



F/T: 0300 244 4000  
E: [scottish.ministers@gov.scot](mailto:scottish.ministers@gov.scot)

[Retailers, SRC/BRC]

Your ref:  
Our ref:  
23 February 2017

## AVIAN INFLUENZA AND MARKETING OF SCOTTISH FREE RANGE EGGS

As you will be aware, a new/revised declaration of an Avian Influenza Prevention Zone for Scotland was issued on 22 February.

As set out by the Chief Veterinary Officer (Scotland) on 16 February, the requirements of the Zone change with effect from 28 February, meaning that keepers in Scotland can let their birds out and preserve their free range status, provided that they have enhanced biosecurity measures in place to minimise the risk of infection from wild birds. Farmers will still have the option to house their birds, but will lose free range status under EU law if they continue to house. This position is different from that which applies in parts of England, where housing is still required. We believe that allowing producers to let their birds out from 28 February, with enhanced biosecurity, provides the right balance between protecting Scotland's free range industry and reducing disease risk.

It is important to stress that expert advice from Health Protection Scotland and Food Standards Scotland remains that there is no threat to human health or the food chain from this strain of H5N8, and consumers should not be concerned about eating eggs or poultry meat.

However I am concerned by reports that some retailers may be requiring free range eggs from Scotland where housing is not mandated, to be relabelled in the same way as eggs from those producers subject to the housing requirement. I understand that this may be administratively convenient, but I do not believe that it is in the best interests of customers, producers or retailers. Scottish producers are able to produce free range eggs, customers want free range eggs, and I think it is incumbent on retailers to meet that demand. It is potentially misleading to customers to have Scottish free range eggs labelled as something else. And it is unfair on producers to have their quality product misrepresented.

I have the greatest of sympathy for producers in those parts of England where the housing restriction remains in place, and who will not be able to sell their product as free range. But  
St Andrew's House, Regent Road, Edinburgh EH1 3DG  
[www.gov.scot](http://www.gov.scot)

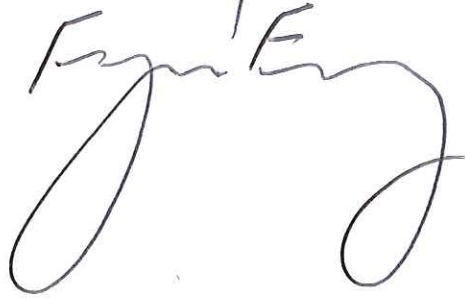
there is no reason why producers in Scotland and elsewhere should be disadvantaged as a result.

I therefore seek your assurance that your [company/members] will not be taking the approach that Scottish free range eggs have to be overstickered, and that they will be presented in a way that reflects their production status and quality.

I will fully support the Scottish eggs industry in resisting any requirement to overstick free range egg packs when free range eggs will be readily available from Scottish producers from 28 February.

*Yours sincerely*

**FERGUS EWING**

A large, stylized handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Fergus Ewing'.