

Cage system (1)

What is a battery cage?

- It is a cage that some egg-laying hens live in
- One battery cage usually contains around 60 - 80 egg-laying hens
- It is usually made of thin wire mesh
- It gives each hen about 600cm² of usable space
- It must be 45cm tall
- The cages can be stacked up to nine rows high
- It has a nesting area where hens can go to lay their eggs, but if this is small not all of the hens may be able to use it
- It has an area of Astroturf where the hens can scratch for food, but if this is small not all of the hens may be able to use it
- It has perches to let the hens roost at night but hens may not be able to stretch up fully when they are sitting on a perch because of the height of the cage
- It has strips of rough material on the floor, which stop the hens' claws from becoming too long

How many egg-laying hens are kept in cages like this?

Answer: Around 18 million egg-laying hens are kept in cages in the UK

Cage system (2)

How do caged egg-laying hens suffer?

How do egg-laying hens naturally behave?	What does the cage system provide?
Dustbathe – they like to dustbathe as it helps them clean themselves and their feathers.	One small area of floor litter. There is not enough litter or space for all of the hens to be able to dustbathe when they choose.
Nest – they look for a safe area to nest in and lay their eggs.	One small place to nest so hens have to compete with each other for it.
Perching – they like to roost together on perches at night to keep themselves warm and safe.	Perches are provided, but there is little room to move around so the hens can't rest undisturbed.
Space – they wander in small groups to find food and avoid danger.	Not enough room to move around or exercise properly, which can lead to weak bones. They can't escape from being bullied or feather-pecked by other hens.
Peck/Scratch – they peck for food and scratch the floor for grit/small stones to help their digestion.	Not enough litter or space for all of the hens to be able to do this.

The RSPCA wants to see all battery cages replaced with barn or free-range systems, which help to keep hens happy and healthy.