

Another blow for British farmers

“Battery chickens” are a thing of the past in Britain, and millions of pounds have been spent ensuring that this form of egg production is well and truly eradicated in this country. But now it looks as if the EU, which helped to push through this policy in the first place, is no longer interested in enforcing it and will allow egg producers on the Continent to flout the law, thereby undercutting British farmers.

John Dalli, the EU Commissioner for Health and Consumer Policy, told the European Parliament’s Agriculture Committee recently that the Commission will no longer make any serious attempt to ensure that the battery cage ban is properly enforced or that consumers will be made aware that they are buying battery eggs.

The Commissioner’s statement brought a furious response from committee member Stuart Agnew MEP, who is himself a farmer and a producer of free range eggs.

Mr Agnew has launched a campaign to ensure that eggs bought and sold in the UK from January 2012 onwards will be from approved sources and not from illegal battery farming. From 1st January, a ban on eggs produced from battery cage hens is due to come into effect, but despite being warned many times the European Commission has failed to take any serious steps to enforce the ban or to pressure member states to prepare for it.

Unfair competition

The biggest concern is with eggs produced in Eastern and Southern Europe, Mr Agnew said. “Five EU member states – Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Spain and Greece – have to date

provided absolutely no information about their efforts to comply with the legislation. Mr Dalli told us that it is the responsibility of member states to ensure compliance, not the Commission, which is a total abrogation of responsibility for legislation it generated.

“This effectively means that British egg producers, who have invested £400 million of their own money to comply with the ban, are being abandoned and many could go out of business in the face of unfair competition from battery egg producers in other EU member states.

“It becomes more than ever vital that the UK Government takes urgent steps to ensure that imported eggs comply with the law.”

The UKIP MEP added, “In order to protect British egg producers and consumers from illegally produced eggs, I am stepping up pressure on supermarkets to ensure that they will not be sourcing battery produced eggs after 1st January. I am also making sure that they are aware of the potential problem of illegal eggs coming into the country and/or being used in food products they are selling to British consumers.

“Fortunately, some consumers are waking up to the problem and, to date I have had nearly 400 emails on this one subject. I have replied to every one of them, supplying a list of 22 supermarket head office addresses that they should write to and I have suggested that they should also write to their local MP, to get them to pressure the Government to ensure that businesses that trade in imported eggs are made aware of the need to avoid battery produced eggs. The response has been overwhelmingly supportive of my campaign.

“One other big lesson everyone should learn from this crisis,” said Mr Agnew, “Is that if we were an independent self-governing nation, we would never have allowed ourselves to get into such a mess.”