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News Release

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OSTEOPOROSIS AND BONE FRACTURES IN LAYING HENS

The Farm Animal Welfare Council (FAWC) today launched its Opinion on osteoporosis and bone fractures in laying hens. The Opinion advises the Government about the concerning extent of bone fractures experienced by laying hens in all production systems and the impact on the hens' welfare.

Professor Wathes, Chairman of FAWC, said "Research has shown for some time that the incidence of bone damage in laying hens is high and more recent work indicates that rather than improving over time the situation may be getting worse. Bone fractures experienced either during lay or at depopulation have a serious impact on the welfare of the birds affected."

He continued "Bone fractures come about by a combination of underlying and immediate causes, including osteoporosis in the hen, injuries occurring as a result of poor design and management of housing systems and poor handling during depopulation. FAWC has identified that improvements can be made through targeted nutrition, selection of birds for improved bone quality, housing systems that enable birds to exercise and improve bone strength without injury and careful and considerate handling at depopulation or consideration of alternative methods of killing on-farm."

Professor Wathes concluded that "The Council would ideally like to see bone damage in live birds eliminated entirely and to that end the egg industry and the government should be working towards a strategy of time-related reduction in bone fractures both during lay and at depopulation"

END

Notes for Editors

1. The Farm Animal Welfare Council (FAWC) is an independent advisory body established by Government in 1979 to keep under review the welfare of farm animals on agricultural land, at market, in transit and at the place of slaughter; and to advise Ministers in the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the devolved administrations in Scotland and Wales, of any legislative or other changes that may be necessary.
2. Professor Christopher Wathes has been the Chairman of FAWC since January 2005. He is Professor of Animal Welfare at the Royal Veterinary College, University of London.
3. All FAWC members serve in a personal capacity and do not represent any organisation with which they may be associated.
4. Copies of FAWC publications are available from the FAWC Website or via the Secretariat at the address below. Approaches for interviews should also be routed through the Secretariat.
5. Following the Government's review of Arms Length Bodies (announced on 14 October) the Farm Animal Welfare Council will not be retained as an advisory non departmental public body and will be reconstituted as an expert committee. Defra hopes to complete the change of status for all its arms length bodies, including FAWC, by 31 March 2011. The full implications of the change in status are currently being considered and terms of reference for the new committee are being prepared.

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