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Animal Rights Coalition works for cage-free eggs at Swarthmore

By [Lauren Stokes](#)

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The Animal Rights Coalition has spent the past semester working to convince the college to purchase eggs from hens that were not raised in battery cages. While the campaign began in spring of 2005, it has gained steam during this past semester, as members of the ARC have discussed the issue with Dining Services, determined how much money would be needed to switch, and received support from college administrators. Where the extra money will come from remains an open question.

Members of the ARC have been working with Josh Balk of the Humane Society of the United States, who told the Gazette that “Egg-laying hens confined in barren battery cages are perhaps the most abused animals in modern-day factory farming. These birds are unable to engage in many of their most important natural behaviors such as nesting, perching, walking on solid ground, or even spreading their wings. Each hen is allotted only 67 square inches of space—that’s less than a single sheet of paper.”

Brian Tomasik '09, a member of the ARC, offered an equation to make the situation concrete. “On the average, hens take at least 25 hours to produce one egg. Presumably there is some reduction in suffering per hour—call it s suffering units/hour—associated with living in a cage-free egg farm compared against living in a battery-cage farm. Let n represent the number of eggs that Swarthmore buys in a year. The reduction in suffering associated with buying cage-free eggs is then $(s \text{ suffering units/hour})(25 \text{ hours/egg})(n \text{ eggs/year}) = 25ns \text{ suffering units/year}$.”

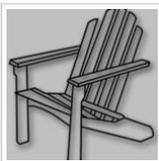
According to Linda McDougall, Director of Dining Services, the conservative estimate for the number of eggs used during the academic years is 10,800 dozen eggs. Readers are invited to do the math themselves, but even if s is a small number, it is clear to Tomasik and the other members of the ARC that Swarthmore could prevent a large amount of suffering by making the switch to cage-free eggs.

Jessica Larson '06 (president of the ARC), Balk, and a representative from the prospective egg supplier met with Bob Gross in March, and according to Tomasik, he “expressed great support and said he was ‘convinced’ that Swarthmore should make the switch.” Over 85 colleges have already decided to eliminate or reduce their use of eggs from caged hens, including Dartmouth, Georgetown, MIT, and the University of Wisconsin-Madison. As of yet, no schools in the Philadelphia area have agreed to make the switch.

Student Council is expected to approve a resolution in support of the campaign at tonight’s meeting; Rasa Petrauskaitė '08, secretary of the Student Council, “The Student Council commends the efforts of the Animal Rights Coalition members to improve the living conditions for hens. The Cage-Free Eggs initiative yet again exemplifies Swatties’ commitment to social progress.”

While most people can agree that reducing the suffering of hens is a positive thing, nobody knows where the money for this cause would come from. The conservative estimate for the cost of the switch is \$10,000 dollars per year, which works out to about seven dollars per student. “In my heart it may be the right thing,” said McDougall, “but fiscally I have a hard time with it. It is my job to be a good steward of my budget and I think something would have to be sacrificed in order to make the change. The question is, what would the students be willing to give up in order to make the switch?”

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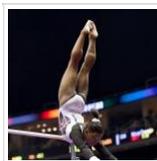
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