# Chris Packham warns Co-op over ‘Frankenchickens’ amid member votes for change



TV presenter Chris Packham has raised concerns over the Co-op's continued sale of fast-growing chickens, colloquially dubbed “Frankenchickens.” Speaking at a protest outside the supermarket’s recent Annual General Meeting (AGM) in Manchester, Packham articulated a view that corporate greed is overshadowing animal welfare. He urged the Co-op to reconsider its practices, stating the current approach prioritises profit over the wellbeing of the animals involved.

“Frankenchickens” are bred to reach a market weight of over 2.0 kg in just five to six weeks—a process that the animal welfare charity The Humane League argues leads to significant suffering for the birds. Packham described the physiological strains these chickens endure, highlighting the “horrendous” consequences of rapid growth on their bodies. He remarked on the debilitating issues these birds face, such as skeletal deformities and muscular problems, which lead to distressing living conditions. “They end up scrabbling around in their own excrement, which is acrid and burns their skin off,” he emphasised.

The use of faster-growing breeds is sometimes justified by supermarkets citing affordability concerns. Packham challenged this rationale, contending it is unjust to deprive people of the right to make ethical choices based on income. “The affordability is in the hands of the Co-op,” he argued, suggesting that the chain could adjust pricing to accommodate higher welfare standards.

Packham's views echoed broader sentiments about corporate responsibility. He pointed out that the price difference between higher and lower welfare chickens is minimal—merely a matter of "pence" rather than "pounds." This minimal difference raises critical questions about the motivations behind maintaining lower welfare conditions. “This is basically the greed of the corporate world, once again, striving to maximise its profits at the expense of high welfare standards,” he noted.

At the same AGM, a motion aiming to phase out the use of these chickens received overwhelming support, with 90.94% of members voting in favour. This aligns with a previous vote where 96% of attendees also approved a motion to end the use of fast-growing chickens altogether. Despite this clear directive from its members, the Co-op has been slow to act, causing frustration among animal rights advocates.

A spokesperson for the Co-op responded to the outcry by reinforcing the chain's commitment to animal welfare, stating, “All Co-op fresh chicken is 100% British, reared in lower-stocking density environments and exceeds Red Tractor standards.” However, critics argue that these claims do not sufficiently address the welfare concerns raised by advocates such as Packham.

The Humane League UK has been particularly vocal, with campaigns manager Claire Williams comparing the growth rates of Frankenchickens to that of a human baby ballooning to the weight of an adult tiger in a mere two months. “These birds have been bred to suffer; their lives are marked by pain, stress and burden,” she stated, calling for an urgent reevaluation of current practices.

The Co-op's AGM was not solely fixated on animal welfare; members also voted in favour of ceasing all trading relations with Israel in light of the ongoing conflict in Gaza. They urged the board to apply similar ethical reasoning as with the boycott of Russian products following the invasion of Ukraine. This vote garnered support from 72.8% of attendees, signifying a desire for the Co-op to take a more principled stand on humanitarian issues.

The supermarket chain is concurrently grappling with the aftermath of a significant cyber attack, which recently disrupted its operations and left many shelves bare. This challenging context may complicate the Co-op’s responsiveness to both customer demands and ethical considerations in its supply chain. As discussions around welfare standards continue, the balance between consumer expectations, ethical sourcing, and corporate profitability remains a pressing concern for both the Co-op and its members.

Ultimately, Packham's rallying cry highlights a fundamental tension within modern retail: the obligation to uphold animal rights against the backdrop of commercial viability. As consumers increasingly advocate for more humane treatment of animals, the onus is on retailers like the Co-op to lead by example and take concrete steps in alignment with their members' ethical inclinations.

### Reference Map

1. Paragraphs 1-3, 5, 6
2. Paragraphs 2, 5
3. Paragraphs 3, 5
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5. Paragraphs 5, 6
6. Paragraphs 5, 6
7. Paragraphs 5, 6

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/business/coop-prioritises-corporate-greed-over-animal-welfare-says-chris-packham-b2752877.html> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.the-independent.com/life-style/food-and-drink/features/frankenchicken-uk-supermarket-animal-welfare-b2737345.html> - An article discussing the continued sale of 'Frankenchickens' by UK supermarkets, including the Co-op, and the associated animal welfare concerns. It highlights Chris Packham's open letter to Co-op CEO Shirine Khoury-Haq, urging the retailer to end the sale of fast-growing chicken breeds that suffer from health issues due to rapid growth. The piece also covers the Better Chicken Commitment (BCC) and the Co-op's response to member votes advocating for improved chicken welfare standards.
3. <https://www.foodmanufacture.co.uk/Article/2022/05/23/Co-op-condemned-for-use-of-Frankenchickens/> - An article reporting on protests by The Humane League UK against the Co-op's use of 'Frankenchickens' during the retailer's annual general meeting in Manchester. The piece includes statements from Chris Packham, who criticizes the Co-op's practices as 'unacceptable and deeply cruel,' and discusses the Better Chicken Commitment (BCC) and the Co-op's response to the protests.
4. <https://thehumaneleague.org.uk/article/Co-op-members-outraged-by-undercover-footage> - A report by The Humane League UK detailing undercover footage revealing severe deformities and suffering among chickens on Co-op farms. The article discusses the public's reaction, especially Co-op members who voted for the Better Chicken Commitment (BCC) in 2023, and the Co-op's refusal to adopt the BCC, despite member support.
5. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c3gg33zyz9no> - A BBC News article covering the disruption of the Co-op's annual general meeting by members of The Humane League UK protesting against the supermarket's use of 'Frankenchickens.' The piece includes statements from the protesters and a response from a Co-op spokesperson regarding animal welfare in their supply chain.
6. <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2023/may/21/co-op-group-members-board-agm-vote-better-chicken-commitment-welfare> - An article from The Guardian reporting on the Co-op's annual general meeting, where members voted overwhelmingly to improve chicken welfare by adopting the Better Chicken Commitment (BCC). The piece discusses the Co-op's response, including their decision to give chickens more space but not to change the breed used, and the tension between the board and members over this issue.
7. <https://www.grocerygazette.co.uk/2023/05/22/co-op-frankenchickens-members/> - A report on the Co-op's annual general meeting, highlighting the clash between the board and members over the use of 'Frankenchickens.' Despite 96% of members voting to adopt the Better Chicken Commitment (BCC), the board refused to stop selling fast-growing chickens, citing the need to keep prices down, but agreed to provide more space for the birds.