

INFO SHEET 1 - EGG PRODUCTION IN THE EU & UK

PRODUCTION & TRADE

In 2021, there were 376 million laying hens in the EU¹, and this figure increases to 460 million if breeding flocks are counted (FAOSTAT)². These hens produced 6.5 million tonnes of shell eggs for consumption in 2021³ (Table 1). France, Germany, Spain, and Italy are the biggest producers, between them accounting for more than half (54%) of EU production in 2021 (Table 1). In the same year, there were 41 million layers in the UK (DEFRA)⁴ - 58 million if breeding flocks are counted² - producing over 0.75 million tonnes of shell eggs². The largest egg producing company in the EU+UK are shown in Table 2.

Table 1. Top 10 egg producing countries in the EU and the UK. Hen eggs for consumption only. (Source: Hen egg production: European Commission³ + UK: FAOSTAT²; Layers numbers: EU - European Commission¹ + UK - DEFRA³).

Country	Hen eggs production 2021 (tonnes)	Share of EU hen eggs production 2021	Layers 2021 (millions)	Share of EU layers 2021 (%)
EU (27)	6,515,662	100.0%	376	100.0%
France*	972,310	14.9%	48	12.8%
Germany	907,000	13.9%	58	15.4%
Spain	870,000	13.4%	47	12.5%
UK	774,000	n/a	41	n/a
Italy	765,000	11.7%	41	10.8%
Netherlands	625,000	9.6%	31	8.4%
Poland	519,130	8.0%	51	13.6%
Romania	350,000	5.4%	9	2.4%
Czechia	152,000	2.3%	7	2.0%
Belgium	145,500	2.2%	11	2.9%

* Layers data for 2019

Table 2. Top 10 egg producing companies in the EU and UK. Source: Clements (2022)⁵.

Company	Country	Layers (million)
Wozniak Poultry Farms	Poland	13.3
Avril Group	France	7.0
Noble Foods	UK	7.0
Grupo Huevos Guillen	Spain	6.0
PEP	France	5.7
DAVA Foods Holding A/S	Denmark	5.4
Eureden	France	5.3
DANAEG A/S	Denmark	4.5
L'OEuf de Nos Villages	France	4.5
Nutrea Nutrition Animale	France	3.5



Five of the top ten egg producing companies in the EU+UK are in France



The largest egg producing company in the EU+UK is Wozniak Poultry Farms in Poland, with 13.3 million layers

EU: Gross exports from EU countries in 2021 included 1.07 million tonnes of shell eggs (50% of the global total), with a value of US\$ 2.3 billion, 323,000 tonnes of liquid egg and 47,700 tonnes of dried egg². The Netherlands is the largest exporter of shell eggs in the world (around 16% of the global total in 2021) and liquid egg (32% of the global total) and the second largest exporter of dried egg (20% of the total) after the USA². Extra-EU exports of eggs and egg products for consumption to third countries amounted to over 366,000 tonnes in 2021, with the main destinations being the UK (23.3%) Japan (21.3%), and Switzerland (10.9%)³.

In 2021, EU countries imported almost one million tonnes of shell eggs, with a value of US\$ 1.7 billion, over 290,000 tonnes of liquid eggs, and over 38,000 tonnes of dried egg². Germany and the Netherlands are the largest importers of shell eggs in the EU (Figure 1), accounting for a third (32.6%) and a quarter (25.3%) of imports to EU countries, respectively. Even though the Netherlands is the leading egg exporting country, they also import eggs for export and further processing⁶. Imports to the Netherlands are mostly from Germany (48.2%) and Belgium (23.9%), and imports to Germany are mostly from the Netherlands (82.7%), followed by Poland (7.2%)². Imports of eggs and egg products into the EU from third countries amounted to over 36,000 tonnes in 2021, with the majority coming from the UK (44.5%), Ukraine (18.3%), and the USA (17.7%)³.

UK: In 2021, the UK exported 21,800 tonnes of shell eggs, with a value of US\$ 116 million, making the UK the ninth largest shell egg exporter in the EU+UK². Gross imports of shell eggs totalled 25,150 tonnes, with a value of US\$ 63 million, making the UK the seventh largest importer of shell eggs in the EU+UK².

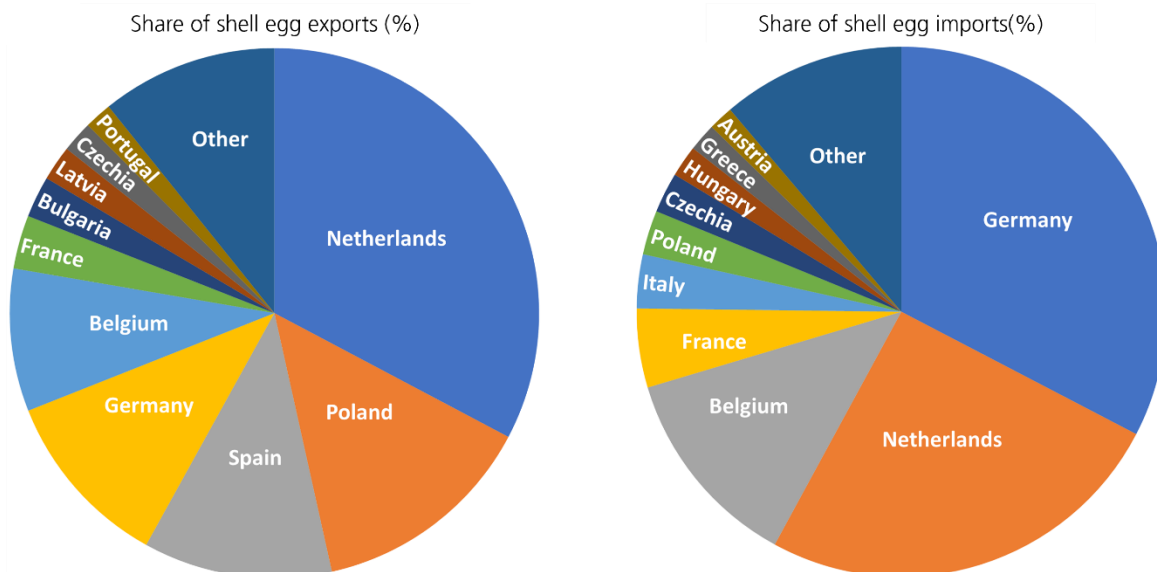


Figure 1. The main EU exporters and importers of shell eggs by share of the market (% of tonnage) 2021. Figures are share of exports from EU countries to any country globally and share of imports to EU countries from any country globally. Source: FAOSTAT².

CONSUMPTION

Around 6.3 million tonnes of eggs were consumedⁱ in the EU in 2020, with an additional 858,000 tonnes consumed in the UK. In the EU, per capita egg consumption was highest in the Netherlands at 22 kg per person in 2020², while the most eggs are consumed by Germany and France (Table 3).

ⁱ Egg consumption – here and throughout consumption is measured as the total supply available for human consumption.

Per capita egg consumption has increased by 7% over the past decade across the EU, to around 13 kg per person per year in 2020, with a wide variation between countries, ranging from 60% growth in the Netherlands to a 25% reduction in Poland (Table 3).

Table 3. Egg consumption (measured as total and per capita supply available for human consumption) in the top 10 egg consuming countries in the EU+UK in 2020. Source: FAOSTAT².

Country	Eggs total supply 2020 (thousand tonnes)	Eggs per capita supply 2020 (kg/cap/yr)	Per capita supply percentage change from 2010 (%)
EU (27)	6,342,000	13.1	6.8%
Germany	1,294	15.3	24.8%
France	992	13.9	4.0%
UK	858	11.2	3.6%
Spain	774	14.8	8.8%
Italy	723	11.3	-1.8%
Netherlands	419	22.2	59.8%
Poland	400	8.8	-24.5%
Romania	268	13.0	3.8%
Belgium	177	13.8	12.8%
Hungary	158	14.7	5.2%

EGG PRODUCTION IN DIFFERENT SYSTEMS

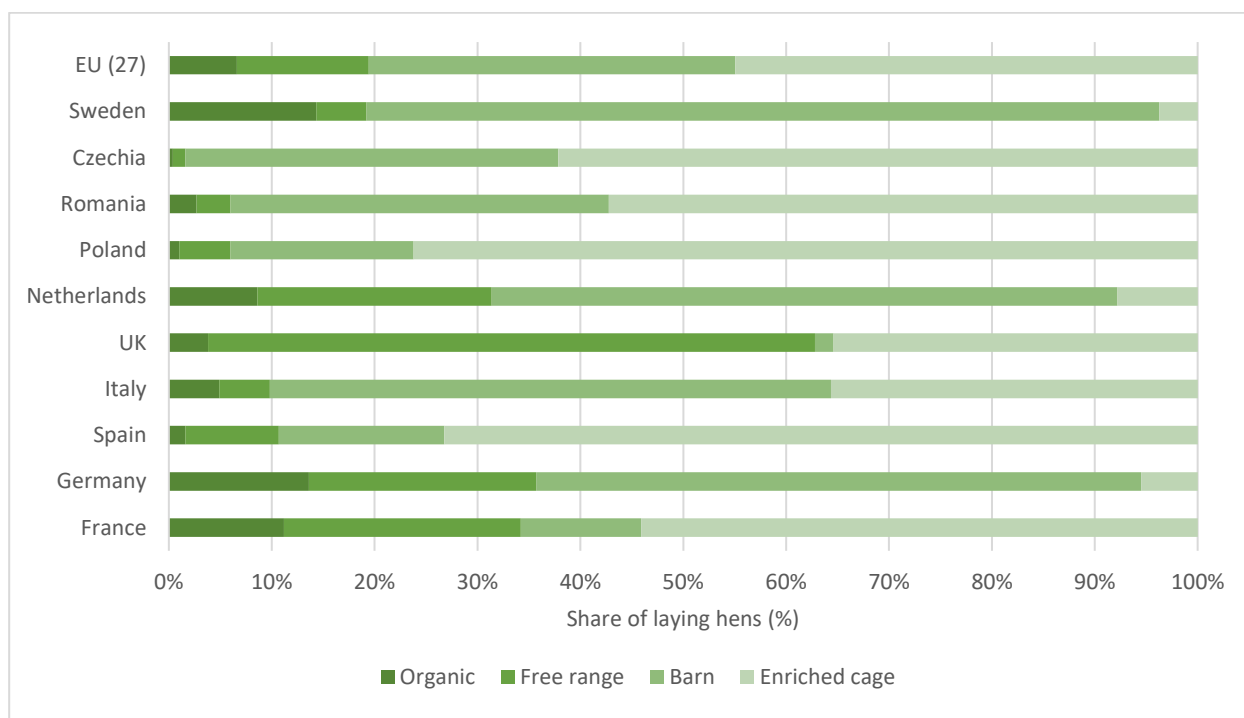


Figure 2. Share of commercial laying hens (flocks ≥ 350 birds) in the different production systems in the EU (including top egg producing countries) and the UK. UK data relate to share of eggs produced rather than share of laying hens, but data are expected to be roughly equivalent. Sources: European Commission (2022)¹ and Defra (2022)⁷.

In the EU, more than half of hens are now kept in non-cage systems. In 2021, 44.9% of hens were kept in enriched cages, 35.6% in indoor non-cage (barn) systems, 12.8% free-range, and 6.6%

organic (Figure 2). The majority of hens are in barn systems in Germany (58.8%), Italy (54.5%), The Netherlands (60.9%), and Sweden (77.0%). Cages are still the most common system in France (54.1%), Spain (73.3%), Poland (76.2%), Romania (57.3%), and Czechia (62.1%) (Figure 2).

In the UK, a majority of hens have access to the outdoors. In 2021, 35.4% of eggs in the UK were produced in enriched cages, 1.8% in indoor non-cage systems, 59% in free-range systems, and 3.8% in organic systems (Figure 2).

LEGISLATION

In 2004, the EU (including the UK) introduced mandatory codes on shell eggs (Commission Regulation (EC) No 2295/2003). These codes not only specified the origin of the eggs but importantly also the method of production: cage, barn, free-range, or organic. Council Directive 1999/74/EC set out the minimum standards for the protection of laying hens which included a ban on the use of conventional battery cages. This ban came into force in the EU (including the UK) in 2012. In 2018, the European Citizen Initiative (ECI), "End the Cage Age", which called for banning the use of cages for laying hens (among other species), received 1.4 million signatures from all EU member states. In response to this, and as part of the EU Farm to Fork Strategy adopted in 2020, the European Commission is undertaking a comprehensive evaluation of the animal welfare legislation (proposals expected at the end of 2023). For laying hens, this revision will both update the existing legislation based on the latest scientific evidence and broaden the scope of the legislation to include both laying hen breeders and pullets. Some EU member states have already banned caged systems for laying hens - Austria and Luxemburg have full bans, while France has banned the installation of new caged systems⁸. Other countries have upcoming bans – Germany from 2025, Czech Republic from 2027, and Slovakia from 2030⁸.

Key features of the EU legal requirements for laying hen welfare in various production systems are summarised in Table 4. Similar requirements for laying hens in the UK are set out in The Welfare of Farmed Animals (England) Regulations 2007 (as amended, and related Regulations in other parts of the UK).

Table 4. Overview of EU legal requirements for various laying hen production systems/marketing terms.

LEGISLATION	COUNCIL DIRECTIVE 1999/74/EC (AS AMENDED); COMMISSION REGULATION (EC) NO 589/2008 (AS AMENDED)			REGULATION (EU) 2018/848 (AS AMENDED); COMMISSION IMPLEMENTING REGULATION (EU) 2020/464 (AS AMENDED)
	ENRICHED CAGE	BARN	FREE RANGE	ORGANIC
Stocking density	750cm ² /hen (of which 600cm ² 'usable' space)	9 hens/m ² 'usable' area	9 hens/m ² 'usable' area	6 hens/m ² 'usable' space
Nest	Yes (no minimum)	7 hens/nest or 120 hens/m ² in group nests	7 hens/nest or 120 hens/m ² in group nests	7 hens/nest or 120 hens/m ² in group nests
Perches	15cm/hen	15cm/hen (elevated)	15cm/hen (elevated)	18cm/hen (elevated)

Litter	Yes (no minimum)	Yes, at least 1/3 of floor area (250cm ² /hen)	Yes, at least 1/3 of floor area (250cm ² /hen)	Yes, at least 1/3 of floor area (250 cm ² /hen)
Outdoor access	No	No	Yes, continuous daily access* 4m ² /hen or 2.5m ² /hen at any one time as part of a rotation where 10m ² /hen is available over whole lifetime. *Access to range can be restricted up to max. 16 weeks continuously for public/animal health reasons.	Yes, 4m ² /hen for a minimum of 1/3 of their life
Beak trimming	Permitted	Permitted	Permitted	Routine beak trimming prohibited
Other	Claw shortening devices provided		Outdoor area must be mainly covered with vegetation	Outdoor area must be mainly covered with vegetation and have shelters or trees/bushes distributed over whole area
Labelling terms (code)	'Eggs from caged hens' with option to add 'Enriched cages' (3)	'Barn eggs' (2)	'Free range eggs' (1)	'Organic eggs' (0)

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- ² 'FAOSTAT'. The FAO statistics database available at: <https://www.fao.org/faostat/en/#data>
- ³ European Commission (2022) EU market situation for eggs. Expert Group for Agricultural Markets, 20 July 2023. https://circabc.europa.eu/sd/a/18f7766e-e9a9-46a4-bbec-94d4c181183f/23.03.2017_eggs_Europa.pdf
- ⁴ DEFRA (2023) National Statistics. Chapter 8: Livestock – Poultry and Poultry Meat. <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/agriculture-in-the-united-kingdom-2021/chapter-8-livestock#poultry-and-poultry-meat>
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- ⁶ Windhorst, H.-W. (2022) Patterns and dynamics of egg trade: The global situation in 2020. *Zootechnica International*, 2 June 2022. <https://zootechnicainternational.com/focus-on/market-trends/patterns-and-dynamics-of-egg-trade-the-global-situation-in-2020/> (accessed 28.07.22).
- ⁷ Defra (2022) Quarterly UK statistics about eggs – statistics notice (data to June 2022) updated 28 July 2022. <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/egg-statistics/quarterly-uk-statistics-about-eggs-statistics-notice-data-to-june-2022> (accessed 28.07.22).
- ⁸ Eurogroup for Animals (2022) Bye bye cages! The legality of an EU ban on the sales of meat and eggs produced from caged animals including imported food. Report published by Eurogroup for Animals in March 2022. <https://euagenda.eu/upload/publications/2022-03-15-20-20bye-20bye-20cages-20report-20-20english-20final.pdf>