What are alternative systems for poultry?

E.K.F. Fröhlich¹, K. Niebuhr², L. Schrader³, H. Oester¹

¹Centre for Proper Housing: Poultry and Rabbits (ZTHZ), Zollikofen, Switzerland
²Institute of Animal Husbandry and Animal Welfare, Department of Farm Animals and Veterinary Public Health, University of Veterinary Medicine, Vienna, Austria
³Friedrich-Loeffler-Institut of Animal Welfare and Animal Husbandry, Dörnbergerstrasse, Celle, Germany

Ernst.Froehlich@bvet.admin.ch

By the late 1960s, poultry production had developed from a small-scale rural enterprise to an economically important branch of agriculture. Flock sizes increased and production systems, for hygienic and economic reasons, became more intensive. Rearing and housing of laying hens took place in conventional cages. At the same time, public concern for intensively housed birds began to increase, particularly following publications such as “Animal Machines” written by Ruth Harrison in 1964. New animal protection laws came into force and agriculture was forced to adapt to the welfare concerns of consumers. Alternative systems for housing laying hens that provided greater freedom of movement and facilities for natural behaviour including the use of the third dimension (perching, nesting) were developed. Production systems for meat birds were introduced that, in addition to higher space allowances, specified maximum rates of growth and feed ingredients. Time alone will show which type of system for poultry egg or meat production will survive the evolving social and economic pressures on producers and consumers.