Is there a future for alternative systems?

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The trend towards alternative systems of production for poultry meat and eggs in the developed economies is paralleled by moves to increase intensification in the developing world. Alongside these changes is the clearly identified imperative to feed an increasing affluent human population in a sustainable manner. Pressure to intensify from the economics of production continue to favour intensive systems but legislation to ban the most intensive systems of production for animal welfare concerns will have a major effect on the way poultry are kept. The least intensive of alternative systems may be associated with greater behavioural freedom for the animals, but can have a significantly greater environmental impact than intensive systems, higher mortality and possibly reduced product quality. In general there is a need for more evidence of all the inputs and outputs from different systems and economic conditions. Such analyses will allow policy makers to identify areas that need to be changed or modified by appropriate action and by suitably targeted research.