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CARING FOR THE CAGED: A LEGAL REVIEW OF POULTRY BIRD WELFARE IN INDIA'S AGRIBUSINESS SECTOR

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Abstract

The law today clearly separates humans from animals. International law especially shows this gap, there are many detailed rules to protect human rights, but very few rules that protect the welfare of animals.¹ The animal welfare debate focuses on recognizing the pain and suffering of animals and creating laws that are kinder and more caring toward them. In recent years, experts have been calling for more humane ways of producing meat and better living conditions for animals in factory farms. They believe that treating animals well not only helps the animals but also leads to safer and healthier food. This includes fewer diseases on farms, less spread of harmful germs from animals to humans, and lower use of antibiotics, which helps prevent antibiotic resistance.² This paper looks at the current laws in India that deal with how poultry birds are managed, especially in areas like housing, transport, and overall welfare. It studies the rules and regulations set by the government and examines how well they are being followed. The paper also points out the gaps

¹ Peters, A. (2016). *Liberté, Égalité, Animalité: Human-Animal Comparisons in Law. Transnational Environmental Law*, 5(1), 25–53. Cambridge University Press.

Retrieved from https://www.mpil.de/files/pdf4/Peters_Human-Animal_Comparisons2.pdf(last visited on October10, 2025)

² de Passillé, A. M., & Rushen, J. (2005). Food safety and environmental issues in animal welfare. *Revue Scientifique et Technique (International Office of Epizootics)*, 24(2), 757–766.

and weaknesses in the legal system, such as poor enforcement, outdated standards, and lack of awareness among farmers and industry workers. By comparing Indian laws with international practices, the paper suggests ways to improve the legal framework to make poultry management more ethical, safe, and effective.

Key Words : Animal rights, Poultry, Hens, Broilers, Cruelty, Cages, Laws, Rules

I. Introduction

The day may come when the rest of the animal creation may acquire those rights which never could have been withheld from them but by the hand of tyranny. ... The question is not, can they reason? Nor can they talk? But, can they suffer?

*Bentham, J.*³

Since ancient times, animals have been an essential part of human life. They appear in myths, folklore, and religious stories, sometimes openly and at other times symbolically. Humans have always believed that animals can experience emotions and express feelings. The bond between humans and animals has remained strong through the ages. In Indian culture, animals have always been deeply respected and considered an important part of human existence. Ancient texts like *Kautilya's Arthashastra* highlight the importance of protecting and caring for animals. The text forbade harming or killing animals that lived in protected areas such as forests, gardens, or sanctuaries. It also made village leaders responsible for preventing cruelty toward animals and gave them the authority to act when necessary. This reflects that kindness and respect for living beings have long been embedded in India's ethical and cultural traditions. Moreover, according to FAOSTAT data from 2022, India is one of the world's leading producers of animal-based products, ranking sixth in meat

³ Bentham, J. (2007). *An introduction to the principles of morals and legislation*. Dover Publications.

production and second in egg production globally.⁴ This shows that the poultry industry plays an important part in India's economy. Hence, it is necessary to study the current laws governing this sector and evaluate them against international standards. Doing so can help enhance poultry management practices, making the system more compassionate, sustainable, and advantageous for both animals and people.

II. Legal Regulation of Poultry Transport and Housing in India

Article 21⁵ of the Indian Constitution ensures that every person has the right to live and enjoy personal freedom. It also states that no one can be denied these rights unless it is done according to the procedure laid down by law. In its judgment on the *Jallikattu*⁶ case, the SC broadened the interpretation of the right to life to encompass all living creatures, not solely humans. The Court affirmed that animals are entitled to live with dignity, respect, and intrinsic worth. It further underscored that, consistent with international principles, animals must be treated with kindness and their rights safeguarded. Additionally, the Court stressed the importance of shielding animals from harm, cruelty, and unfair treatment.

The Indian Constitution directs the government to advance agricultural and animal care through the use of contemporary, scientific techniques through the Directive Principles of State Policy.⁷ Additionally, it motivates the state to take action to safeguard and enhance the environment, as well as to maintain the

⁴Press Information Bureau. (2024, December 19). *Year End Review 2024: Department of Animal Husbandry and Dairying*. Ministry of Fisheries, Animal Husbandry & Dairying, Government of India. Retrieved from : <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2086052>(last visited on October 13, 2025)

⁵Government of India. (1950). *Constitution of India*. Article 21. Retrieved from :<https://legislative.gov.in/constitution-of-india>(last visited on October 13, 2025)

⁶ Animal Welfare Board of India v. A. Nagaraja& Others, (2014). *Supreme Court of India*, (7 SCC 547).

⁷Government of India. (1950). *Constitution of India*. Article 48. Retrieved from :<https://legislative.gov.in/constitution-of-india>(last visited on October 13, 2025)

nation's forests and wildlife.⁸ Art. 51A(g)⁹ of the Indian Constitution says that it is every citizen's duty to look after the environment. This includes keeping forests, lakes, rivers, and wildlife safe and healthy. It also means we should be kind and caring toward all living creatures.

The Indian Parliament has passed various laws to safeguard animals from cruelty and to uphold food safety and quality standards. One of the most important among them is the *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, 1960*. This law aims to stop animals from being subjected to unnecessary pain or suffering and makes it the responsibility of caretakers to ensure their proper care and well-being.¹⁰ The Act also led to the creation of the Animal Welfare Board of India, which helps make rules to protect animals and ensure they are not mistreated.¹¹ Section 11(1) of the PCA Act explains what counts as cruelty.¹² For example, it is cruel if someone keeps an animal in a cage that is too small for it to move properly, or if the owner does not give the animal enough food, water, or shelter. It is also considered cruelty if someone sells or keeps an animal that is in pain due to injury, hunger, thirst, overcrowding, or other forms of mistreatment. These actions are punishable under the law.

⁸ Government of India. (1950). *Constitution of India*. Article 48A. Retrieved from :<https://legislative.gov.in/constitution-of-india>(last visited on October 13, 2025)

⁹ Government of India. (1950). *Constitution of India*. Article 51A(g). Retrieved from <https://legislative.gov.in/constitution-of-india>(last visited on October 13, 2025)

¹⁰ Government of India. (1960). *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act*, Section 3. Retrieved from https://www.indiacode.nic.in/bitstream/123456789/11237/1/the_prevention_of_cruelty_to_animals_act%2C_1960.pdf(last visited on October 13, 2025)

¹¹ Government of India. (1960). *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act*, Section 4. Retrieved from https://www.indiacode.nic.in/bitstream/123456789/11237/1/the_prevention_of_cruelty_to_animals_act%2C_1960.pdf(last visited on October 13, 2025)

¹² Government of India. (1960). *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act*, Section 11. Retrieved from https://www.indiacode.nic.in/bitstream/123456789/11237/1/the_prevention_of_cruelty_to_animals_act%2C_1960.pdf(last visited on October 13, 2025)

In India, the duty of managing farm animals and controlling the spread of diseases among them lies with the State Governments. This responsibility is mentioned in the Seventh Schedule of the Indian Constitution.¹³ As a result, various States have created their own laws and regulations on the rearing and transportation of poultry. These measures aim to ensure that chickens are handled humanely and remain in good health. For instance, the *Bombay Diseases of Animals Act, 1948*¹⁴ was introduced to control and prevent diseases affecting animals, including poultry. It laid the foundation for disease management in farm animals within the state. Similarly, the *Gujarat State Poultry Farm Registration and Regulatory Authority Act, 2007*¹⁵ deals with the registration and oversight of poultry farms. It authorizes the state government to establish regulations ensuring that poultry farming practices do not negatively impact public health or the environment. The Act also introduces biosecurity provisions aimed at preventing the spread of diseases. In Odisha, the *Animal Contagious Diseases Act, 1949*¹⁶ was enacted to manage the spread of infectious diseases among animals. The Act defines “animal” broadly to include birds and outlines penalties for actions such as denying animals proper food or causing the spread of disease. It also grants authorities the power to investigate such cases and arrest individuals without a warrant if they are found committing certain offenses. Punjab has taken similar steps with

¹³ Government of India. (1950). *Constitution of India*. Entry 15, List II, Schedule VII. Retrieved from <https://legislative.gov.in/constitution-of-india> (last visited on October 13, 2025)

¹⁴ Government of Bombay. (1948). *The Bombay Diseases of Animals Act, 1948* (Bombay Act No. LIX of 1948). Retrieved from : https://www.indiacode.nic.in/bitstream/123456789/20124/1/the_bombay_diseases.pdf (last visited on October 13, 2025)

¹⁵ Government of Gujarat. (2007). *Gujarat State Poultry Farm Registration and Regulatory Authority Act, 2007*. Retrieved from : <https://doah.gujarat.gov.in/Home/ActandRule> (last visited on October 13, 2025)

¹⁶ Government of Orissa. (1949). *The Orissa Animal Contagious Diseases Act, 1949*. Retrieved from : https://www.indiacode.nic.in/bitstream/123456789/14065/1/the_orissa_animal_contagious_diseases_act_1949_%281%29.pdf (last visited on October 13, 2025)

the *Livestock and Bird Diseases Act, 1948*,¹⁷ which allows the state to take preventive measures against disease outbreaks in poultry and livestock. This Act is supported by the *Punjab Livestock Development Board Rules, 2001*,¹⁸ which established a board to promote modern and commercial poultry farming practices. Further strengthening its legal framework, Punjab enacted the *Poultry Production Act, 2016*¹⁹, which deals with the registration of poultry premises, improvement of poultry product quality, and enforcement of bio-security standards. In Rajasthan, the *Animal Diseases Act, 1959*²⁰ was passed to prevent and control diseases in animals, including poultry. These state-specific laws reflect a broader commitment to animal welfare and public health, ensuring that poultry farming is carried out responsibly and in line with scientific standards. Each Act plays a vital role in regulating poultry care, disease prevention, and environmental protection within its respective state.

III. Regulatory Framework Governing Animal Transportation in India

The Food Safety and Standards (Licensing and Registration of Food Businesses) Regulations, framed under the Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006, set out specific provisions for the humane handling of animals, particularly during transport prior to slaughter. As stated in *Part IV, Rule 6.4(a)(1)*, only

¹⁷ Government of Punjab. (1948). *The Punjab Livestock and Bird Diseases Act, 1948* (East Punjab Act No. 47 of 1948). Retrieved from : https://www.indiacode.nic.in/bitstream/123456789/8388/1/punjab_livestock_and_birds_diseases_act_1948.pdf(last visited on October 15, 2025)

¹⁸Government of Punjab. (2001). *Punjab Livestock Development Board Rules, 2001*. Department of Animal Husbandry, Dairying and Fisheries, Government of Punjab.

¹⁹ Government of Punjab. (2016). *The Punjab Poultry Production Act, 2016* (Act XLVII of 2016). Retrieved from : <http://punjablaws.gov.pk/laws/2665.html>(last visited on October 15, 2025)

²⁰Government of Rajasthan. (1959). *Rajasthan Animal Diseases Act, 1959* (Act No. 5 of 1959). Retrieved from <https://www.latestlaws.com/bare-acts/state-acts-rules/rajasthan-state-laws/rajasthan-animal-diseases-act-1959/>(last visited on October 16, 2025)

animals that have been examined and certified as healthy by a qualified veterinary officer are permitted to be transported. When animals are moved from regions affected by contagious diseases to disease-free zones, they must first undergo vaccination and a 30-day quarantine period. The regulations further prohibit the transport of pregnant animals nearing delivery. During transit, animals must be handled gently and provided with adequate space to either stand or rest comfortably. They should receive light feeding and regular access to clean water, and a responsible person must accompany them to administer first aid if necessary. Transportation during extreme weather conditions, whether excessive heat or cold, should be avoided. Before loading, vehicles must be thoroughly inspected to ensure safety, including checking the floor and walls for any damage and ensuring proper covering to shield the animals from adverse weather. These rules collectively aim to safeguard animal welfare throughout the transportation process while maintaining high standards of food safety.²¹

The Transport of Animals Rules, 1978, especially Chapter VII (added in 2001), provides specific directions for the safe transportation of poultry. These rules state that only birds certified as healthy by a qualified veterinarian can be moved. Before the journey, they must be given food and water, and during travel, water should be provided at least once every six hours. When transported by road, the cages or boxes must not be placed one over another and should be properly covered to ensure enough air circulation while protecting the birds from heat, cold, or rain. For train journeys lasting more than twelve hours, a caretaker must travel with the birds to look after them, and no dangerous goods are allowed in the same compartment. In air travel, containers should be placed near the exit door and removed immediately upon arrival. The rules also mention the correct size and design of

²¹ Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI). (2011). *Food Safety and Standards (Licensing and Registration of Food Businesses) Regulations, 2011*. Notification F.No. 2-15015/30/2010 dated 01.02.2011. Retrieved from : https://fssai.gov.in/upload/uploadfiles/files/Compendium_Licensing_Regulationns.pdf(last visited on October 16, 2025)

cages for different bird species, requiring them to be safe, properly labeled, and securely fixed in the vehicle. The total travel time should not go beyond six hours, and any halts should not last more than thirty minutes. Additionally, all vehicles carrying birds must have fire extinguishers. Altogether, these rules aim to make sure that poultry are moved in safe, humane, and well-regulated conditions.²²

In 2015, the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways updated the Central Motor Vehicles Rules, 1989 through a new rule called 125E. This rule says that vehicles used to carry animals must have fixed sections inside so that each animal travels in its own space. For poultry, each section should be at least 40 cm square.²³ However, this size is smaller than what international guidelines suggest for animal comfort and safety.²⁴

IV. International Frameworks Governing Poultry Rights and Welfare

The World Organization for Animal Health (OIE) defines Animal welfare as, “Animal welfare means how an animal is coping with the conditions in which it lives. An animal is in a good state of welfare if (as indicated by scientific evidence) it is healthy, comfortable, well nourished, safe, able to express innate behaviour and is not suffering from unpleasant states such as pain, fear, and distress. Good animal welfare requires disease prevention and veterinary treatment, appropriate shelter, management, nutrition, humane handling and humane slaughter

²² Government of India. (1978). *Transport of Animals Rules, 1978* (as amended in 2001). Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change.

Retrieved from : <https://moef.gov.in/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Transport-of-Animals-Rules-1978.pdf>(last visited on October 16, 2025)

²³Ministry of Road Transport and Highways. (2015). *Central Motor Vehicles (Eleventh Amendment) Rules, 2015*, G.S.R. 546(E), dated 8 July 2015. Retrieved from <https://morth.nic.in/notification>(last visited on October 16, 2025)

²⁴Veterinaria Digital. (n.d.). *Animal welfare in poultry farming during transport*. Retrieved from <https://www.veterinariadigital.com/en/articulos/animal-welfare-in-poultry-farming-during-transport/>(last visited on October 18, 2025)

or killing. Animal welfare refers to the state of the animal; the treatment that an animal received is covered by other terms such as animal care, animal husbandry, and humane treatment.”²⁵

India is a member of the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE), which has established key global standards for animal welfare. One of its most influential principles is the concept of the “Five Freedoms,” first introduced in 1965. These freedoms are designed to make sure that animals cared for by humans live in healthy and humane conditions. They include freedom from hunger, thirst, and poor nutrition; freedom from fear and stress; freedom from discomfort caused by surroundings or physical conditions; freedom from illness and injury; and the freedom to show natural behavior. These principles serve as a guide for treating animals with kindness and responsibility. In the United Kingdom, awareness about farm animal welfare became significant in 1965 when the Brambell Committee recommended that animals should have certain basic rights, such as being able to stand, lie down, stretch, and turn around easily. This idea became the basis for modern animal welfare standards. Later, in 1979, the Farm Animal Welfare Council (FAWC) built upon these recommendations, improving them to protect both the physical and emotional well-being of animals more effectively.²⁶

The Welfare Quality Project mainly suggests using animal-based outcome indicators to assess poultry welfare. These measures can be applied to examine each of the 12 established welfare criteria (refer to Table 1). For example, body condition or emaciation levels on a defined scale can help assess hunger, while behaviors such as panting or clustering may reflect the birds’ thermal comfort. Each indicator can be assigned a different level

²⁵ World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE). (2012). *Introduction to the recommendations for animal welfare*. Retrieved from : https://www.woah.org/fileadmin/Home/eng/International_Standard_Setting/docs/pdf/A_Update_2012_Chapter_7_1_Introduction_Welfare.pdf(last visited on October 18, 2025)

²⁶Nicol, C. J., & Davies, A. (n.d.). *Poultry welfare in developing countries*. In Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (Ed.), *Poultry Development Review*. Retrieved October 19, 2025, from <https://www.fao.org/4/i3531e/i3531e09.pdf>(last visited on October 18, 2025)

of importance to arrive at an overall evaluation of the hens' welfare in a specific setting, with greater weight given to the criteria considered most vital to their well-being.

Welfare Principle	Welfare Criteria
Good Feeding	1. Absence of prolonged hunger 2. Absence of prolonged thirst
Good Housing	3. Comfort around resting 4. Thermal comfort 5. Ease of movement
Good Health	6. Absence of injuries 7. Absence of disease 8. Absence of pain induced by management procedures
Appropriate behaviour	9. Expression of social behaviours 10. Expression of other behaviours 11. Good human-animal relationship 12. Positive emotional state

Table 1. Welfare principles and criteria as defined by Welfare Quality

Different countries have developed their own laws to prevent cruelty to animals, with most imposing penalties such as fines or imprisonment on individuals who harm them. These punishments apply not only to intentional acts of cruelty but also to negligent actions that cause suffering. In Japan, the *Welfare and Management of Animals Act*, first introduced in 1973 and later amended, aims to protect animals from abuse and mistreatment. This legislation forbids killing, injuring, or causing suffering to animals without valid justification. It covers a wide range of species, including domestic animals and livestock, whether they are kept in captivity or live freely. Serious offences, such as harming animals without reason, denying them food or water, or

abandoning them, can lead to heavy fines or imprisonment.²⁷ The law emphasizes the need for responsible pet ownership and the humane treatment of all animals. Similarly, *Bangladesh introduced the Animal Welfare Act, 2019*, replacing the old *Cruelty to Animals Act*, to create a more modern and complete framework for protecting animal rights. This Act bans all forms of unnecessary suffering, including cruelty, neglect, and exploitative practices such as animal fights or painful experiments. It also provides clear and humane rules for transporting and slaughtering animals, ensuring they are treated gently and protected from needless pain. Those who violate these laws may face fines or imprisonment. To make enforcement stronger, the Act also created a National Animal Welfare Council, which works with local authorities and organizations to promote and maintain animal welfare standards across the country.²⁸

V. Indian Judiciary and Animal Welfare

The SC India has played a leading role in advancing justice for animal welfare. On numerous occasions, the Apex Court has reaffirmed and protected the rights of animals through its landmark rulings. In the case of *Animal Welfare Board of India v. A. Nagaraja*,²⁹ the SC recognized that animals possess the right to live with dignity and worth, free from unnecessary pain and suffering. The Court directed the AWBI and the government to implement measures to prevent cruelty toward animals. It further highlighted that Sections 3 and 11 of the PCA Act provide legal safeguards for animals, making it the duty of authorities to uphold

²⁷Government of Japan. (1973). *Welfare and Management of Animals Act* (amended in 1999 and 2005). Retrieved from <https://www.env.go.jp/en/laws/nature/animal.html>(last visited on October19, 2025)

²⁸ Aziz, M. I., & Sirazi, Y. (2022). Protection of animals in the laws of Bangladesh. *Journal of Social Science Studies*, 3(5–6), 261–280. Retrieved from

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/391278642_Protection_of_Animals_in_the_Laws_of_Bangladesh/stats(last visited on October19, 2025)

²⁹ *Animal Welfare Board of India v. A. Nagaraja&Ors.*, (2014). *Supreme Court of India*, (2014) 7 SCC 547.

their welfare. In the case of *State of Gujarat v. Mirzapur Moti KureshiKassabJammat*,³⁰ the SC held that under Art. 51A(g) of the Indian Constitution, every citizen has a fundamental responsibility to act with compassion and kindness toward animals. This moral and constitutional duty aligns with the purposes of Art. 48 and 48-A, which promote the safeguarding of animals and environmental conservation. The Court explained that the phrase “compassion for living creatures” reflects empathy, care, and humane behavior. It also associated this duty with the PCA Act, especially Sections 3, 11(1)(a) and (m), and 22, which are designed to prevent cruelty and ensure the welfare of animals. In the 2014 case of *Gauri Maulekhi v. Union of India & Others*,³¹ the SC prohibited the import of cosmetics that involved animal testing. The Court observed that testing beauty products on animals leads to needless pain and suffering and emphasized the adoption of humane, non-animal testing alternatives. This ruling reflected India’s firm commitment to animal welfare and aligned with international efforts to eliminate animal testing in the cosmetics industry.

In *N.R. Nair & Others v. Union of India & Others*,³² the Supreme Court examined a challenge to a government notification issued under Section 22 of the PCA Act, 1960, which prohibited the training and public exhibition of wild animals such as bears, monkeys, tigers, panthers, and lions. The regulation aimed to prevent cruelty to animals commonly used in circuses. The Indian Circus Federation contested this prohibition, asserting that it infringed upon their fundamental right to carry on a trade or business under Art. 19(1)(g) of the Constitution. The Court, however, rejected this argument, observing that circus animals endure significant suffering during training and performances, and that confinement in cages severely limits their natural

³⁰State of Gujarat v. Mirzapur Moti KureshiKassabJammat& Others. (2005). *Supreme Court of India*, (2005) 8 SCC 534.

³¹ Gauri Maulekhi v. Union of India & Others. (2014). *Supreme Court of India*, Writ Petition (PIL) No. 77 of 2010, decided on October 17, 2014.

³² N.R. Nair & Others v. Union of India & Others. (2001). *Supreme Court of India*, Civil Appeal Nos. 3609–3620 of 2001, decided on May 1, 2001.

behavior. Affirming the Kerala HC's earlier ruling, the SC held that safeguarding animals from cruelty and exploitation takes precedence over commercial or economic interests.

In *Rajendra Kumar v. Union of India*³³, the petitioner, an ivory trader, challenged the constitutional validity of certain sections of the Wildlife Protection (Amendment) Act, 1991. He argued that banning the ivory trade violated his right to practice a lawful business under Art. 19(1)(g) of the Constitution. He also claimed that the ivory he dealt in came from extinct mammoths, not living elephants, and that this trade was a part of India's traditional art and culture. However, the Rajasthan HC rejected these arguments, ruling that the restrictions were reasonable and consistent with the objectives of the Constitution. The Court held that the ban was necessary to protect wildlife and prevent the illegal killing of elephants. It further stated that the amendment aligned with India's international obligations under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), reinforcing the nation's commitment to global wildlife conservation.

In *S. Kannan v. Commissioner of Police*,³⁴ the Madras HC declared that every bird, including poultry, deserves protection from cruelty in any form. The Court underscored that animals and birds possess the right to coexist peacefully with humans. It further prohibited cockfighting and other animal combat events conducted for amusement, asserting that such activities are inhumane and cannot be justified. In the case of *MuhammadbhaiJalalbhaiserasiya v. State of Gujarat*,³⁵ the Gujarat HC stated that keeping birds in cages is like unlawfully locking them up, which goes against their right to fly freely in the open sky. The Court ordered that such birds must be set free. In

³³Rajendra Kumar v. Union of India. (1998). *Rajasthan High Court*, AIR 1998 Raj. 165.

³⁴ S. Kannan v. Commissioner of Police. (2014). *Madras High Court*, W.P. (MD) No. 8040 of 2014, decided on May 21, 2014.

³⁵MuhammadbhaiJalalbhaiserasiya v. State of Gujarat. (2014). *Gujarat High Court*, 2015 JX (Guj) 378.

People for Animals v. M.D. Mohazzim & Another,³⁶ the Delhi HC recognized that birds are entitled to basic rights, including the right to live with dignity. The Court held that acts of cruelty, such as keeping birds in cramped cages for trade or personal use, are impermissible. It further asserted that humans have no moral or legal right to curtail the natural freedom of birds in a manner that inflicts suffering or discomfort upon them.

VI. Poultry Care Essentials: Managing Layers and Broilers

India's egg production industry has seen tremendous growth over the years. In the 1950s and 1960s, egg production mainly took place in small backyard poultry farms. By 1995, many farmers started using raised cage systems to keep their hens. The sector changed even more by 2011 with the rise of large commercial farms equipped with automated feeding systems, temperature control, and improved housing designs that helped increase productivity and promote better bird welfare.³⁷ Over the years, poultry farming methods for layer hens have developed and become more varied across India. Today, the poultry sector is both highly profitable and very competitive. To stay successful, farmers aim to increase egg production while keeping costs low and ensuring good quality for consumers. Large commercial farms now produce most of the country's eggs, operating on a much bigger scale than traditional backyard farms. Their large size allows better organization of work, greater use of machines, lower labor costs, and improved overall efficiency.³⁸ In rural areas, many people continue to raise chickens using

³⁶ *People for Animals v. M.D. Mohazzim & Another*. (2015). *Delhi High Court*, CRL.M.C. 2051/2015, MANU/DE/2074/2015, decided on May 15, 2015.

³⁷ Chatterjee, R. N., & Rajkumar, U. (2015). An overview of poultry production in India. *Indian Journal of Animal Health*, 54(2), 89–108. https://ijah.in/upload/snippet/76_49.pdf (last visited on October 19, 2025)

³⁸ Linden, J. (2014, February 18). *Animal rights campaigners highlight welfare issues in Indian egg industry*. The Poultry Site. Retrieved from <http://www.thepoultrysite.com/poultrynews/31498/animal-rights-campaignershighlight-welfare-issues-in-indian-egg-industry/> (last visited on October 19, 2025)

traditional backyard methods. However, this approach is less secure and less efficient, as the birds are more exposed to predators and have a higher risk of falling ill.³⁹

Laying hens kept in conventional cages often face serious health and welfare issues because the limited space restricts their movement, leading to weak bones and a higher risk of injury. Such confinement also stops them from performing natural behaviors like dust-bathing and foraging, which can cause stress-related problems like feather pecking and cannibalism. While beak trimming is sometimes used to reduce these behaviors, it raises ethical concerns as it can be painful for the birds. Foot ailments such as dermatitis and overgrown claws are also frequent, particularly in dirty or poorly maintained cages. Although non-cage systems provide hens with more space and allow natural movement, they come with challenges like predator attacks and higher mortality rates. In general, the design of housing, the amount of space provided, and the surrounding environment play a crucial role in maintaining the health and well-being of laying hens. Moreover, poor farm management can lead to bad air quality, where excessive dust or ammonia causes breathing issues and increases the risk of disease among birds.⁴⁰

Broiler chickens are selectively bred to grow and gain weight at a very fast rate, often without much attention to their health or comfort. This unnatural growth rate puts strain on their weak bones and joints, causing leg disorders and making it hard for them to walk properly. Keeping these chickens confined in cages further increases their suffering, creating welfare problems

³⁹ Kumar, S., & Sharma, R. K. (2009). Problems related to farm operations in poultry farming as perceived by farm women. *Veterinary World*, 2(5), 193–195. Available at <http://www.veterinaryworld.org/Vol.2/May/Problems%20related%20to%20farm%20operations%20in%20poultry%20farming%20as%20pe.pdf> (last visited on October 23, 2025)

⁴⁰ Pedersen, S., Nonnenmann, M., Rautiainen, R., Demmers, T. G. M., Banhazi, T., & Lyngbye, M. (2000). Dust in pig buildings. *Journal of Agricultural Safety and Health*, 6(4), 261.

similar to those faced by egg-laying hens.⁴¹

VII. Legal Guidelines for the Slaughter and Care of Broiler Chickens

According to the *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (Slaughter House) Rules, 2001*, animals may be slaughtered only in licensed or officially approved slaughterhouses. These rules are designed to ensure that animals are treated humanely during the process. For example, they require that no animal should be killed in front of another, and that no drugs or chemicals should be given to an animal before slaughter unless they are needed for medical treatment. Similarly, *the Food Safety and Standards (FSS) Regulations, 2011* set detailed standards for the design and functioning of slaughterhouses. These include rules on maintaining hygiene, using proper equipment, ensuring staff cleanliness, handling animals carefully before slaughter, and transporting them safely. Together, these provisions aim to ensure that animal slaughter is carried out in a clean, regulated, and humane manner.⁴² The goal of these rules is to ensure both animal welfare and food safety.

VIII. Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (Egg Laying Hens) Rules, 2023⁴³

The Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (Egg Laying Hens) Rules, 2023 were created to improve how egg-laying hens are

⁴¹ Law Commission of India. (2017). *Report No. 269: Transportation and house-keeping of egg-laying hens (layers) and broiler chickens*. Government of India. Retrieved from : <https://lawcommissionofindia.nic.in/reports/Report269.pdf> (last visited on October 23, 2025)

⁴² Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI). (2011). *Food Safety and Standards (FSS) Regulations, 2011*. Government of India. Retrieved from https://www.fssai.gov.in/upload/uploadfiles/files/FSSR_2011.pdf (last visited on October 25, 2025)

⁴³ Government of India. (2023). *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (Egg Laying Hens) Rules, 2023*. Ministry of Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Dairying. Retrieved from <https://www.legitquest.com/act/prevention-of-cruelty-to-animals-egg-laying-hens-rules-2023/CDA0> (last visited on October 25, 2025)

treated on farms. These rules apply to farms that use colony enclosures, which were earlier called battery cages. Every farm must register with the local Animal Husbandry Department, and the registration lasts for five years. Each hen must have at least 550 square centimeters of space, and cages should hold 6 to 8 birds so they can move freely and reach food and water. Farm owners and operators are responsible for following these rules, and government farms must also comply. Officials can inspect farms, but they must follow safety steps to avoid spreading diseases. Farms must keep records of bird numbers, deaths, and space used. Feeding hens dead chicks or using growth drugs is not allowed, and medicines can only be given by a vet. Farms must have enough staff and a registered vet, with emergency contact details clearly shown. Male chicks must be euthanized using approved methods, and old hens should be sold to licensed slaughterhouses or traders. If farms break the rules, they can be fined, and their registration may be canceled. However, they can appeal or fix the problems to get registered again.

IX. Conclusion

The 2023 Rules were introduced to promote improved welfare and living standards for hens in India. Despite this intention, the regulations still permit hens to be confined in extremely limited spaces, around 550 square centimeters per bird, roughly equivalent to the area of a standard sheet of paper. These enclosures closely resemble battery cages, a practice that has already been prohibited across the European Union.⁴⁴ Many countries are moving away from using cages for egg-laying hens and are banning the routine killing of male chicks, which are often discarded because they don't produce eggs. Surprisingly, the rules won't be fully enforced until 2029. 'The guidelines also mention that male chicks should be euthanized according to

⁴⁴ Council of the European Union. (1999). *Council Directive 1999/74/EC of 19 July 1999 laying down minimum standards for the protection of laying hens*. Official Journal of the European Communities, L 203, 53–57. Retrieved from <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/1999/74/oj/eng> (last visited on October 25, 2025)

international standards, but current practices in India, as reported by PETA India, involve cruel methods like burning, drowning, or crushing. These practices are expected to continue until 2029.⁴⁵

Moreover, violations of the provisions under the PCA Act, 1960, attract only mild penalties. The Act does not prescribe a minimum punishment, and the maximum penalty is limited to a fine of ₹100 or imprisonment for a period of up to three months. Such lenient measures make the law ineffective in strongly deterring acts of animal cruelty.⁴⁶ The penalties listed in the PCA Act are now considered outdated and insufficient. While the punishments and fines were suitable when the law was first enacted, they have lost their impact over time due to inflation. Unlike many countries that regularly update their animal protection laws and penalties, India's legislation has remained mostly unchanged. Updating these rules is crucial to ensure the safety and well-being of both animals and humans. Moreover, weak enforcement and the lack of awareness among poultry workers about proper animal care further emphasize the urgent need for reform. Along with revising the law, proper implementation is equally important to provide real protection to animals. On June 3, 2014, the Central Government issued an advisory to all States and Union Territories warning against the routine use of antibiotics and growth promoters in livestock and poultry raised for meat, milk, or eggs. The advisory noted that adding such substances to animal feed can leave harmful chemical residues in food and contribute to antibiotic resistance in both humans and animals. It also highlighted that the use of hormones to speed up animal growth can harm human health. Hence, farmers, industries, and feed manufacturers must be made aware and trained to stop such practices to promote safer and

⁴⁵ PETA India. (2023, February 27). *PETA India condemns as 'humane washing' the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (Egg Laying Hens) Rules, 2023*. Retrieved from <https://www.petaindia.com/blog/peta-india-condemns-as-humane-washing-the-prevention-of-cruelty-to-animals-egg-laying-hens-rules-2023/> (last visited on October 25, 2025)

⁴⁶ Government of India. (1960). *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, 1960 (Section 38[3])*. Ministry of Law and Justice. Retrieved from

Available At: <https://stsoldierjournaloflawandsocialscience.com>

healthier food production.⁴⁷ Similar provisions are in the 2023 rules which need to be strictly implemented.⁴⁸ In conclusion, while both the Indian Legislature and judiciary have shown a consistent willingness to improve poultry bird management through various laws, rules, and court decisions, significant gaps still remain. These include weak enforcement, outdated standards, and limited awareness among stakeholders. For example, despite regulations, practices like overcrowding, misuse of antibiotics, and inhumane handling during transport continue. To truly ensure ethical and safe poultry management, India must strengthen its legal framework, improve implementation, and align with global best practice.

⁴⁷ Law Commission of India. (2017). *Report No. 269: Transportation and house-keeping of egg-laying hens (layers) and broiler chickens*. Government of India. Retrieved from: <https://lawcommissionofindia.nic.in/reports/Report269.pdf> (last visited on October 20, 2025)

⁴⁸ Government of India. (2023). *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (Egg Laying Hens) Rules, 2023* (Rule 10). Ministry of Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Dairying. Retrieved from <https://www.legitquest.com/act/prevention-of-cruelty-to-animals-egg-laying-hens-rules-2023/CDA0> (last visited on October 30, 2025)