

Farm Animal Welfare Advisory Council



Code of Practice for the Welfare of Broiler Chickens



Department of
**Agriculture,
Fisheries and Food**

An Roinn
**Talmhaíochta,
Iascaigh agus Bia**

Farm Animal Welfare Advisory Council

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AN INTRODUCTION BY PROFESSOR PATRICK FOTTRELL

Chairperson of the Farm Animal Welfare Advisory Council

The Farm Animal Welfare Advisory Council was set up to allow representative groups with a variety of perspectives on animal welfare, meet and exchange views, seek consensus on various issues and developments relevant to the care of farm animals. These guidelines are the product of this consensus and have been adopted unanimously by the Council.

This Code of Practice is intended to encourage all those who care for broiler chickens to adopt the highest standards of husbandry. Without good stockmanship, broiler welfare can never be adequately protected. Adherence to these recommendations will help flock-keepers to reach the required standard.

In establishing rules for the protection of chickens kept for meat production, a balance should be kept between the various aspects to be taken into account, as regards broiler welfare, health, economic and social considerations and the environmental impacts.

The welfare of broiler chickens is considered within a framework, elaborated by the Farm Animal Welfare Advisory Council, and known as the 'Five Freedoms'. These form a logical basis for the assessment of welfare within any system together with the actions necessary to safeguard welfare within the constraints of an efficient broiler industry.

In maintaining the recommendations of this Code of Practice, flock-owners, flock-keepers, catchers, handlers and others can demonstrate Ireland's prominence in the practice of broiler welfare standards.

Professor Patrick Fottrell
Chairperson



THE FIVE FREEDOMS CONCEPT

Welfare codes usually list five basic freedoms that should underpin broiler chicken welfare best practice at farm level. The five freedoms are listed below and provide an overall concept of broiler welfare.

1. Freedom from hunger, thirst and malnutrition
2. Freedom from discomfort
3. Freedom from pain, injury and disease
4. Freedom to express normal patterns of behaviour
5. Freedom from fear and distress

The five freedoms concept can be summarised for broiler chickens as follows:

- Ready access to fresh water and a diet to maintain full health and vigour
- Provision of an appropriate environment including shelter and a comfortable resting area
- Prevention or rapid diagnosis of disease and treatment
- Provision of sufficient space, proper facilities and company of the birds' own kind
- Ensuring conditions and treatment to avoid mental suffering

In acknowledging these freedoms, those who have care of broiler chickens should practice:

- Caring and responsible planning and management;
- Skilled, knowledgeable and conscientious stockmanship;
- Appropriate environmental design (for example, of the husbandry system);
- Considerate handling and transport.

For the purposes of the code, "flock-keeper" means the owner of the birds or the person responsible for looking after them. The recommendations are relevant to broiler chickens under all types of husbandry system. Following them will help to ensure that the welfare of the birds is safeguarded.

The strain of bird selected must be suitable for the production system. Care must be taken in the production of birds within extended growing periods (e.g. organic, free range) to use suitable strains and feeding regimes.

STOCKMANSHIP, STAFFING AND TRAINING

- Primary responsibility for bird welfare rests with the owner or keeper of the birds.*
- Birds must be cared for by a sufficient number of staff who possess the appropriate ability, knowledge and professional competence.
- It is essential that sufficient well-motivated and competent personnel be employed to carry out all necessary tasks. Staff should be well managed and supervised, fully conversant with the tasks they will be required to undertake and competent in the use of any equipment.
- All flock-keepers should demonstrate full understanding of the welfare needs and basic biology of the birds and have shown that they are capable of safeguarding them under all foreseeable conditions before being given responsibility for a flock. A good flock-keeper will have a compassionate and humane attitude, will be able to anticipate and avoid many potential welfare problems, and have the ability to identify those that do occur and respond to them promptly.
- Staff, including those employed by contractors, should be given appropriate training. This requires the acquisition of specific stockmanship skills, which may be developed on-farm, working with an experienced person, or by following a course offered by a suitable training provider. Flock-keepers should demonstrate competence and understanding before they are given responsibility for the birds. Training should continue throughout the duration of employment, and suitable refresher courses should be undertaken regularly. Wherever possible, the training should be of a type which leads to formal recognition of competence.
- A training plan should be implemented to ensure that those working with broiler chickens recognise not only normal behaviour and good health but also signs of illness or disease or impending health problems. If specialised tasks are to be performed, for example vaccination or humane culling, then specific training should be given. Alternatively, the services of a competent contractor using trained staff should be obtained.
- Staff should establish a methodical routine in completing the range of tasks involved in keeping chickens. As part of this they should be particularly vigilant in checking that systems are operating properly and birds are behaving normally. This will enable flock-keepers to detect problems in their earliest stages and acquire a good understanding of the action to be taken if a problem is noticed. If the cause is not obvious, or if the flock-keeper's action is not effective, immediate veterinary or technical advice should be obtained.

- It is essential to ensure that enough time is available within the flock-keeper's daily work routine for the birds to be properly inspected and for any remedial action to be taken. Large flocks can be managed successfully but in general the larger the size of unit, the greater the degree of skill and dedication needed to safeguard the welfare of the birds.

** The catching team, regardless of who employs them, works under the direction of the owner or keeper while on the holding.*

FEED AND WATER

- Birds must be fed a wholesome diet which is appropriate to their age and species and which is fed to them in sufficient quantity to maintain them in good health, to satisfy their nutritional needs and to promote a positive state of well-being.
- Birds must be provided with food and liquid in a manner which ensures that such food or liquid does not contain any substance which may cause them unnecessary suffering or injury.
- All birds must have access to feed at intervals appropriate to their physiological needs (and, in any case, at least once a day) except where a veterinary practitioner acting in the exercise of his profession otherwise directs.
- All birds must have access to fresh drinking water at all times.
- Feeding and watering equipment must be designed, constructed, placed and maintained so that contamination of food and water and the harmful effects of competition between birds are minimised.
- No other substance, with the exception of those given for therapeutic or prophylactic purposes or for the purpose of zootechnical treatment should be administered to birds unless it has been demonstrated by scientific studies of bird welfare or established experience that the effect of that substance is not detrimental to the health or welfare of the birds.
- All birds must have daily access to feed. When introducing birds to a new environment, the flock-keeper must ensure that the birds can find feed and water.
- To prevent birds having access to stale or contaminated feed or water, these must be replaced on a regular basis. Provision must be made for supplying water in freezing conditions.
- In intensively housed systems, the maximum distance which any bird should have to travel in a house to reach feed and water should not be more than 4 metres. However, in some situations, such as some outdoor production systems, it may be necessary for

the birds to travel more than 4 metres; in these situations, all birds must be adequately cared for in terms of stocking density, feeding and drinking space to allow for such movements.

- Sudden changes in the type, quantity and make-up of feed should be avoided. Any changes in diet should be introduced gradually.
- Compounded feeds which have been prepared for other species should be avoided, as certain substances can be toxic to birds.
- For broiler chickens, feed must not be withheld for more than 12 hours before the birds are slaughtered or delivered to a new farm. This period of 12 hours must be an inclusive period to include the catching, loading, transport lairaging and unloading time prior to slaughter. Prior to transport, water should be provided up to the start of the loading procedure.
- Water meters should be fitted to each house to enable daily monitoring of water usage. Daily records of water consumption provide an early warning of potential problems and a water meter is a necessary management tool.
- Daily access to water throughout the period of lighting and a sufficient number of drinkers, well distributed and correctly adjusted, must be provided.

HEALTH

Inspection

- All birds kept in husbandry systems in which their welfare depends on frequent human attention must be thoroughly inspected at least twice a day to check that they are in a state of well-being.
- Birds kept in systems other than husbandry systems in which their welfare depends on frequent human attention must be inspected at intervals sufficient to avoid any suffering.
- Where birds are kept in a building, adequate lighting (whether fixed or portable), must be available to enable them to be thoroughly inspected at any time.
- In order to reduce the risk of welfare problems developing in broiler chicken units, it is recommended that a systematic inspection of all flocks should be undertaken at least twice each day at appropriate intervals. Young birds, in the first few days of life, should be inspected more frequently.
- These health and welfare inspections may be linked with other visits to the poultry houses but each inspection should be undertaken as a separate, specific procedure.

- Flock-keepers should establish in advance the best course of action to take should problems be identified and ensure that veterinary or other expert advice is available when needed.
- Light levels during inspection should be sufficiently high to ensure that all birds in all parts of the house are clearly visible.
- While it may not be possible to examine each bird individually during routine inspection a good indication of flock health should be gained on each occasion. Where birds are not being fed on ad lib diets, inspection is particularly effective at feeding time when any birds which are not fit will be slow to feed and can be identified.
- In order to ensure a thorough inspection, the flock-keeper should walk as close as is practical to every bird and encourage it to move, taking care not to frighten the birds with sudden, unaccustomed movement, noise or changes in light levels. The aim should be to pass close enough to the birds to see them clearly and for them to be disturbed and so move away. This should enable the identification of any individual that is sick, injured or weak. Any such birds should immediately be removed to a hospital pen and treated or humanely killed. Birds with considerable difficulty in walking, severe ascites, malformations, severe wounds or seizures should be culled immediately unless they can be treated and are likely to recover without unnecessary suffering. Dead birds must be removed without delay.
- When a bird is routinely slaughtered or killed on farm, this must be done using a permitted method. The permitted methods of killing poultry include decapitation and neck dislocation.
- In the event of signs of serious respiratory disease the use of personal protection equipment (ppe) must be considered (e.g. in suspected cases of Avian Influenza and Newcastle Disease). When respiratory signs together with mortality are observed professional help must be sought.

Disease Control*

A documented health and welfare programme should be implemented for each unit which sets out health and husbandry activities covering the whole of the production cycle. It should also establish management procedures and control measures to reduce the risk of infections and injury. This will normally include an effective vaccination protocol (which should be carefully monitored to ensure efficacy) to reduce the risk of disease outbreaks. The health and welfare programme should be developed in consultation with an experienced poultry veterinarian and reviewed against performance and updated accordingly.

Important indications of good health are clear bright eyes, alertness, good posture, vigorous movements if unduly disturbed, active feeding and drinking, singing and vocalisation, and clean and healthy skin, shanks and feet. Any departure from the norm may indicate a problem which should be given immediate attention.

A disease challenge may first be noticed by a change in water consumption, a reluctance to eat, changes in litter quality or in the general behaviour of the flock. It is good management practice to keep daily records of water consumption and where possible, feed intake. Veterinary attention should be sought at an early stage in any outbreak of disease so that the cause can be determined and appropriate action taken.

Measures to control diseases caused by external parasites should be taken by using the appropriate parasiticides.

Birds that are seriously injured or show evident signs of health disorder, such as those having difficulties in walking, severe ascites or severe malformations, and are likely to suffer, must receive appropriate treatment or be culled immediately. A veterinarian must be contacted whenever necessary.

All those in contact with birds should practice strict hygiene and disinfection procedures. Where possible the site should be managed so that all houses are empty simultaneously to facilitate effective cleaning and disinfestation. An “all in – all out” approach with periods when there are no birds on site will also act to provide a disease break.

When houses are emptied and cleaned, old litter should be removed from the site before re-stocking so as to reduce the risk of the carry over of disease.**

* *See Appendix 3 for list of Notifiable Diseases in Poultry*

** *See Appendix 1 for Good Farming Advice Leaflets*

Leg Health

Leg health issues are multi-factorial and include nutrition, genetics and litter quality. The responsibility of the flock-owner is to seek prompt professional attention when required. This would include input from professional experts including processors, nutritionists and veterinary practitioners. Flock-keepers must monitor all birds for signs of lameness, leg weakness or abnormal gait on a daily basis. Any bird which is unable to move about freely and find feed and water must be humanely killed using a permitted method as soon as it is detected unless it can be treated and is likely to recover without unnecessary suffering. Flock-keepers, in consultation with the veterinary consultant, must communicate with breeding establishments on all aspects of leg health. Flock-keepers should also follow up on monitoring returns from the slaughterhouse on the quality of legs and feet.

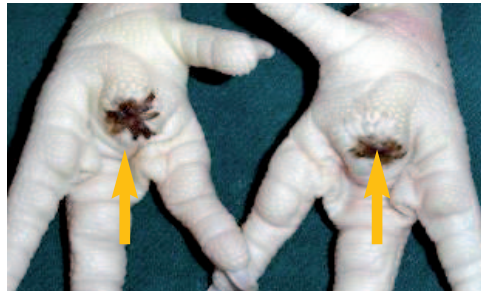
Foot- pad dermatitis in broilers – a photo guide to broiler foot health



No Lesions



Severe Lesions



Lesions on the central foot pad



Mild Lesions



Severe Lesions

- No lesions:** No lesions or very small and superficial lesions, slight discolouration on a limited area, mild hyperkeratosis, old scars.
- Mild lesions:** Substantial discolouration of the foot pad, superficial lesion, dark papillae.
- Severe lesions:** Ulcers or scabs of significant size, signs of haemorrhages or severely swollen foot pad.

Generally, the foot as a whole shall be classified. However, the lesions on the central foot pad are of major importance, not lesions on the toes.

Management measures must be taken to prevent lameness, having regard to previous experience on the farm and recognised best practice. The strain and source of birds, stocking density, lighting patterns, feed composition and feeding routine and litter management should all be considered. Lameness is often caused by a bone or joint infection so effective prevention and control of viral and bacterial disease is essential. If a lameness problem develops, management and husbandry practices must immediately be altered as appropriate in order to rectify the problem. Encouraging activity will help prevent the occurrence of leg problems.

Birds can suffer from lameness due to infections acquired in the parent flock or hatchery. It is believed that 60% of lameness cases result from infectious causes. High standards of biosecurity and hygiene in the parent flock, in the handling of the eggs, at the hatchery and in subsequent handling and transport of the chicks should be maintained. Husbandry measures should be designed to minimise floor eggs and heavily soiled eggs should not be set as hatching eggs.

Heat stress

- Every flock-keeper should have a documented emergency heat stress plan posted on site. This should be agreed with the poultry veterinarian.
- Birds should not be exposed to strong, direct sunlight or hot, humid conditions long enough to cause heat stress as indicated by prolonged panting. Housing affects the birds' ability to maintain their normal body temperature but under any management system ambient temperatures high enough to cause prolonged panting may occur, particularly when humidity is relatively high. All accommodation should therefore be designed so that its ventilation is adequate to protect the birds from overheating under any weather conditions that can reasonably be foreseen. Attention should be paid to air throughput and distribution, especially at bird level.
- Flock-keepers should plan ahead to avoid heat stress. During the summer months consideration should be given to reducing stocking density at the time of ordering or placing day-old chicks. If suffering or mortality occurs, the onus will be on the person responsible for the birds to demonstrate that the measures taken were appropriate for the design of the building, its locality and the predictable maximum temperature/humidity at the time.
- During hot and humid conditions, the birds should be checked frequently, but not disturbed unduly.
- Steps should be taken to minimise the potential for heat stress by increasing ventilation and air speed at bird level. Portable back-up fans should be available. The air temperature within a building may be reduced by improved insulation, hosing the roof and the correct use of evaporative cooling of incoming air. The heat output of the birds may be reduced by lowering stocking density or changing the feeding patterns.

BUILDINGS AND ACCOMMODATION

General

Advice on welfare aspects should be sought from qualified advisers before any new buildings are constructed or existing buildings modified. It is important to ensure that the design of housing and equipment is suitable for the intended use. The incorporation of facilities for raising drinkers and feeders to aid access for handling equipment should be considered. Consideration should also be given to the incorporation of weighing, handling and loading facilities.

Location

When a new farm is being constructed, ideally it should be located as far away as possible from other commercial poultry premises, other livestock enterprises and other potential sources of contamination such as abattoirs, sewage treatment plants, landfill sites etc. When a farm is close to such sites a higher level of protection against the introduction of disease is required, including wildlife control and ensuring that no drainage or waste from the nearby property enters the farm.

Poultry Site

- Good biosecurity* is extremely important to prevent the introduction of a wide range of microorganisms into poultry farms. Site design and management practices should be planned to facilitate this.
- The perimeter of the site should be clearly identified and if possible, fenced. Access should be via specific entry points where there should be a bell or other means of attracting attention along with a notice asking visitors to wait to be admitted by farm staff. Whilst there will be a need for people to enter the unit (managers, workmen, veterinary practitioners, auditors etc.) visits should be carefully controlled. Access to poultry houses should be restricted to those with essential duties.
- There should be a hard standing for parking, which should be kept clean and disinfected so as to ensure that it is maintained in a hygienically acceptable condition. On-farm roadways should ideally have a hard surface, which can be cleaned effectively. Roadways should be kept clear of faecal soiling to prevent vehicles becoming contaminated. A disinfectant footbath and brush should be placed at the entrance to the site and /or near the vehicle parking area. Endeavours should be made to provide a separate gatehouse where visitors can change into overalls and boots and sign a visitors' book. Spray disinfection of the wheels of vehicles at the point of entry to the site is also advisable.
- The site should be kept clean and tidy to discourage wild birds, rodents and flies.

**Biosecurity is a term that includes all those measures that may be taken to prevent the introduction of unwanted organisms into the flock.*

POULTRY HOUSES

Structural

- Ideally, there should be a hard surface/gravel around the perimeter of houses which is designed to avoid puddling.
- Buildings should be of sound construction and well maintained to prevent access by wild birds and to deter rodents. Insulation cladding should be maintained in good repair as damage allows easy refuge for rodents. Avoid storing materials such as feedbags, litter and moveable equipment within the house for the same reason.
- Where possible surfaces should be smooth, hard and impervious to enable effective cleaning and disinfection. Ancillary buildings such as storage rooms, rest rooms, toilets etc. should be of a similar standard.
- Materials used for the construction of accommodation, and in particular, for the construction of pens, stalls and equipment with which the birds may come into contact, should not be harmful to them and should be capable of being thoroughly cleaned and disinfected.
- Accommodation and fittings for securing birds should be constructed and maintained so that there are no sharp edges or protrusions likely to cause injury to them.

Operational

- Drinkers must be positioned and maintained in such a way that spillage is minimised.
- Feed must be either continuously available or be meal fed and must not be withdrawn from birds more than 12 hours before the expected slaughter time.
- The noise level must be minimised. Ventilation fans, feeding machinery or other equipment must be constructed, placed, operated and maintained in such a way that they cause the least possible amount of noise.
- Intensive housing systems require a preventative maintenance program with automatic systems requiring alarms and emergency back-up systems and procedures.
- Flock-keepers should take measures to protect birds from predators, rodents and other animals.
- Those parts of buildings, equipment or utensils which are in contact with the birds must be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected every time after final depopulation is carried out, before a new flock is introduced into the house. After the final depopulation of a house, all litter must be removed, and clean litter must be provided.

- Where any poultry other than those kept in the systems referred to are kept in a building, they should be kept on or have access at all times to, well maintained litter or to a well-drained area for resting.
- Broilers may spend their lives in contact with litter and their health and welfare are linked to its quality. Conditions such as pododermatitis, hock burn, foot-pad lesions and breast blisters are consequences of poor litter quality. Well-designed equipment and high standards of management are important if good litter quality is to be maintained. The ventilation capacity should be sufficient to avoid overheating and to remove excess moisture. The feed composition should be well balanced to avoid problems with wet or sticky droppings.
- All birds must have permanent access to litter which is dry and friable on the surface. Measures should be taken to minimise the risk of mould and mite infestation. The litter should be inspected frequently for signs of deterioration and appropriate action should be taken to rectify any problem. Mouldy litter should not be used. Litter should also be inspected to ensure it does not become excessively wet or dry. A water system, which minimises water spillage, should be used, such as water nipples with drip cups positioned at an appropriate height for all birds. Nipple drinkers without cups may be used if they are well managed and the water pressure is checked frequently. Flock-keepers should ensure that litter is kept carcase free*

**See Appendix 1 for Good Farming Advice Leaflets*

Ventilation and Temperature*

The owner or keeper must ensure that each house of a holding is equipped with ventilation and, if necessary, heating and cooling systems designed, constructed and operated in such a way that:

- The concentration of ammonia (NH₃) does not exceed 20 ppm and the concentration of carbon dioxide (CO₂) does not exceed 3000 ppm measured at the level of the chickens' heads;
- The inside temperature, when the outside temperature measured in the shade exceeds 30°C, does not exceed this outside temperature by more than 3°C;
- The average relative humidity measured inside the house during 48 hours does not exceed 70% when the outside temperature is below 10°C.

**The exact parameters have been set under Council Directive 2007/43/EC. (See Annex 11 of the Directive.)*

Lighting

- Birds kept in buildings must not be kept in permanent darkness.
- Where the natural light available in a building is insufficient to meet the physiological and ethological needs of any birds being kept in it, then appropriate artificial lighting must be provided.
- Birds kept in buildings must not be kept without an appropriate period of rest from artificial lighting.
- Birds should be housed at light levels which allow them to see clearly and which stimulate activity. This should be provided by lighting systems designed, maintained and operated to give adequate light level. Illumination of the house to at least 20 lux* which illuminates at least 80% of the usable area will encourage activity. Houses should have a uniform level of light. A temporary reduction in the lighting level may be allowed when necessary following veterinary advice.
- Within seven days from the time when the birds are placed in the building and until three days before the foreseen time of slaughter, the lighting must follow a 24-hour rhythm and include periods of darkness lasting at least six hours in total, with at least one uninterrupted period of darkness of at least four hours, excluding dimming periods.

**The exact parameters have been set under Council Directive 2007/43/EC. (See Annex 1 of the Directive.)*

Emergency Procedures

- Flock-keepers should make advance plans for dealing with emergencies such as fire, flood, power or equipment failure, or disruption of supplies, and should ensure that all staff are familiar with the appropriate emergency action. This must include an independent alarm system that is tested and serviced at regular intervals. At least one responsible member of the staff should always be available to take the necessary steps. Fire precautions should be a major priority for all flock-keepers. Where buildings need to be locked, arrangements must be made to allow rapid entry in case of emergency.
- Expert advice on all fire precautions can be obtained from fire prevention officers of Local Authority.
- Contingency arrangements should be made to ensure that adequate supplies of water and suitable feed can be made available in emergencies. Efforts should be made to minimise the risk of drinking water freezing.

STOCKING DENSITY AND FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT

- The maximum stocking density for chickens kept to produce meat for the table must be 33kg/m²* which should not be exceeded at any time during the growing period. Flock-owners who wish to avail of higher stocking densities should consult the specific requirements outlined in Council Directive 2007/43/EC. This carries obligations in relation to higher standards of stockmanship and husbandry. This stocking density is satisfactory for chickens reared to the usual slaughter weights (1.8 - 3.0 kg) but it should be reduced for chickens being reared to significantly lower slaughter weights. However, a variety of factors need to be taken into account when setting and monitoring stocking densities in chicken houses at levels which promote good welfare.
- The observance of any particular stocking density is important but cannot, by itself, ensure the welfare of the birds. There is a close relationship between stockmanship, environmental control and stocking density. Birds will be maintained in good condition only if the balance is right and the onus is on the producer to demonstrate that welfare is not compromised whatever the stocking density.
- Irrespective of the type of system, all birds should have sufficient freedom of movement to be able, without difficulty, to stand normally, turn around and stretch their wings. They should also have sufficient space to be able to sit without interference from other birds.
- Stocking density should be reduced and specialist advice taken if problems occur, in particular excessive heat or humidity due to inadequate ventilation and poor litter quality. If disease or environmental problems arise in a particular building or system, reducing the stocking density in subsequent flocks may lessen the likelihood of recurrence.
- Deliberately placing a high number of birds and routinely “thinning” should be avoided as this causes unnecessary distress to the birds and may result in stocking densities that are too high.

**The exact stocking densities have been set under Council Directive 2007/43/EC. (See Paragraphs 2,3,4 and 5 of Article 3 of the Directive.)*



AUTOMATIC OR MECHANICAL EQUIPMENT

- All automated or mechanical equipment essential for the health and well - being of the birds must be inspected at least once a day to check that there is no defect in it.
- Provision should be made for an appropriate back-up system to guarantee sufficient air renewal to preserve the health and well - being of the birds in the event of failure of the system.
- An alarm system (which will operate even if the principal electricity supply to it has failed) must be provided to give warning of any failure of the system.
- All equipment and services, including feed hoppers, feed chain and delivery systems, drinkers, ventilating fans, heating and lighting units, fire extinguishers and alarm systems, should be cleaned and inspected regularly and kept in good working order.
- Ventilation, heating, lighting, feeding, watering and all other equipment or electrical installation should be designed, sited and installed so as to avoid risk of injuring the birds.
- All equipment should be constructed and maintained in such a way as to avoid subjecting the birds to excessive noise.
- All automated equipment upon which the birds' welfare is dependent, must incorporate a fail-safe and/or standby device and an alarm system to warn the flock-keeper of failure. Defects should be rectified immediately or other measures taken to safeguard the health and welfare of the birds. Alternative ways of feeding and of maintaining a satisfactory environment should therefore be ready for use. A secondary or alternative water supply should also be put in place.

RECORD KEEPING*

Well-developed record keeping should be sufficient to meet quality assurance, regulatory and management requirements.

The owner or keeper must maintain a record for each house of a holding of:

- The number of chickens introduced;
- The useable area;
- The hybrid or breed of the chickens, if known;
- By each control, the number of birds found dead with an indication of the causes, if known, as well as the number of birds culled with cause;
- The number of chickens remaining in the flock following the removal of chickens for sale or for slaughter;

- Any medicinal treatment given to the birds;
- The number of mortalities found on each inspection of birds carried out.

Those records must be retained for a period of at least three years and must be made available to the competent authority when carrying out an inspection or when otherwise requested.

Records are an essential aid to management and those kept should include:

- The number and sex of chicks placed.
- Daily mortality and the number and average weight of birds removed for slaughter or when thinning the flock to reduce stocking density.
- Number of culls with reason for cull to be recorded (leg culls to be specifically identified).
- Where possible, feed consumed (daily and cumulative).
- Body weight in relation to expected growth rates.
- Daily water consumption (water meters should be fitted in each house).
- Testing and maintenance of automatic equipment, including alarms, fail safes, fire extinguishers and stand-by generators.
- Daily maximum and minimum temperature.
- The lighting regime - intensity and duration.
- Dates of cleaning/disinfection and bacterial counts between placements.
- Veterinary consultation, date and outcome.
- Medicine and vaccine administration records.

** For specific additional requirements in relation to higher stocking densities see Annex 11 of Council Directive 2007/43/EC.*

CATCHING, HANDLING AND TRANSPORT

- No person must transport any bird in a way which causes or is likely to cause injury or unnecessary suffering to that bird.
- No person shall transport any bird unless:
 - It is fit for its intended journey, and
 - Suitable provision has been made for its care during the journey and on arrival at the place of destination.

For these purposes a bird should not be considered fit for its intended journey if it is ill, injured, or fatigued, unless it is only slightly ill, injured or fatigued and the intended journey is not likely to cause it unnecessary suffering.

- Any person transporting birds must ensure that the birds are transported without delay to their place of destination.
- In the case of birds transported in a receptacle, any person in charge of birds must ensure that they are not caused injury or unnecessary suffering while they are in the receptacle either waiting to be loaded on to the means of transport or after they have been unloaded.
- The means of transport and receptacles must be constructed, maintained, operated and positioned to provide adequate ventilation and air space. Receptacles in which birds are carried must be constructed and maintained so that they allow for appropriate inspection and care of the birds. Receptacles in which birds are carried must be of such a size as to protect the birds from injury or unnecessary suffering during transport. Receptacles in which birds are transported must be constructed and maintained so that they prevent any protrusion of the heads, legs or wings from them.
- The catching and handling of birds without causing them injury or stress requires skill. It should only be undertaken by competent persons i.e. those who have been appropriately trained to the task. Responsibility for the management of the operation should be clearly allocated.
- High standards must be applied irrespective of the potential economic value of the birds.
- Panic among the birds and subsequent injury should be avoided. Catching should take place in low or blue light to minimise fear responses. Catching and handling should be carried out quietly and confidently exercising care to avoid unnecessary struggling which could bruise or otherwise injure the birds.
- Unless they are caught and carried around the body (using both hands to hold the wings against the body), birds should be caught and carried by both legs. No catcher should carry by the legs more than three chickens (or two adult breeding birds) in each hand. Birds must not be carried by the wings or by the neck.
- One possible way of avoiding the potential for damage to the birds is to collect the birds mechanically; only devices proven to be humane should be considered for use in gathering birds.
- The distance birds have to be carried should be minimised by taking the crates and containers into the house. Density in the crates should be adjusted according to weather conditions and size of bird. It is important to ensure that once birds are loaded in the container they are not exposed to extremes of temperature.

- Crates or containers should be suitable for the purpose of transporting birds and allow them to be easily put in, conveyed and taken out without injury. They should in particular be protected from rain and road spray which greatly increases the effect of wind chill, although effective ventilation must be maintained.
- Journeys should be carefully planned so that birds are not left on the vehicle for long periods either at the start of the journey or at their destination. The provision of adequate ventilation and protection from adverse weather and extremes of temperature are essential during loading and transport.
- Measures should be taken to ensure efficient removal of excess heat and water vapour. It is important to make use of the natural airflow patterns around a moving vehicle to optimise conditions for the birds during transport. However, when a vehicle is stationary for any length of time, mechanical ventilation may be necessary to maintain acceptable levels of temperature and humidity. When this is the case it is more effective to extract air from the vehicle than to blow air into it.
- Birds should be unloaded as soon as possible after arrival at a slaughterhouse. After unloading, birds must be protected from adverse weather conditions and be provided with adequate ventilation. In addition, if any bird has been subjected to high temperatures in humid weather, it must be cooled by appropriate means.

ADDITIONAL REQUIREMENTS FOR FREE RANGE BIRDS

- Birds not permanently kept in buildings should, where necessary and possible, be given protection from adverse weather conditions, predators and risks to their health and should, at all times, have access to a well drained lying area. This must include secure housing when required for bird welfare and health reasons.
- Land on which free range birds are kept for prolonged periods may become 'fowl sick', i.e. contaminated with organisms which cause or carry disease to an extent which could seriously prejudice the health of the birds on the land. Land should be frequently monitored for worm burden. The time taken for land to become fowl sick depends on the type of land and stocking density. Appropriate measures should be taken to prevent fowl sickness or to provide a new ranging area by moving the housing (in the case of portable units) or to rotating the ranging area outside fixed buildings.
- Sufficient housing should be available to the birds at all times and it may be necessary to exclude birds from the range in bad weather if there is a clear danger that their welfare will be compromised.
- Birds should be encouraged to use the outdoor area by provision of adequate suitable, properly managed vegetation, a fresh supply of water and overhead cover, all sufficiently far from the house to encourage the birds to range.

- Factors such as soil type, drainage and size of colony and frequency of flock rotation are very important in deciding the number of birds that a particular area can carry. Heavy, poorly drained soil can carry fewer birds than land which is light and well drained.



Free Range Indices Summary

Stocking Density: **Indoors:** Max. 13 birds/m²
Or 27.5kg/m²

Outdoors:

- 1m² pasture per bird e.g. 10,000 birds per hectare
- Access – available from 28 days onwards paddock fenced with 2 rows electric fence (top and bottom) and netting wire.
- Pasture dedicated to poultry only.

Slaughter Age: Minimum 56 days (slow growing breed optional e.g. hubbard JA57).

Acknowledgements: Photos of foot-pad dermatitis in broilers courtesy of Charlotte Berg, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences.

All other photos courtesy of Carton Brothers Ltd., Shercock, Co Cavan.

APPENDIX 1

GOOD FARMING PRACTICE WITH REGARD TO SPREADING OF POULTRY LITTER ON LAND

This advice leaflet is intended to reduce the risk of disease in animals.

- Only accept litter from poultry farmers who have adequate systems in place to ensure all poultry carcasses are removed from houses, stored and disposed of according to good practice;
- Vehicles used for the transportation of animal fodder should not be used for the transportation of poultry litter or any other waste material including chicken carcass material;
- Sites for litter stacks must be on dry ground, vermin proof and remote from all water sources and proximity to livestock (including on neighbouring farms);
- Animals should not be grazed on lands on which poultry litter has been spread;
- Do not spread poultry litter that contains poultry carcasses or parts of carcasses, do not chop litter and check lands thoroughly immediately after spreading to ensure the pasture is carcass free, remove all offending material. Where possible plough litter into land immediately after spreading.
- Where possible litter should only be spread on tillage land and immediately ploughed in, again check tillage land thoroughly to ensure land is carcass free;
- Where litter is ploughed into land keep dust to a minimum and ensure that there are no grazing animals in adjacent fields.
- Do not use land for grazing livestock;
- Avoid spreading and stockpiling litter in warm weather;
- There should be a three-year interval between land spreading of litter;
- Do not make baled silage from lands where litter is spread;
- There are disease risks for animal and man associated with handling of and contact with poultry litter therefore care must be exercised at all times and any un-necessary contact should be avoided;
- Wash your hands thoroughly after handling litter;
- Avoid spreading near waterways and comply with the recommended level of animal manure for land spreading;
- Contact your local District Veterinary Office for further advice.

May 2006.

GOOD FARMING PRACTICE WITH REGARD TO DISPOSING OF DEAD BIRDS FROM POULTRY HOUSES

The Poultry Industry should be aware of the correct procedures for the disposal of poultry carcasses, as prescribed by the European Communities Regulation (EC) 1774/2002 and the European Communities (Animal By-products) Regulations, 2003. S.I. No. 248 of 2003.

In order to comply with the regulations and to reduce the incidence of poultry litter-related animal disease to a minimum, we would ask all poultry farmers to implement the following points of **Good Farming Practice**:

1. EU Regulation 1774/2002 states it is illegal to burn, bury or dispose of carcasses by any other method than by those prescribed by the regulations. Dead birds must be removed from poultry houses on at least a TWICE-DAILY basis. An accurate count should be kept of birds collected and the number recorded in the farm diary.
2. Carcasses must be safely stored in sealed barrels or wheelie bins while awaiting collection. Barrels should not be overfilled, open barrels or barrels with a plank of wood over them are not acceptable.
 - Containers for the storage of carcasses must be covered, leak-proof and vermin proof
 - Containers must be cleaned, washed and disinfected after each use; maintained in a clean condition and clean and dry before use
 - Containers must be labelled "Category 2 Material – Not for Animal Consumption" and all labels to be permanently attached to both sides of the container, clearly legible with letters of a minimum of 15 cms in height.
3. Carcase bins must be removed from the farm frequently for final disposal at an approved rendering plant. Records of dates of collection and the number of barrels or bins collected must be maintained and kept available for inspection.
4. Records of the numbers of birds in, number of birds out, number of dead birds collected and disposed of must be kept and made available for inspection.
5. Records of the quantities of poultry litter removed from houses, the date on which it is removed, the name of the hauler and the destination of the litter should be kept and made available for inspection.
6. Haulage trailers should be covered when transporting poultry litter.
7. Haulage trailers used for transporting litter should not be used for transporting animal fodder.
8. Sites for litter stacks/clamps must be on dry ground, vermin proof and remote from all water sources and proximity to livestock (including on neighbouring farms).

9. Water used for cleaning poultry houses should be captured and disposed of, on land not used for livestock and remote from all water sources and proximity to livestock (including on neighbouring farms).
10. Farmers/hauliers who accept litter from growers for land spreading must be made aware by the **grower or the haulier** that there are disease risks associated with the spreading of such litter, cattle should not be grazed on, or adjacent to, land on which such litter has been spread and farmers/hauliers must be advised of other measures to reduce the risk of disease (this advice is available from the local District Veterinary Office).

May 2006.

APPENDIX 2

<http://eurlex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2007:182:0019:0028:EN:PDF>

http://www.agriculture.gov.ie/animal_health/avian_influenza/poultry_industry/4670BioSecuritylr.pdf

APPENDIX 3: Notifiable Diseases in Poultry

Significant:

- Avian influenza
- Newcastle disease

Others:

- Psittacosis
- Infectious laryngotracheitis
- Turkey rhinotracheitis
- Mycolpasma meleagridis, gallinarum and synovia
- Samonella arizona (Arizona disease), pullorum (bacillary white diarrhoea) and gallinarum (fowl typhoid)
- Salmonella enteritidis and typhimurium
- Campylobacter jejuni



For further information please contact:
The Secretary
Farm Animal Welfare Advisory Council
Animal Health and Welfare Division
Agriculture House
Kildare Street, Dublin 2
www.agriculture.gov.ie/fawac

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