



# Animal Welfare Institute

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March 31, 2020

John Starkey, President  
U.S. Poultry & Egg Association  
1530 Cooledge Road  
Tucker, GA 30084-7303

Dear Mr. Starkey:

I am writing on behalf of the Animal Welfare Institute (AWI) to express our concerns regarding a significant increase in large barn fires that have killed millions of egg-laying hens and meat chickens in recent years.

As the world's largest poultry organization and the industry's leading technical resource, the U.S. Poultry & Egg Association is in the best position to address this important issue. However, in the past your organization has opposed efforts to require fire prevention improvements in animal housing facilities. Despite this opposition to specific fire protection initiatives, you have declined to offer alternative solutions, even as the problem continued to escalate. AWI is now urging your organization to immediately address this devastating problem by engaging your members and industry partners to study the issue and prioritize finding effective solutions that provide fire prevention and suppression in animal housing facilities.

AWI has analyzed media reports to track hundreds of barn fires that have killed over 4 million birds since 2013 (see enclosed report). In just the past three years, we have seen a significant increase in large barn fires that have resulted in the deaths of over 2.5 million egg-laying hens and 287,000 meat chickens (see enclosed lists of major fires).

While officials were able to determine or speculate what caused the fire in a limited number of these incidents, the cause of most large barn fires has remained undetermined. In addition, little information has been provided by the industry regarding what companies are currently doing to prevent and suppress fires and how they plan to expand on these efforts to prevent a continued increase in large fires and fatalities. At minimum, the U.S. Poultry & Egg Association should work with members and industry partners to conduct an industry-wide assessment of the current level of fire prevention and suppression mechanisms in animal housing facilities and of best practices to minimize the risk of a fire in large commercial egg and broiler operations.

Of particular concern to AWI is what appears to be a rise in fires at cage-free egg production facilities. Since the start of 2020, two large fires have occurred at cage-free facilities where at least 700,000 hens were killed. It is possible that environmental factors associated with cage-free housing increase the risk of fires. As egg producers ramp up a transition to cage-free egg

production, new barns are being constructed that will remain in use for decades and house many millions of hens. Before such construction takes place on a large scale, it is imperative that the industry work to identify and implement measures capable of mitigating the risk of barn fires and reducing the loss of life when fires do occur.

We hope that before millions more animals are needlessly killed, the U.S. Poultry & Egg Association makes preventing barn fires a priority and works with all stakeholders to put forth meaningful solutions. Enclosed you will find a letter with 10,000 signatures from conscientious citizens and consumers across the country who share our concerns and are calling on your organization to act. This is in addition to the nearly 5,000 letters recently sent to your organization by email.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I would appreciate the opportunity to meet with you to provide additional information and answer any questions you might have. You may contact me via email ([cathy@awionline.org](mailto:cathy@awionline.org)) or by telephone (202-337-2332).

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Cathy Liss". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Cathy Liss  
President

Enclosures