

Cage-free egg battle rages

By Micah Wintner
COLLEGIAN STAFF WRITER

Cage-free egg activists continue to argue that battery-cage eggs — which Penn State purchases — are more vulnerable to Salmonella than cage-free eggs.

Though the Pennsylvania Egg Quality Assurance Program (PEQAP) has kept Pennsylvania's eggs safer than the rest of the country's during the current nationwide egg recall, cage-free activists are pushing for change.

Nick Cooney, director of the Humane League, a Philadelphia-based animal activist organization, said nine independent scientific studies done in the past five years have shown that "without exception" battery-cage facilities were more subject to Salmonella than cage-free facilities.

But Penn State Director of Residential Dining Lisa Wandel disagrees. Wandel said there are many scientific-supported arguments that battery-cage eggs are less likely to have Salmonella because of the controlled environment of the hens.

"Both sides are claiming statements that contradict each other," she said.

Wandel said that whether an egg is cage-free or battery-cage makes no difference in terms of Salmonella, and it is the "handling of the egg" that counts.

"We don't use raw eggs. We have fresh

eggs come in that we hard-cook," she said.

Penn State has certain specifications set on every product it purchases and every egg is United Egg Producers-certified, Wandel said. And Wandel said she is "very comfortable" knowing where Penn State's eggs come from and how the dining hall staff is trained. But activists feel the battle between cage-free and battery-cage eggs goes beyond Salmonella.

"From a personal perspective, being inside a battery-cage farm is literally the most disgusting and sad place I've ever been in," Cooney said.

The three reasons to switch to cage-free eggs are animal welfare, food safety and sustainability, Cooney said. Cooney is currently helping Penn State students in their petition efforts to have Penn State switch to cage-free eggs. With more than 6,000 signatures currently, Cooney said he hopes to reach 10,000 signatures.

Penn State has no current plans to switch to cage-free eggs, Wandel said.

"There are false claims that cage-free eggs are less likely to have Salmonella," Wandel said.

Until the science shows that battery-cage eggs are riskier than cage-free, Penn State isn't making the change, Wandel said.

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Steph Witt/Collegian

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