Testimony

of

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submitted to

the State of Connecticut Joint Committee on Environment regarding Raised HB No. 5811, an Act An Act Concerning Battery Cages and Egg Laying Hens.

February 9, 2009

Co-Chairman Edward Meyer, Co-Chairman Richard Roy, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for this opportunity to speak with you about Raised House Bill 5811. As the national organization representing the interest of egg farmers across America, and of which all commercial size egg farmers in Connecticut are members, we must express our opposition to any legislation that would impose arbitrary and unscientific restrictions on egg farmers. We further believe that this legislation may have been promoted by extreme animal rights activist groups.

This legislation would dictate unreasonable cage space and/or possibly non-cage systems for egg-laying hens that have no scientific basis and therefore we urge the committee to reject this legislative act.

The egg industry has been very proactive in regard to the issue of animal care and has done so based upon the best available science for caged and cage-free laying hens.

Since 2002, approximately 85% of all egg farmers across the U.S. have implemented the "UEP Certified" animal welfare program. This program was created from the recommendations of an independent scientific committee, which was chaired by Dr. Jeff Armstrong, Dean of the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources at Michigan State University. Members of this respected committee have since served on animal welfare committees for McDonalds, Burger King, the Food Marketing Institute and the National Council of Chain Restaurants. By the fact that a vast majority of U.S. egg farmers have voluntarily implemented animal husbandry guidelines, we see no reason why legislation is now necessary.

The "UEP Certified" guidelines not only set requirements for space per bird, but also important guidelines for feed, water, air quality, lighting, handling, transportation etc. USDA and Validus, an independent auditing company, annually inspect the farms of egg farmers implementing the program.

The "UEP Certified" program has the support of the Food Marketing Institute, the National Council of Chain Restaurants, and the International Egg Commission. Full details of the program can be found at www.uepcertified.com.

We believe in consumer choices and believe that Connecticut's legislation would eliminate the choice of the most economical eggs for many of your citizens. To meet the market demand and to assure that consumers have choices, many of our members are producing eggs in cages, cage-free and organic production systems. A variety of these eggs can be found on most every grocery shelf. We believe consumers, as well as the state agencies that serve the citizens of Connecticut, should be able to choose the least expensive egg if that is of their choosing. This choice should not be taken away by animal activist's agendas.

Each week the USDA Agriculture Marketing Service conducts a survey of 17,000 retail grocery stores across the country and then publishes a report of the retail feature price of fresh shell eggs. For the week ending January 30, 2009 USDA reported the following:

Cage Eggs	=	$1.08 cents per dozen
Cage-free Eggs	=	$2.61 per dozen
Organic Eggs	=	$3.99 per dozen

The proposed state legislation is unnecessary and has the real potential to force existing Connecticut egg farmers out of business at a time when consumers are expressing more interest in locally produced foods. The cost to convert the approximately 4 million laying hens in Connecticut from scientifically supported cages to cage-free only systems would be more than $100 million (approximately $30 per bird). Who would pay for this? The consumers and citizens of Connecticut would. The more likely scenario would be the egg farmers of Connecticut would leave the state costing hundreds of jobs and all the eggs purchased and consumed by citizens of Connecticut would be produced in another state.

In today's economic crisis, I would hope the last thing this Committee wants to associate itself with are more job losses and higher food costs. And if you pass House Bill 5811, that is exactly what will happen. Jobs will be lost and the price of the cheapest source of high-quality protein will increase. The responsible egg farmers of Connecticut are proud to be producing an abundant, affordable and safe food product. Without modern cage systems each of these would be in jeopardy.

On behalf of our members in Connecticut, and all egg farmers across the U.S., we urge the Committee on Environment to reject Raised House Bill 5811.

Once again, thank you for this opportunity to share the views of United Egg Producers and egg producers across the entire U.S. I would welcome the opportunity to answer any questions you may have.