nascent stage in the country.

### 2.4.1 Government role and training

Under the umbrella of the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR), the Central Avian Research Institute (CARI) plays a crucial role in advancing cage-free farming practices in India. CARI's facilities and laboratories are dedicated to research, development and training in poultry farming. The institute offers specialized training programs for farmers, focusing on sustainable and humane poultry farming practices. These programs cover aspects such as:

#### Poultry Management

- 1 Training on optimal housing, feeding, and health management to ensure high welfare standards

#### Disease Control

- 2 Education on the prevention and management of common poultry diseases

#### Breeding Practices

- 3 Guidance on selecting and breeding poultry for optimal productivity and welfare

CARI also collaborates with various stakeholders, including government agencies, non-governmental organizations, and private sector players, to support cage-free practices. An initiative undertaken by them in collaboration with the State of Uttar Pradesh is the establishment of model cage-free facilities that also operate as training centres to practically demonstrate the management of a commercially viable cage-free facility. One such centre is being established in Tamil Nadu in collaboration with the Tamil Nadu Startup and Innovation Mission (TANSIM).







CARI has also developed and published training modules to educate farmers on cage-free farming practices. CARI scientists have also conducted and published the results of a needs-assessment survey of cage and cage-free farmers in the country to better understand the requirements of farmers in the poultry sector. Such a study – the first of its kind for India – aimed at addressing the unique challenges faced by local poultry farmers by taking into consideration local context and specific climate and geographical conditions to provide assistance, interventions and support the Indian poultry sector. The survey's findings conclude that there is a need for technical support, training and financial assistance in the form of subsidies.

## 2.4.2 Main stakeholders in the cage-free ecosystem

The transition to cage-free systems relies on the collective efforts of various stakeholders to foster a food production model rooted in sustainability, animal welfare and transparency, as outlined below:

- 1 Corporate Leadership drives demand by adopting policies that prioritise high welfare/cage-free sourcing.
- 2 Suppliers and Farmers play a pivotal role by investing in infrastructure to expand cage-free availability.
- 3 Government Bodies facilitate the transition through supportive policies, regulations and subsidies.
- 4 Retailers act as key intermediaries by sourcing and marketing cage-free products, promoting them through sustainable and welfare-focused messaging on their platforms and stores, and educating consumers.
- 5 Animal Welfare Organisations advocate for ethical sourcing through awareness campaigns, offer guidance, and hold stakeholders accountable through tracking progress, supporting and publishing progress, and spreading awareness about ethical sourcing.



# 03

## Shift in consumer demand

### 3.1

### Institutional consumers: corporate commitments

In response to growing demand from conscious consumers, companies across sectors are making commitments towards ethical sourcing, including the use of cage-free eggs allowing them to align with consumer values and build stronger brand loyalty and trust. Ethical sourcing practices not only resonate with consumers but also foster repeat purchases and positive word-of-mouth.

Given their substantial consumption of eggs and egg-based products, corporate consumers significantly influence market practices and animal welfare standards. Consumers increasingly look to these institutions to set the tone for ethical practices, as their choices have the power to drive large-scale change in the industry. Numerous multinational corporations with global commitments to source 100% cage-free eggs are already operating in India, showcasing their alignment with global standards and the growing trend towards humane and sustainable food production. By prioritizing cage-free sourcing, these companies fulfil their responsibility to animals in their supply chains and lead by example, promoting broader adoption of ethical and sustainable practices.

### Companies in India committed to sourcing 100% cage-free eggs



The global companies have cage-free commitments that have a deadline of 2025



## 3.2 Conscious individual consumers

Increasing consumer consciousness and awareness is seen growing across different products, leading to the creation of numerous responsible sourcing frameworks such as the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO), the Roundtable on Responsible Soy (RTRS), the Rainforest Alliance, the Textile Exchange for Responsible Leather and Cotton, and Cobalt Institute for responsible sourcing.

Animal welfare has been a significant driver for the global shift towards cage-free systems, with studies showing that many consumers oppose the use of battery cages, which severely restrict hens' natural behaviours and movement.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, research indicates that consumers are often willing to pay a premium for products aligned with these values. Campaigns led by animal protection organizations, in combination with evolving laws, are reinforcing the push toward the more humane option of cage-free systems.

In addition to welfare concerns, consumers who are health-conscious favour cage-free eggs since they are perceived to be healthier and of higher quality. For example, a survey indicated that 64% Indians prefer to buy eggs from hens not kept in cages while 71.9% of respondents don't want hens to suffer.<sup>3</sup> Sustainability-minded customers are also drawn to cage-free products, which are considered more environmentally friendly due to improved waste management practices and reduced ecological impact. Together, these concerns are fuelling the demand for cage-free eggs as a more ethical, sustainable, and health-conscious choice.

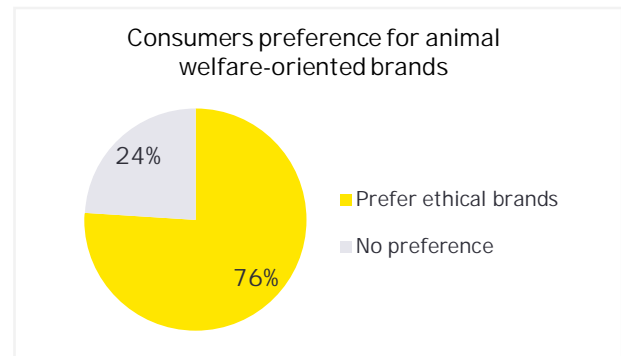


Figure 4: Consumer preferences  
(Source: Sinclair et al, 2022)

Data collected from a global perspective suggests that over three-quarters of consumers prefer to purchase products from ethical brands, as illustrated above.



2. Humane Society of the United States (HSUS). "Cage-Free vs Battery Cage Eggs." Published 2023. <https://www.humanesociety.org/resources/cage-free-vs-battery-cage-eggs#:~:text=Both%20cage%20and%20cage-free,with%20no%20food%20or%20water>
3. Frontiers "Consumer attitudes towards egg production systems and hen welfare across the world" Published 2022. Table 4, [Cage-free vs. battery-cage eggs | Humane World](#)

# 04

## Corporate transition to cage-free eggs

Corporations that commit to cage-free systems demonstrate their dedication to ESG principles while ensuring compliance with emerging standards and impacting industry practices.

### 4.1 Corporate commitments

As of 2024, over 2,600 companies have made cage-free commitments, with this number constantly growing as more companies make the switch.<sup>4</sup> The ongoing transition at this scale marks a significant step towards more humane sourcing practices across industries.

#### 4.1.1 Benefits of making a cage-free commitment

##### 1 Enhanced brand image and consumer trust

Many consumers are willing to pay a premium for products like cage-free eggs that align with their values. Investing in cage-free systems signifies a long-term commitment to sustainability, resonating with consumers and investors focused on ethical practices while strengthening consumer trust and loyalty.

##### 2 First-mover advantage and industry leadership

Committing to cage-free systems positions companies as industry leaders, influencing market trends and setting benchmarks for others. Early adopters benefit from a first-mover advantage, gaining recognition for their ethical and sustainable practices. Making a cage-free commitment demonstrates leadership and responsibility in addressing ethical concerns.

4. Open Wing Alliance. "Fair and Fowl: Global Companies Edition." Published 2024. <https://assets.ctfassets.net/ww1e0z745y7/qAONMyMh7TzzEukot2cUm/044b231c48ea63363237ed564e229701/owa-24-global-cage-free-report-v5.pdf>.





### 3 Sustainability and ESG goals

Switching to cage-free eggs seamlessly integrates into a company's sustainability and ethical sourcing initiatives by reducing animal cruelty and promoting humane treatment. Cage-free systems contribute to sustainable farming practices by improving waste management practices and reducing pollution. Such commitments also attract socially responsible investors who prioritise companies with strong ESG practices.

### 4 Regulatory compliance and risk mitigation

Governments worldwide are implementing laws prohibiting battery cages on account of them compromising welfare, mandating cage-free production instead. Proactively transitioning to cage-free systems helps corporations stay ahead of the curve and avoid supply chain disruptions or public backlash over unethical practices.

### 5 Stable and resilient supply chains

Cage-free systems promote the health and welfare of hens, resulting in consistent egg production and fewer supply chain disruptions. A stable supply chain enhances operational efficiency and ensures reliable delivery to meet corporate and consumer demand.

### 6 Foster partnerships

Companies embracing cage-free systems not only builds trust with consumers but also other stakeholders such as non-profit organisations, sustainable producers, and other ethical brands. Such alignment can foster collaborations, expand networks, and strengthen market influence.

### 7 Health and nutritional benefits

Studies suggest that cage-free eggs may have higher levels of nutrition due to increased presence of Omega-3 fatty acids and vitamin D, offering better options for consumers and contributing to improved public health.<sup>5</sup>

5. Healthline. "Pastured vs. Omega-3 vs. Conventional Eggs." Published February 16, 2023. <https://www.healthline.com/nutrition/pastured-vs-omega-3-vs-conventional-eggs>.

## 4.1.2 Elements of a strong commitment

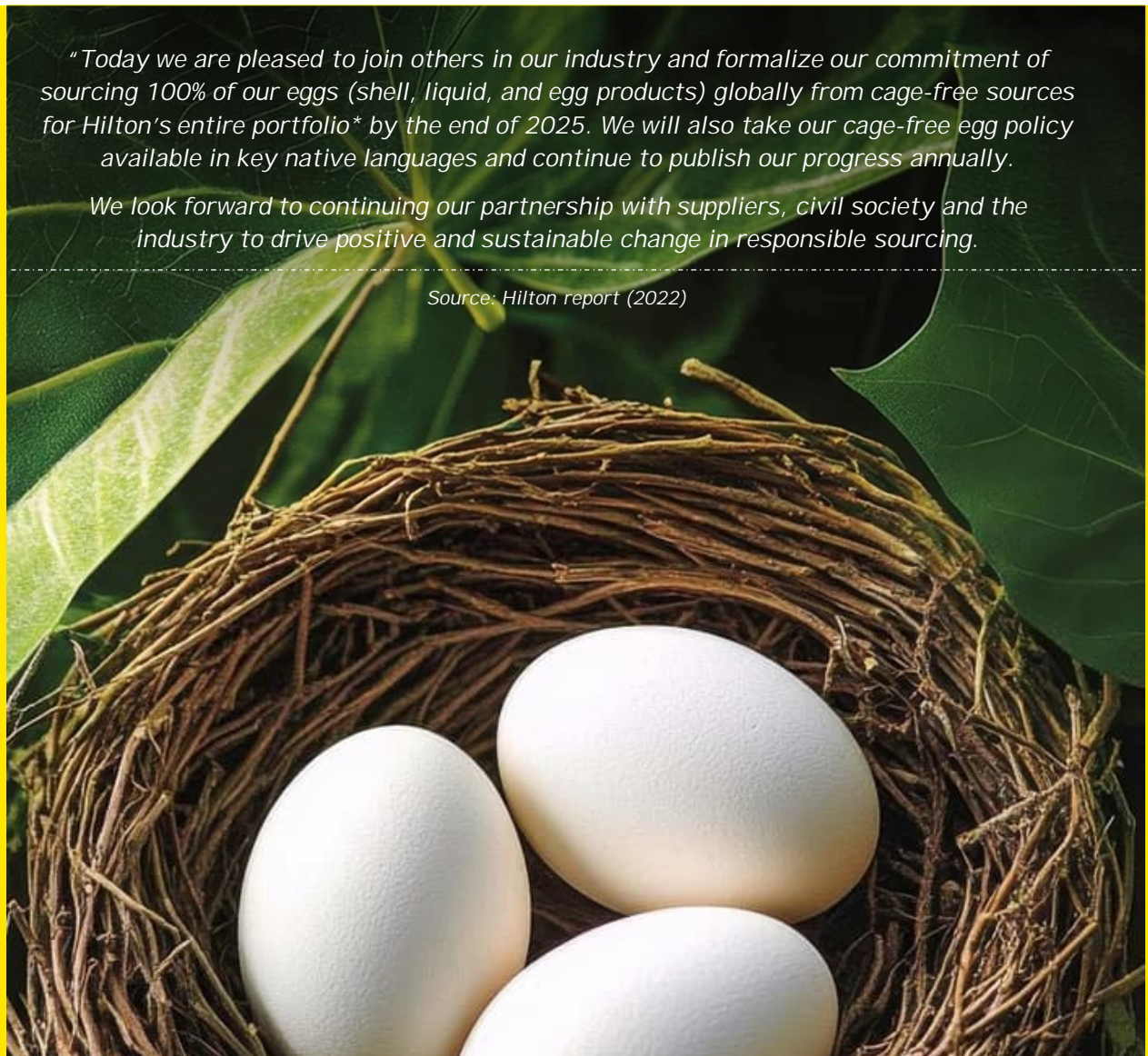
Strong language	Clear deadlines	Targets
Strong, clear and unambiguous commitment language, free from caveats, demonstrates the seriousness and priority of the commitment.	A timeline must be included to assure stakeholders of timely commitment fulfilment, as demonstrated by Hilton's pledge to complete its transition by the end of 2025.	All types of eggs should be covered under cage-free operations such as whole, liquid, and powdered eggs displaying a strong commitment.
Application	Reporting	Publicly available
A good commitment ensures that the entire supply chain across all locations are within its ambit, including owned, franchised and managed properties.	A strong commitment includes a requirement to report annual progress, ensuring transparency in its implementation.	The commitment must be formal and publicly available on the company's website allowing interested stakeholders to be aware of this policy while promoting accountability.

*The following commitment made by Hilton, a global hospitality company serves as a strong example of a holistic cage-free commitment.*

*"Today we are pleased to join others in our industry and formalize our commitment of sourcing 100% of our eggs (shell, liquid, and egg products) globally from cage-free sources for Hilton's entire portfolio\* by the end of 2025. We will also take our cage-free egg policy available in key native languages and continue to publish our progress annually.*

*We look forward to continuing our partnership with suppliers, civil society and the industry to drive positive and sustainable change in responsible sourcing.*

*Source: Hilton report (2022)*





## 4.2 Implementation strategies and roadmap

### 4.2.1 Roadmap development and publication

- 1 **Assessment:** Conduct a supply chain assessment to understand current egg usage. This should include the quantity of all forms of eggs such as shell eggs, liquid eggs, powdered eggs, egg products, etc.
- 2 **Roadmap development:** Create a clear roadmap for the transition to cage-free eggs, with trackable metrics and the timeline for achieving them. This can be quarterly, biannual or annual. This will allow monitoring of the supply chain transition and promote accountability.  
For example, Unilever, an international manufacturing company, included a roadmap with regional projections for the following year while reporting on its progress. This gives stakeholders a measurable metric to track progress.

#### 4. Progress in cage free eggs (Q28)

In 2023 the percentage of cage free sourced eggs, decreased to 68%. The decrease is mainly due to including new businesses in the baseline volume, mainly located in regions with low availability of cage free eggs.

We met our end 2020 deadline for achieving 100% cage-free eggs in Europe and North America and are working towards our 100% global 2025 target. This figure includes all egg products purchased, including shell, liquid and powered egg. The focus in the coming years will be on Latin America and Asia. We partner with Global Food Partners to develop local roadmaps with our suppliers in Asia. The performance in 2023 and the roadmap for UL cage free commitment is shown per region below. To meet our target of transitioning to cage-free eggs by the end of 2025, we are currently prioritizing physical supply. In areas where we are experiencing availability challenges, we are planning to use egg credits as an alternative.

Region	2023	2024
Africa	100%	100%
Europe	100%	100%
Latin America	28%	47%
North America	100%	100%
Middle East & Turkey	11%	27%
Asia and Oceania	7%	27%
Total	68%	79%

Source: [Unilever Animal Welfare Report, 2024](#)



- 3 **Publish and communicate plans:** Transparency is essential to build credibility. In addition to having the cage-free commitment publicly available, companies must also publish the transition plan including the steps to be taken, roadmaps, and timelines.
- 4 **Consumer education and demand:** Educating consumers about the benefits of cage-free eggs will drive demand, supporting the transition. Companies may also leverage marketing campaigns to highlight their commitment to animal welfare.

## 4.2.2 Implementation

There are four key approaches available to companies for transitioning their supply chain to cage-free in India:

### 1 Physical sourcing

There are cage-free and free-range egg suppliers in the country that can be contracted to meet this direct requirement. Companies can streamline this process with the help of established organizations such as the Cage-Free Free-Range Poultry Producers Association. They can connect corporations with a wide network of cage-free egg vendors tailored to their specific supply needs and geographical preferences.

Where the projected requirements are higher than the available supply, companies can plan ahead by placing advance orders. This grants suppliers the time and security to invest in scaling up their cage-free production systems.

### 2 Training existing suppliers

If companies do not want to change their existing egg suppliers, they have the option to invest in training them to switch to cage-free production. The Indian Council of Agricultural Research - Central Avian Research Institute (ICAR-CARI) conducts training programs to equip egg producers with the necessary knowledge and tools to manage a commercially viable facility. The ICAR-CARI website also has resources like videos in regional languages that can be shared with producers. These tools will help producers transition to cage-free systems with confidence and competence.





### 3 Cage-free credits

Companies looking to immediately switch their supply chain to cage-free, or facing logistical or supply challenges in procuring eggs, can buy cage-free egg credits as an interim solution. This book-and-claim model is run by Global Food Partners (GFP) in India, which guides companies on how to leverage credits effectively to meet their cage-free commitments when it is difficult to integrate physical eggs into their supply chains. This approach also fosters investment in cage-free systems and signals demand without requiring immediate logistical changes that may be challenging. This program is discussed in greater detail in the following chapter.

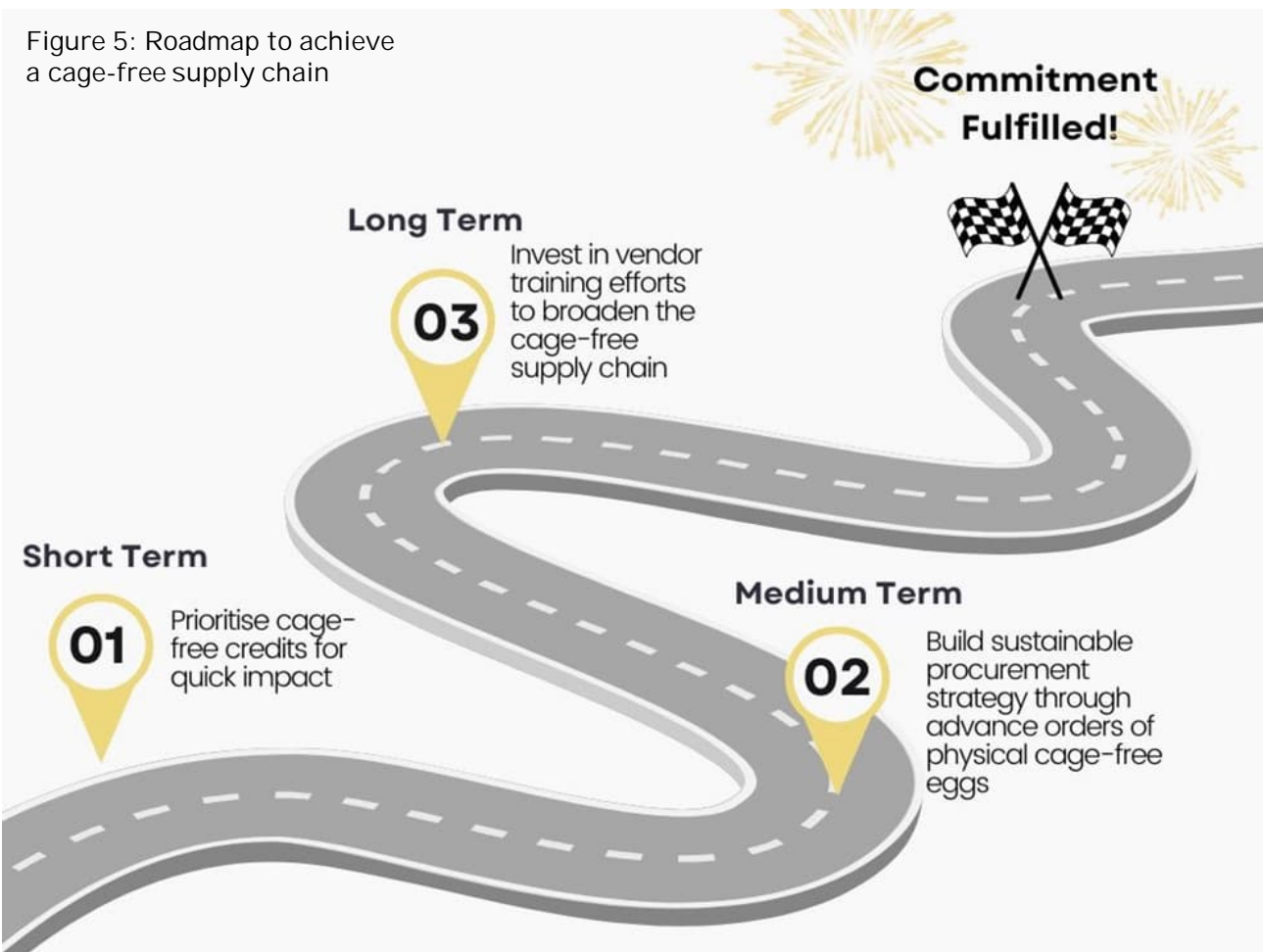
### 4 Hybrid

Companies always have the option of using a combination of any of the above solutions, based on their goals, timelines and requirements. Regional market maturity is an additional factor in making this decision. A hybrid approach combining current orders, advance orders, vendor training, and cage-free credits considers all these factors to establish a strong foundation upon which to build momentum.



This phased approach ensures a seamless and effective transition to a cage-free supply chain, allowing companies to meet their goals while driving positive change in the industry.

Figure 5: Roadmap to achieve a cage-free supply chain





### 4.2.3 Funding models for cage-free transition

A sustainable financing strategy is essential for companies aiming to transition to cage-free eggs while supporting producers and ensuring stability in the supply chain. The following funding models achieve this and facilitate a smoother and more efficient transition to higher animal welfare standards:

#### Impact incentives

The cage-free impact incentives, also referred to as impact incentives or cage-free egg credits, are market-based financial mechanisms designed to accelerate the transition to cage-free egg production. This mechanism allows food businesses to purchase credits from certified cage-free egg producers. While buyers do not receive physical cage-free eggs in their supply chains, they incentivize the production of cage-free eggs and are able to make a claim of support for cage-free eggs.

The book-and-claim model is available in India and enables companies to achieve their cage-free commitments in situations where supply or logistics poses a challenge. The model, facilitated by Global Food Partners (GFP), leverages impact incentives to enable food businesses to offset their conventional egg usage through credits. Global Food Partners aids this transition by training farmers and collaborating with companies, enabling farmers to trade credits or supply cage-free eggs directly to food businesses within three years of the impact partnership.

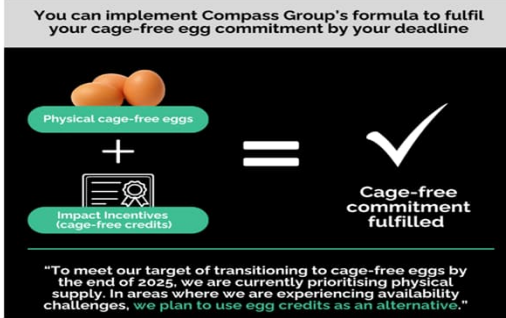
The impact incentives model is utilized across various sectors, including green electricity, sustainable aviation fuel, and textiles like leather and cotton. This model is now being applied to cage-free eggs, facilitating the adoption of humane production systems. It separates the sustainability claim from the physical product, allowing companies to meet cage-free commitments without sourcing cage-free eggs directly.

Egg producers log their cage-free production on the Impact Alliance Cage-Free Egg Platform, generating verifiable cage-free credits. Companies can purchase these credits and receive certificates for supported cage-free eggs while sourcing from existing suppliers.

Additionally, this model shows a company's commitment to cage-free goals by reducing transport costs and logistical challenges since eggs do not need to be physically moved.



Compass Group, a food service Company, is among the organizations adopting cage-free credits to fulfil its commitments, especially in challenging markets like Asia. Their roadmap details a strategy to procure physical eggs wherever possible and utilize cage-free credits during supply shortages. This approach has garnered recognition from animal welfare groups and stakeholders, ensuring compliance with cage-free targets while aiding suppliers in scaling operations to meet demand. It effectively communicates the model's application and implications for similar companies.



Text Source: Compass Group Animal Welfare Progress Report (2024)

## Advance Purchasing model

The Advance Purchasing model involves buyers committing to purchasing a predetermined volume of cage-free eggs in advance. This approach provides producers with financial security and predictability, allowing them to make the necessary investments in infrastructure to expand their cage-free production capacity. It also offers supply chain reliability by ensuring a consistent line of supply for companies.

Farmers benefit from market assurance, as they have a guaranteed buyer and a source of stable income. This financial stability enables producers to invest in facilities and operations to scale up their production. Additionally, they are better positioned to offer eggs at lower prices, which benefits the companies purchasing them. This model has great potential in countries like India, where the market is still developing. Advance purchasing fosters a sustainable and scalable transition to cage-free systems, as farmers gain financial security and the ability to expand their operations.

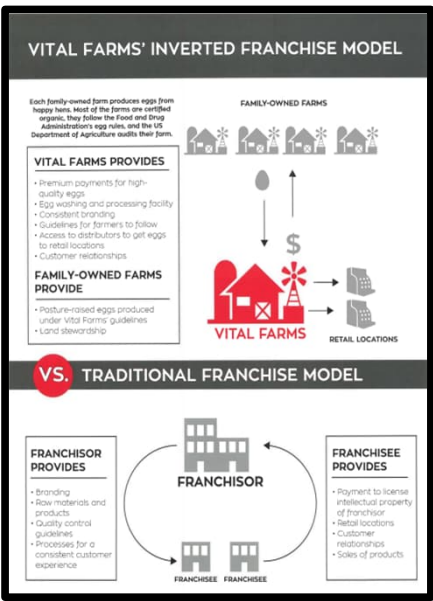
A notable example of this model is the collaboration between McDonald's and Cargill. McDonald's committed to sourcing approximately 2 billion cage-free eggs annually from Cargill. Through advance payments, Cargill established a large-scale, multi-million-dollar cage-free facility in Renville, Minnesota. These funds also allowed them to collaborate with local farmers by offering training and resources to help them produce cage-free eggs in compliance with established guidelines. This ensures that farmers have a guaranteed market and steady income. Cargill manages the procurement and distribution of the eggs, delivering them to McDonald's, which fulfils its commitment to 100% cage-free sourcing. The revenue flow benefits all stakeholders: farmers earn stable payments, Cargill ensures operational stability, and McDonald's secures a reliable supply chain.

## Cost-plus model

The Cost-plus model is a pricing strategy where producers calculate the total cost of production and add a fixed profit margin to determine the final price. This model is particularly effective in covering the additional costs associated with cage-free production, such as infrastructure upgrades, feed adjustments, and welfare compliance measures. By ensuring that producers recover their costs while maintaining sustainable profitability, this approach supports long-term sustainability.

The initial investment required for the Cost-plus model is medium to high, due to the need for operational changes and higher welfare standards. However, this method guarantees financial security for producers and emphasizes quality and accountability, aligning with both business and ethical goals while fostering sustainable growth.

An example of this model in action is Vital Farms, which collaborates with farmers to produce pasture-raised eggs. Vital Farms supports producers by providing the necessary infrastructure, training, and quality control measures. This partnership ensures that higher production costs are covered while maintaining a fair profit margin.



Source: Vital Farms (2024)



## 4.2.4 Certification and labelling of cage-free practices

To legitimize humane and sustainable poultry farming practices, several international and regional certification programs ensuring adherence to animal welfare standards have come into effect. Some of the prominent certification and labelling bodies around the world include [Certified Humane](#), [Global Animal Partnership](#) (GAP), [Animal Welfare Approved](#) (AWA), [American Humane Certified](#), [United Egg Producers](#) (UEP), [USDA](#) (U.S. Department of Agriculture), and [CDG Standards for free-range eggs](#), [UK RSPCA standards](#), among others.

At present, cage-free egg producers in India have access to the Certified Humane certification. India-specific certification standards are also being developed under the Bureau of Indian Standards.



Source: Consumers for Sustainability (2022)

In addition to certification bodies, the [Best Practice Hens Project](#), funded by the EU, serves as a valuable resource for supporting the transition to cage-free systems for laying hens. While not a labelling or certifying body, this pilot project provides guidance, best practices, and policy recommendations for implementing cage-free systems effectively.

Such programs, resources, and certifications empower producers to adopt higher welfare standards while offering consumers transparency and confidence in cage-free practices.

The transition to cage-free egg production presents both challenges and opportunities. On one hand, the higher costs associated with feeding and maintaining hens in cage-free systems, coupled with the sector's present limited scale, pose financial hurdles. Additionally, the need for specialized farm management training in areas like biosecurity and waste disposal further complicates the transition. Price sensitivity in markets like India also raises concerns about the affordability of cage-free eggs.

At the same time, growing corporate and consumer demand present significant opportunities for expansion and growth. Commitments from major multinational companies to source only cage-free eggs globally by 2025, alongside increased consumer interest in ethical and sustainable products, are driving market growth. Early adopters in India are demonstrating the viability of cage-free systems, while government initiatives, animal welfare campaigns, and sustainability benefits further support the transition.

Together, these factors make cage-free production a promising avenue for economic upliftment, rural development, and enhanced animal welfare.

Several commercial cage-free egg producers in the country, certified by [Humane Farm Animal Care \(HFAC\)](#), include Happy Hens, Farm Made, Earthy Origins, SasiAnand and Pearl Eggs.

India also has an association of cage-free producers, called the [Cage-Free Free-Range Poultry Producers Association](#), which brings together poultry producers working to promote ethical farming practices in the country.





## 4.2.5 Reporting

Transparency through regular reporting is crucial for companies to build trust with stakeholders and demonstrate their commitment to the cage-free transition. A well-structured reporting framework should include region-wise and country-wise progress to highlight local achievements and challenges, enabling targeted solutions. Collaborating with procurement teams to gather data ensures accuracy, while visual aids like maps and infographics make local updates more accessible and actionable.

Effective communication plays a key role in keeping stakeholders engaged. Regular internal updates through newsletters and briefings keep employees and leadership informed, while external reporting via annual reports, sustainability reports, and dedicated FAQ sections ensures transparency and accountability. Tailored messaging for different audiences, including customers, investors, and suppliers helps reinforce the company's dedication to cage-free goals and its broader social responsibility.

Failing to meet public commitments or addressing challenges can lead to negative media coverage, harming brand reputation and consumer trust. Issues such as supply shortages or animal welfare concerns can be concerning for stakeholders, making proactive communication critical.

Consistency in updates is equally important. Companies can publish updates on key milestones, challenges, and upcoming initiatives in their annual sustainability or CSR/ESG reports. Social media, press releases and corporate blogs can also be used to share notable achievements, new partnerships with organisations/agencies, or events as they happen.

Further, tracking key metrics, such as the percentage of cage-free eggs in the supply chain, or animal welfare impact (e.g., number of hens moved out of cages), ensures that the progress is measurable. A robust reporting system reflects a corporation's commitment to transparency, accountability, and continuous improvement in cage-free initiatives.

### Cage-Free Egg Reporting Framework

In previous years, Compassion provided a reporting framework via individual corporate outreach to ensure companies could be successful in transparently disclosing their cage-free progress. We have now laid out that framework in EggTrack itself so that companies seeking guidance on how best to report can find it in one consistent location.

Companies that have made public commitments to transition to a 100% cage-free egg supply should **publicly disclose the following for all regions and egg categories relevant to their supply chains by July 31 of the given year:**

- the proportion (%) of **shell eggs**, in terms of volume purchased, that are currently cage-free within their global, US, European, and/or Asia-Pacific supply chains
- the proportion (%) of **egg products (liquid and/or processed)**, in terms of volume purchased, that are currently cage-free within their global, US, European, and/or Asia-Pacific supply chains

Companies may wish to further break out their reporting within their regional supply chains. We welcome additional specificity and include country-level data if provided. EggTrack also aims to measure progress across a company's entire supply chain by tracking all the egg types relevant to its business (shell eggs and egg products, including liquid and processed eggs). Relevant egg categories vary by company; therefore, we ask that companies provide clarity regarding which types are covered by an individual commitment.

### Sample Disclosure

*"We have a global commitment to source 100% cage-free shell eggs and egg products by 2025. As of June 2022:*

- *x% of shell eggs and x% of egg products we purchase in the US are cage-free.*
- *x% of shell eggs and x% of egg products we purchase in Europe are cage-free.*
- *x% of shell eggs and x% of egg products we purchase in Asia-Pacific are cage-free.*
- *x% of shell eggs and x% of egg products we purchase across our global operations are cage-free."*

It should be noted that in 2023, our egg category definitions will be adjusted to explicitly include egg ingredients in addition to shell eggs and egg products. This category covers those products containing eggs as an ingredient that are purchased by a company from a third party (e.g., mayonnaise, muffins, cakes, pasta, etc.). Please see the "Looking Forward" section of the report for more information on this upcoming change.

Source: [Egg Track report 2022](#)

# *The Way forward*

The cage-free movement is gaining momentum globally, with significant progress being made in India. Rising consumer awareness leading to demand for ethical and sustainable products drives this movement. Producers in India are increasingly being encouraged to adopt cage-free systems, supported by government initiatives such as model farms, training programs, and certifications aimed at standardizing practices and facilitating this transition. The cage-free sector's rapid development in the country is a promising sign for companies with approaching deadlines. These solutions not only ensure companies fulfill their commitments but also help uphold their public promises, reinforcing consumer trust and loyalty. With the market expanding and robust frameworks in place, the transition to cage-free sourcing is becoming more achievable and beneficial for all stakeholders.

As the sector grows, more and more companies are announcing cage-free commitments, demonstrating their dedication to animal welfare and sustainable sourcing. However, once these commitments are made, companies must actively work towards implementation. This requires a supply chain assessment to understand egg usage, roadmap development and consumer education. The commitment can be achieved through solutions such as physical sourcing (including advanced orders), training existing suppliers to meet cage-free standards, utilizing cage-free credits, or a combination of these strategies.

Adopting cage-free practices benefits all stakeholders by promoting animal welfare, a growing concern among consumers and advocacy groups. For businesses, it aligns with evolving market trends, enhances brand reputation, and meets the increasing demand for ethically sourced products. Farmers and suppliers gain access to premium markets, fostering long-term sustainability and profitability. Moreover, stakeholders across the supply chain benefit from transparency and trust, building stronger partnerships. These practices also contribute to meeting global sustainability goals, creating a positive impact on the environment and society.





# 07

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- Massachusetts: "An Act to Prevent Cruelty to Farm Animals" (2016) required that all eggs sold in the state come from cage free systems by 2022.
- Colorado: Passed bill 1343 in 2000, requiring all eggs sold in the state to be laid by hens living in cage-free conditions with 1 square foot of floor space or better by 2023. The bill also requires all egg-laying hens in the state to be housed in the same standards or better by 2025.
- Michigan: Passed Senate Bill 174 in 2019, requiring all eggs produced and sold in the state to be laid by hens living in cagefree conditions or better by the end of 2024.
- Nevada: Signed Assembly Bill 399 into law in 2021, requiring all eggs produced and sold in the state to be laid by hens living in cage-free environments or better by the end of 2024. Nevada's hens will also be guaranteed enrichments like perches, nests, and dust-bathing areas under AB399.
- Oregon: Senate Bill 1019 was passed and signed into law in 2019, requiring all eggs produced and sold in the state to be laid by hens living in cage-free conditions or better by 2024.
- Rhode Island: Passed House Bill 7456 in 2018 requiring all egg-laying hens in the state to be housed in cage-free environments or better by 2026.
- Utah: Senate Bill 147 signed into law in 2021, requiring all egg-laying hens in the state to be housed in a cage-free environment with 1 square foot of floor space or better by 2025.
- Washington: House Bill 2049 was signed into law in 2019, requiring all eggs sold in the state to come from cage-free (or better) laying hens by 2023.



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