

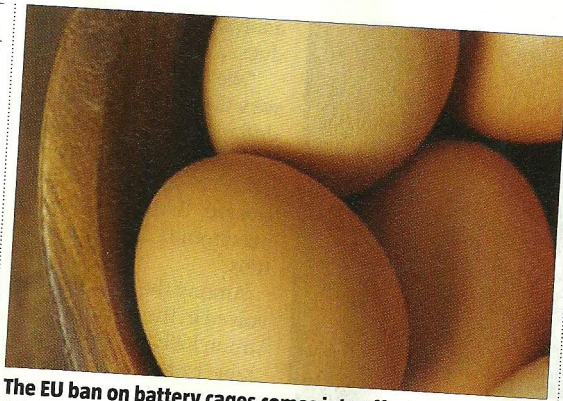
Government slammed for illegal egg stance

Julia Glotz

The British egg industry has launched a blistering attack on the government for not doing enough to protect domestic producers against competition from illegal imported eggs.

The move comes after food and farming minister Jim Paice said this week that the UK would not impose a unilateral trade ban on shell eggs and liquid egg products from EU states that were not fully compliant with the EU-wide ban on 'battery' cages, which comes into effect on 1 January 2012.

Instead, Defra would use UV surveillance to ensure no illegally produced shell eggs would enter the UK, Paice said. But he warned that a loophole in current egg marketing regulations



The EU ban on battery cages comes into effect on 1 January

meant there was little the government could do to prevent illegally produced liquid eggs – and products made from such eggs – from coming to the UK.

The British Egg Industry Council slammed Paice's statement as a sign that the UK government was "chickening out" on its responsibility to protect

British egg producers, who had invested about £400m to make systems compliant with the new rules.

Egg-based products sold to UK consumers, such as quiches, egg mayonnaise and Scotch eggs, could still be produced using illegal eggs, risking thousands of jobs, the BEIC said.

The NFU said it was "dis-

appointed" the government had decided not to take tougher action. "The government's announcement is not what UK egg producers needed after they have invested so heavily and met the requirements of the law," said poultry board chairman Charles Bourns.

Paice told parliament that many retailers, suppliers and food manufacturers had made commitments to only source legally produced eggs from 2012, but the BEIC warned there were still many that had not done so.

"Anecdotal evidence suggests that the main difficulty will be in ensuring that imported shell or processed egg used in manufacturing and catering products will be compliant," it added.