



WELFARE STANDARDS FOR CHICKENS

January 2002

© 2002 RSPCA

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the Copyright owner.

It is the intention of Freedom Food Ltd, to establish sister franchise organizations in other countries working to these welfare standards and therefore, in time, establish a common and consistent message for consumers around the world.

Wilberforce Way,
Southwater,
Horsham,
West Sussex,
RH13 9RS
Telephone 0870 010 1181

Registered charity no. 219099
ISBN 1 898331 51 0

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	(i)
FOOD AND WATER	
Food	1
Water	2
ENVIRONMENT	
Buildings	3
Floor and litter	4
Lighting	5
Stocking density	6
Air quality & thermal environment	6
Environmental enrichment	8
Free-range	8
Access to the range area	9
Specific provisions for chicks	10
MANAGEMENT	
Managers	13
Stock-keepers	14
Inspection	14
Equipment	15
Pests & Predators	16
HEALTH	17
Casualty slaughter	20
TRANSPORT	
Depopulation	23
Transport	24
SLAUGHTER	
Management	27
Lairage	28
Shackling	29
Stunning	30
Bleeding	31
Appendix 1	33

1. INTRODUCTION

The RSPCA Welfare Standards for Chickens have been developed to provide the only RSPCA approved scheme for the rearing, handling, transport and slaughter of broiler chickens. They take account of legislation, government welfare codes, scientific research, veterinary advice, recommendations of the Farm Animal Welfare Council (FAWC) and the practical experience of the farming industry.

The standards are based upon the 'Five Freedoms' as defined by FAWC; hence the name "Freedom Food".

Although these 'freedoms' define ideal states, they provide a comprehensive framework for the assessment of the animal welfare on farm, in transit, and at the place of slaughter, as well as representing an important element of farm assurance requirements.

* **Freedom from hunger and thirst**

- by ready access to fresh water and a diet to maintain full health and vigour

* **Freedom from discomfort**

- by providing an appropriate environment including shelter and a comfortable resting area

* **Freedom from pain, injury or disease**

- by prevention or rapid diagnosis and treatment

* **Freedom to express normal behaviour**

- by providing sufficient space, proper facilities and company of the animal's own kind

* **Freedom from fear and distress**

- by ensuring conditions and care which avoid mental suffering.

These freedoms will be better provided for if those who have care of livestock practise:-

* **Caring and responsible planning and management**

* **Skilled, knowledgeable and conscientious stockmanship**

* **Appropriate environmental design**

* **Considerate handling and transport**

* **Humane slaughter.**

2. FREEDOM FOOD LTD

Freedom Food is a wholly owned subsidiary of the RSPCA, formed to implement these standards. Upon satisfactory inspection farmers, hauliers, slaughterers, processors and retailers may subscribe to the scheme and use the Freedom Food trademark. All participants are regularly assessed by Freedom Food Ltd, and a charge is levied to cover inspection and administration costs. Participants are also randomly monitored by members of the Farm Animals Department of the RSPCA, free of charge.

Freedom Food Ltd is a charity and is non-profit making. Any surplus income will be used to fund research into farm animal welfare.

3. GUIDE TO THE USE OF THE WELFARE STANDARDS

- (i) At the head of each section the broad objectives of the standards are described.
- (ii) The numbered requirements are the standards, all of which must be complied with.
- (iii) Boxed sections give additional advice or may highlight areas where the standards will be reviewed in the future.
- (iv) **Farmers are required by law to have a thorough knowledge of the MAFF Codes of Recommendations for the Welfare of Livestock: Domestic Fowls.**

FOOD AND WATER

Livestock must have freedom from hunger, thirst and malnutrition by ready access to fresh water and a diet to maintain full health and promote a positive state of well-being. Feed and water must be distributed in such a way that livestock can eat and drink without undue competition.

Food

FW 1.1 Chickens must be fed a wholesome diet which is appropriate to their species and which is fed to them in sufficient quantity to maintain them in good health and to satisfy their nutritional needs.

FW 1.2 Chickens must have free access to nutritious food each day, except when required by the attending veterinary surgeon.

The age and weight at slaughter has a major effect on the prevalence of skeletal abnormalities. When predicting energy content of the diet and feeding regime, this should achieve an appropriate growth rate curve which reaches the desired liveweight and avoids associated leg problems.

FW 1.3 Management procedures must demonstrate that the age and weight at slaughter has been considered when predicting energy content of the diet and feeding regime.

FW 1.4 Producers must have a written record of the nutrient content of the feed, as declared by the feed compounder, and make it available to the Freedom Food Assessor and RSPCA Farm Livestock Officer.

FW 1.5 No feedstuffs containing mammalian or avian derived protein are permitted. This does not include dairy products.

FW 1.6 The use of in-feed antibiotics, other than for therapeutic reasons, is prohibited.

The Veterinary Health Plan (see H1.1) should consider the use of alternative strategies aimed at reducing the risk of health problems such as necrotic enteritis.

FW 1.7 All treatments given to birds must only be used under close supervision of the veterinary surgeon and must be recorded in the VHP.

FW 1.8 Food must not be allowed to remain in a contaminated or stale condition.

FW 1.9 There must be a minimum of 25mm of single sided feed trough space per bird, which may need to be increased depending on lighting programmes.

FW 1.10 Where circular pan feeders are used, there must be a minimum of 1 x 330mm diameter pan feeder per 65 birds.

- FW 1.11** Where a new feeding system is installed, this must be pan feeders.
- FW 1.12** Feed distribution must ensure uniform feed availability throughout the entire feeder system.
- FW 1.13** Chickens must not have to travel more than 4 metres anywhere in the house to reach food or water.
- FW 1.14** The siting of feeders and drinkers must be such that increased activity is encouraged in the birds.

Water

- FW 2.1** Chickens must have continuous access to an adequate supply of clean, fresh drinking water at all times, except when required by the attending veterinary surgeon.
- FW 2.2** Water must not be allowed to remain in a contaminated or stale condition.
- FW 2.3** Provision must be made for supplying water in freezing conditions.
- FW 2.4** The minimum number of drinkers which must be provided are as follows:

bell	1 per 100 chickens
nipple	1 per 10 chickens
cup	1 per 28 chickens

It has been shown that certain systems of drinker (360° nipple, high flow rate) can be provided at a minimum of 1 drinker per 20 chickens. Producers who have installed alternative designs of drinker facilities should discuss their suitability with the Freedom Food Assessor or RSPCA Farm Livestock Officer.

- FW 2.5** Where a new drinking system is being installed, this must not be bell drinkers.
- FW 2.6** Drinkers must be of a design which reduces water wastage.
- FW 2.7** In order to reduce water spillage and prevent consequent problems with litter management, drinkers must be placed at optimum height for the size and age of the birds and be of an appropriate design.
- FW 2.8** A water storage tank (with fitted lid) must be installed on-site which is capable of providing water to the flock of all ages for a period of at least 24 hours when mains water supply is cut off.
- FW 2.9** Water meters must be connected to all the birds' drinking systems and records made of daily water consumption.

ENVIRONMENT

The environment in which livestock are kept must take into account their welfare needs and be designed to protect them from physical and thermal discomfort, fear and distress, and allow them to perform their natural behaviour.

- E 1.1** Where management systems, designs or layout of facilities not covered in the RSPCA Welfare Standards are being employed or considered, these must be referred to, and discussed with, the RSPCA Farm Animals Department before they can be considered for certification.

Buildings

The RSPCA believes that birds should be kept in conditions which provide access to natural daylight. The Farm Animals Department will review the evidence about the need for natural light and the quality of light provided in enclosed buildings. The standards will be amended when this information is made available.

- E 2.1** For all accommodation, a notice containing a checklist of the key points relating to welfare must be prominently displayed at, or near, the entrance to each building and be amended accordingly.
- E 2.2** The checklist must include:
- a) total floor area available to the birds
 - b) total number of birds
 - c) total number of drinkers and feeders
 - d) target air quality parameters
 - e) lighting levels and regimes
 - f) emergency procedures, ie actions in the case of fire, flood, failure of automatic equipment, and when temperatures move outside acceptable limits.
- E 2.3** The interior of any building, including the floor, to which chickens have access must be designed, constructed and maintained so that there are no sharp edges or protrusions likely to cause injury or distress to the birds.
- E 2.4** Internal walls must be smooth, unobstructed and constructed of a durable material capable of withstanding clean-out procedures.
- E 2.5** Except where preservatives with an insecticidal role are used, chickens must not come into contact with toxic fumes or surfaces from paints, wood preservatives or disinfectants.

E 2.6 All electrical installations at mains voltage must be inaccessible to the chickens, well insulated, safeguarded from rodents, properly earthed and regularly tested.

E 2.7 New buildings must have a minimum ceiling height of 3 metres.

Polythene tunnels and other novel types of structures will require individual consideration by the RSPCA Farm Animals Department and Freedom Food before certification is granted.

E 2.8 Producers must discuss with the Freedom Food Assessor or RSPCA Farm Livestock Officer the feasibility and implementation of subdividing large houses into smaller colonies of birds.

E 2.9 The apron must be level to facilitate the loading of birds at the time of depopulation.

E 2.10 The apron immediately surrounding the outside of the house must:

- a) be kept clean and tidy
- b) not offer shelter to wild birds or rodents
- c) be well managed with vegetation kept short.

Where possible, this should be of concrete to ensure effective disinfection once the building has been emptied and cleaned.

Floor & litter

E 3.1 Chicken house flooring must allow for effective cleansing and disinfection, preventing the significant build up of parasites and other pathogens.

Where possible, these should be concrete floors which are well maintained.

E 3.2 Where internal house floors are concrete, a damp proof membrane must be fitted.

E 3.3 The floor of all houses must be completely covered in litter.

E 3.4 The litter must:

- a) be of a suitable material and particle size
- b) be managed to maintain it in a dry, friable condition (and replaced where necessary)
- c) be maintained at an average minimum depth of 5cm to allow for the dilution of faeces

- d) allow birds to dust bathe
- e) be topped up daily, if necessary, with fresh litter
- f) be managed hygienically

E 3.5 Good quality litter must be used.

Wood shavings is the preferred substrate.

E 3.6 Chickens must have access to the litter area at all times.

E 3.7 Fresh litter must be stored indoors in hygienic, rodent-proof premises.

E 3.8 Stock-keepers must:

- a) be aware of the welfare problems associated with poor litter management
- b) understand the factors which affect litter condition, ie moisture, nitrogen content and greasy capped litter
- c) have access to a copy of the MAFF booklet, *Poultry Litter Management* (PB 1739, 1994), be familiar with its content, and adopt its recommendations.

Lighting

E 4.1 The lighting system in the chicken house must provide in each period of 24 hours:

- a) a minimum period of 8 hours light, by the provision of either artificial light or access to daylight
- b) a minimum period of 6 hours and a maximum of 12 hours continuous darkness, except when the natural period of darkness is shorter.

This requirement need not apply during the first few days of rearing and the last 3 days prior to slaughter.

E 4.2 Lighting patterns in all houses must be recorded and records must be made available to the Freedom Food Assessor and RSPCA Farm Livestock Officer for inspection.

Where possible, this should be recorded automatically.

- E 4.3** Daytime lighting levels must allow birds to see and be inspected without difficulty.
- E 4.4** The lighting system in the chicken house must be designed and maintained in order to give an average minimum illumination of 20 lux throughout the house (with the exception of shaded areas).
- E 4.5** Artificial light must be switched on and off in a stepped or gradual manner to allow the chickens to prepare for daylight and darkness.
- E 4.6** Where chickens are housed indoors, adequate lighting, whether fixed or portable, must be available to enable them to be thoroughly inspected at any time.

Stocking density

- E 5.1** The maximum stocking density must be calculated on the weight of birds/m² of available floor space; this must never exceed 30kg/m².

Stocking densities to comply with this are as follows:

<u>Average slaughter weight (kg)</u>	<u>No of birds/m²</u>
3.0	10
2.5	12
2.1	14
1.9	16

- E 5.2** Records must be kept which enable the stocking density to be verified easily by producer/Freedom Food Assessor/RSPCA Farm Livestock Officer at any time.
- E 5.3** Records must include:
- details of the number of birds placed in each house
 - the daily mortality
 - the number culled (including reason for culling)
 - average weight of birds removed for slaughter.

Air quality & thermal environment

- E 6.1** Provision must be made to ensure that aerial contaminants do not reach a level at which they are noticeably unpleasant to a human observer.
- E 6.2** Ventilation systems, natural or forced, must be designed to maintain air quality.

Air quality parameters should be maintained, under all foreseeable climatic conditions, below the following levels at bird head height:

Ammonia	15ppm
Carbon dioxide	5000ppm

The measurement for relative humidity should be between 50% and 70%.

Where practically feasible, air quality parameters, ie ammonia, carbon dioxide, carbon monoxide, etc, should be measured and recorded on a weekly basis. Where a level higher than that specified within the Standards is recorded, daily recordings should be made until an acceptable level is achieved and maintained.

Where possible, these levels should be automatically recorded and the records made available to the Freedom Food Assessor and RSPCA Monitor.

- E 6.3** Inhalable dust, carbon monoxide and other aerial contaminants within chicken buildings must be kept at levels which comply with COSHH regulations.
- E 6.4** There must be, averaged over an 8 hr period:
- a) dust not exceeding 10mg/m³
 - b) carbon monoxide not exceeding 50ppm.
- E 6.5** Provision must be made to ensure that chickens have access to a thermally comfortable environment at all times so that heat/cold stress does not occur.
- E 6.6** The design of buildings must be such that risks of overheating are minimised; for example, by installation of an evaporative cooling system.
- E 6.7** All buildings must be able to cope with a temperature lift of 3°C and the maximum and minimum temperatures must be recorded daily.
- E 6.8** Records of maximum and minimum temperatures must be made available to the Freedom Food Assessor and RSPCA Farm Livestock Officer.
- E 6.9** The ventilation system and rate must be such that it maintains the birds at a thermally comfortable temperature appropriate to their age and stage of growth.
- E 6.10** Ventilation equipment must be maintained in good working order.
- E 6.11** Alarm systems must be installed where there is any risk of failure of ventilation equipment. (See FF information sheet: Requirement for Alarmed Ventilation Systems [May 2000]).
- E 6.12** Stock-keepers must have access to a copy of the MAFF booklet,

Heat Stress in Poultry (PB 1315, 1993), be familiar with its content and adopt its recommendations.

Environmental enrichment

- E 7.1** Provisions must be made to keep indoor chickens active by enriching their environment.
- E 7.2** Stock-keepers must be able to demonstrate to the Freedom Food Assessor and RSPCA Farm Livestock Officer, effective methods of environmental enrichment which stimulate activity in the birds.

Possible methods of providing environmental enrichment include the provision of straw bales, scattering of whole grain, and the provision of brassicas.

Free-range

The RSPCA Welfare Standards for Chickens do not insist on chickens having access to range. Where they do, the following Welfare Standards must be met.

- E 8.1** For free-range systems, managers must be aware of the EU Poultrymeat Marketing Standards Commission Regulation (EEC) No 2891/93EC with regard to stocking densities, access to range and minimum age at slaughter.
- E 8.2** Producers must demonstrate that every effort has been made when applying for planning permission to ensure the most efficient utilisation of the range area.
- E 8.3** The outdoor area in free-range systems must:
- a) be designed and managed in ways which ensure that the area around the house does not become poached
 - b) consist of pasture mainly covered by vegetation.
- E 8.4** Chickens with access to range must have access to a well drained area for resting whilst outside the building.
- E 8.5** Where there is a risk of build up of parasites or disease on free-range land, rotational grazing or other disease control measures must be applied.
- E 8.6** For free-range systems in summer conditions, a shaded area must be accessible which has sufficient space that the chickens do not have to crowd together (thereby risking further heat stress).

Producers must consider the suitability of shelters which provide adequate overhead shade to protect birds against strong sunlight and prevailing winds. Some shade should be available to birds, no further than 30metres from the house. Account must be taken of problems associated with heat stress when determining the height of overhead shade.

- E 8.7** Young birds must be introduced onto the range as soon as they are mature enough and, in any case, from 28 days of age.

Access to the range area

- E 9.1** Chickens kept in free-range systems must have access to the range for a minimum of 8 hours each day except when the natural daylight period is less.

- E 9.2** Where chickens are kept in free range systems there must be sufficient popholes appropriately distributed around the building to ensure that all birds have ready access to the range.

- E 9.3** Each pophole must be no smaller than 450mm high and 2m wide to allow the passage of more than one chicken at any one time.

- E 9.4** There must be one pophole per 600 chickens.

For sheds with smaller colonies, the popholes can be reduced in size although they should allow individual chickens to pass through the pophole comfortably.

- E 9.5** The total length of the popholes must be at least 4m per 100m² of the surface of the house.

- E 9.6** All popholes must normally be open for this time, except when this is precluded by inclement weather conditions.

- E 9.7** Where birds have access to the range via a veranda, the specification for popholes between the house and the veranda must satisfy the requirements as stated in E9.3 and E9.4).

Producers may consider the use of balanced ventilation systems which may help to maintain an even flow of air throughout the building including the veranda area. Where automatic equipment is employed, producers should refer to standard E6.11.

- E 9.8** The sides of the veranda must be of solid, waterproof material from ground level to at least the top of the pophole.

- E 9.9** Where gale breakers or mesh-type material is used, any damage must be repaired promptly.

- E 9.10** The construction of the veranda must allow for effective cleaning and disinfection.
- E 9.11** Litter must be provided in the veranda area and maintained in a dry, friable condition and replaced where necessary (see E3.4 and E3.5).
- E 9.12** The total floor area occupied by the veranda on either size of the house must occupy no less than 20% of the calculated floor area within the house.
- E 9.13** The roof of the veranda must be entirely waterproof and insulated.
- E 9.14** Provisions must be made to prevent the area surrounding the building from flooding during wet weather.
- E 9.15** Popholes leading from the house to the veranda (where provided) and from the veranda to the range must be placed so as to avoid uneven air movement within the building.

Specific Provisions for Chicks

- E 10.1** Day old chicks must be handled carefully and placed in an appropriate environment.
- E 10.2** Great care must be taken to avoid heat stress, particularly when chicks are at a maximum stocking density.
- E 10.3** Brooder surrounds and feeding and watering equipment within the surround must be designed and constructed such that chicks can move freely towards or away from the brooder.
- E 10.4** Particular care must be taken in the placement and maintenance of brooder heaters to ensure against risk of fire and emission of carbon monoxide.
- E 10.5** Care must be taken to ensure that feeders do not become hot, especially when metal feeders are used.
- E 10.6** Supplementary feed trays and small water fonts must be provided in addition to the automatic tube feeders and drinkers at the start of brooding.
- E 10.7** For the first several hours after placement, cardboard egg trays can be used as an additional water container.
- E 10.8** The brooder must be suspended above the centre of the surround.
- E 10.9** The height of the brooder must be adjustable to ensure that the temperature at the level of the litter is maintained at the optimum level.
- E 10.10** Supplementary lighting must be hung next to the brooder for the first few days after placement to attract chicks to the heat source and provide extra illumination of feeders and drinkers.

- E 10.11** Throughout the brooding period the behaviour of the chicks must be closely monitored and the brooders adjusted accordingly.
- E 10.12** Feeders and drinkers must be kept clean and free from litter.
- E 10.13** For brooding and rearing of chicks the placement of feeder/drinker/number of birds, stocking density, air quality, ventilation, lighting, must be as the breeding company's management guidelines.

MANAGEMENT

A high degree of caring and responsible management and stockmanship is vital to ensure good animal welfare. Managers and stock-keepers must be thoroughly trained, skilled and competent in animal husbandry and welfare, and have a good working knowledge of their system and the livestock under their care.

Managers

- M 1.1** Managers must ensure that all stock-keepers have a copy of the RSPCA Welfare Standards for Chickens, are familiar with it and understand its content.
- M 1.2** All farm managers and assistant farm managers must have attained the relevant NVQ poultry qualification.
- M 1.3** Managers must:
- a) ensure all stock-keepers have completed relevant and adequate training and can satisfy the Freedom Food Assessor and RSPCA Farm Livestock Officer of their competence in practical circumstances
 - b) develop and implement plans and precautions to prevent and cope with emergencies such as fire, flood, breakdown of environmental control or interruption of supplies, eg food, water, electricity
 - c) provide an Emergency Action Board sited adjacent to a telephone point, highlighting the procedures to be followed by those discovering an emergency, eg a fire, flood, power failure
 - d) develop and implement a biosecurity plan to minimise the risk of introducing disease onto a site and ensure that the Veterinary Health Plan is written, implemented and regularly updated
 - e) maintain and make available to the Freedom Food Assessor and RSPCA Farm Livestock Officer, records of production data, which include documentation on:
 - incoming and outgoing stock
 - mortality (reasons should be stated)
 - culling (reasons should be stated)
 - feed consumption
 - water consumption (if possible, water meters should be fitted in each chicken house)
 - maximum and minimum temperatures
 - relative humidity
 - ventilation (including settings and any necessary changes)
 - f) develop and implement a transport plan to Freedom Food approved abattoirs which minimises waiting time for the birds.

- M 1.4** Managers must take into account the abilities of the stock-keepers when deciding on stocking densities for present systems or when considering expanding the unit or installing more complex equipment.

Stock-keepers

- M 2.1** Prior to being given responsibility for the welfare of livestock, stock-keepers must be properly trained.

Where possible, this training must be validated.

- M 2.2** Stock-keepers must know the normal behaviour of chickens and understand the signs which indicate good health and welfare.
- M 2.3** When an outbreak of abnormal behaviour occurs, it must be tackled immediately by appropriate changes in the system of management.
- M 2.4** Stock-keepers must be able to recognise a potential problem in its earliest stages, enabling them to identify the cause and put matters right immediately.
- M 2.5** Stock-keepers must be properly trained and competent to:
- recognise signs of common diseases and know the appropriate actions for treatment
 - recognise signs of normal behaviour, abnormal behaviour and fear
 - understand the environmental requirements for chickens
 - handle chickens in a positive and compassionate manner.
- M 2.6** Stock-keepers must be able to demonstrate their proficiency in procedures which have the potential to cause suffering, eg injections.
- M 2.7** Stock-keepers must be aware of the welfare problems associated with poor litter management, eg hockburn, foot pad lesions and breast blemishes.

Inspection

- M 3.1** Birds, and the facilities on which birds depend, must be inspected a minimum of three times daily, with at least one of these inspections sufficiently thorough to identify any bird which is showing signs of sickness or injury.
- M 3.2** The records of inspection, which must be available to the Freedom Food Assessor and RSPCA Farm Livestock Officer, must be dated, signed and the time of inspection noted.

Management

- M 3.3** On completion of inspection, records should be kept of ill, injured and dead birds.
- M 3.4** Causes of illness and injury, and reasons for culling, must be recorded.
- M 3.5** Welfare problems of sufficient severity that they should have been noticed on previous inspections and dealt with, shall be taken as evidence of negligence of duties by the stock-keeper.
- M 3.6** Work routines and practices must be developed, and where necessary modified, to ensure that chickens do not become fearful and are not frightened in avoidable ways.
- M 3.7** All movement throughout the unit must be slow and deliberate, both to alleviate fear and reduce possible injury to birds.

Equipment

- M 4.1** Stock-keepers must inspect the equipment, including the automatic equipment, upon which chickens depend at least once daily to check that there is no defect in it.
- M 4.2** Where a defect is found (whether on inspection or at any other time):
- a) the defect must be rectified immediately
 - b) if this is impracticable, such measures as are required to safeguard the birds from suffering unnecessary pain or distress as a result of the defect, must immediately be taken and shall be maintained until the defect is rectified.
- M 4.3** It must not be possible to deactivate the alarms fitted to automatic equipment on which birds depend, ie feeders, drinkers and ventilation.
- M 4.4** The alarms must be checked daily to ensure they are in correct working order.
- M 4.5** Additional equipment or means of ventilation must be available (whether automatic or not) which, in the event of such a failure of the ventilation system, will provide adequate ventilation so as to prevent the birds from suffering unnecessary distress as a result of the failure.
- M 4.6** An auxiliary power supply which is capable of providing instant start and power supply to the house and all equipment within the house for a 24 hour period must be situated on site.
- M 4.7** The power supply must be tested once weekly and the outcome of the test recorded.
- M 4.8** For existing or new equipment which is used in management, eg heaters, lighting, ventilation (flaps/fans), stock-keepers must be able to:
- a) demonstrate an ability to operate the equipment competently
 - b) demonstrate the ability to carry out routine maintenance

- c) recognise common signs of malfunction
- d) demonstrate knowledge of action to be carried out in event of failures.

M 4.9 Particular care must be taken in the placement and maintenance of brooder heaters to ensure against the risk of fire.

Pests and predators

- M 5.1** Humane precautions must be taken to protect chickens from pests and predators, including rodents. Specifically:
- a) The intrusion of wild birds into non-free-range houses must be prevented with netting or similar material over roof ventilation ducts, windows, etc.
 - b) Farm dogs and cats must not be permitted in the chicken house.

HEALTH

Livestock must be protected from pain, injury and disease. The environment in which livestock are housed must be conducive to good health. All producers must develop a health plan in consultation with their veterinary surgeon.

★

The RSPCA believes that breeding companies must address effectively the welfare issues associated with the fast growth rate of broilers, which can lead to physical and metabolic disorders, before further changes are made to production efficiency.

For these reasons, the daily growth rate of birds should not exceed on average 50g a day over the entire growth period. It is important that this growth rate is reduced during the first few weeks of life during the early development of the skeletal frame and internal organs. The Society does not consider that birds should reach a body weight greater than 2kg before 42 days of age, unless it can be proven that there are no detrimental effects on the welfare of the birds.

The RSPCA Farm Animals Department has discussed its concerns about broiler health with some of the major breeding companies and believes that much more progress could be made to reduce these problems. Producers should liaise with breeding companies to establish what priority is given to the welfare criteria. More emphasis should be placed on the development of slower growing strains.

- H 1.1** A written Veterinary Health Plan (VHP) must be drawn up and regularly updated by the attending veterinary surgeon.
- H 1.2** Records, including details of any medication, must be available for examination by the Freedom Food Assessor and RSPCA Farm Livestock Officer.
- H 1.3** The VHP must contain a salmonella control programme.

The Veterinary Health Plan (VHP) forms a vitally important part of the RSPCA Welfare Standards with regard to maintaining health and welfare of livestock on farm. RSPCA guidelines have been developed for producers wishing to use these as a basis for a Veterinary Health Plan/ Flock Plan, and they are available to Freedom Food producers and their veterinary surgeons from RSPCA Farm Animals Department.

- H 1.4** There must be no recurring injuries of a similar nature seen on a number of birds attributable to physical features of their environment or handling procedures.
- H 1.5** If recurring injuries are found, a programme of preventative action must be specified in the VHP.

Recurring injuries are those seen on a number of birds, with sufficient similarity to suggest they have a common cause.

Injury is described as damage severe enough for the formation of granular scar tissue or defective bones or joints, and to an extent significantly greater than would be caused by accidental bumps or scratches. Attention should be paid to foot lesions.

- H 1.6** Flock performance data must be continuously monitored for signs of disease or production disorders.
- H 1.7** If any flock performance parameters fall below the tolerance limits identified in the VHP, the veterinary surgeon must be informed and the VHP revised to include a programme of action which will remedy the problem.
- H 1.8** Ailing chickens and any chickens suffering from injury such as open wounds or fractures must be:
- a) segregated
 - b) treated without delay
 - c) if necessary, be humanely killed.

Leg weakness and deformity are serious welfare problems in growing chickens, whether caused by infectious agents or growth abnormalities. Producers should include written procedures as part of their veterinary health plan aimed at preventing chickens suffering joint disease or leg deformation, which take into account the importance of infection in leg weakness and ensure effective hygiene control at the hatchery and on farm.

- H 1.9** Producers must be able to demonstrate that leg weakness control strategies outlined in the Veterinary Health Plan address both infectious and skeletal causes of leg weakness.
- H 1.10** Floor eggs must not be set. (See also, *RSPCA Welfare Standards for Chicks at Hatcheries*).
- H 1.11** Stock-keepers must be able to demonstrate that particular attention is paid to birds which are due to be slaughtered at a later age (ie over 42 days of age) or above 3kg liveweight.
- H 1.12** Any chicken which, due to leg problems or other physical conditions, has difficulty in reaching food and water must be promptly removed from the flock and, if necessary, humanely killed.
- H 1.13** Any overtly lame bird must be treated immediately or, if necessary, humanely killed.
- H 1.14** The presence of any overtly lame bird (Bristol Gait Score 4 or 5) will be taken as non-compliance with the RSPCA Welfare Standards).
- ★ **H 1.15** Management plans must prevent chickens suffering chronic joint disease or leg deformation.

- H 1.16** All culls due to leg abnormalities and/or deformities must be recorded, and the records assessed weekly to ensure an increasing problem is not developing.
- H 1.17** Where such a problem is identified, veterinary guidance must be sought to alleviate/ prevent further deaths.
- H 1.18** Where the level at a leg abnormality cull is greater than 3% to 42 days of age, this must be the subject of investigation and reported to the Freedom Food Assessor and RSPCA Farm Livestock Officer.
- H 1.19** Facilities must be available to segregate sick or injured birds.
- H 1.20** The RSPCA Welfare Standards do not allow any mutilation of chickens.
- H 1.21** If the mortality level within a house is in excess of 0.5% in 24 hours, a veterinary investigation must be made.
- Investigation at lower mortality levels is at the discretion of the attending veterinary surgeon.
- H 1.22** Great care must be taken to avoid heat stress, particularly when chickens are at maximum stocking density.
- H 1.23** Following depopulation, all houses must be thoroughly cleansed, disinfected and tested free from infectious agents as specified in the VHP.
- H 1.24** Written procedures must be in place, and must be followed at all times, for the safe disposal of pharmaceutical waste, needles and other sharps.
- H 1.25** These procedures must be in strict accordance with the relevant waste disposal regulations.
- H 1.26** Medicines must be clearly labelled and stored in accordance with the label instructions.
- H 1.27** Medicines must be kept in a secure, lockable store which is safe from other animals children and birds.
- H 1.28** The medicine store must be separate from food producing areas.
- H 1.29** A nominated person must:
- a) be responsible for the management of the medicine store
 - b) keep appropriate records for stock control purposes
- H 1.30** Any medicines used must be licensed for use in the UK, and applied in accordance with UK and EU legislation.

- H 1.31** All personnel involved in the administration of animal medicines must be competent to do so.

Casualty slaughter

- H 2.1** Each farm must have provisions for humane slaughter without delay of casualty chickens, either by on-farm methods carried out by a named, trained, competent member of staff, or a licensed slaughterman; or a veterinary surgeon must be called to carry out the procedure.

It is not illegal to slaughter a bird to prevent further severe suffering if a method of humane slaughter is available on the premises and there is someone competent to undertake the procedure.

The Humane Slaughter Association (HSA) has produced a booklet *Practical Slaughter of Poultry: A Guide for the Small Producer*. Producers should obtain a copy of this booklet, from HSA, The Old School, Brewhouse Hill, Wheathampstead, Herts AL4 8AN.

- H 2.2** Only those methods of on-farm slaughter recommended by the Humane Slaughter Association are permitted:
- ◆ Hand held electrical stunning, immediately followed by neck cutting. (This should be used if killing on a regular, routine or seasonal basis.)
 - ◆ Neck dislocation. (This should be used in an emergency or for the one-off slaughter of a very small number of birds.)
- H 2.3** Equipment which crushes the neck (eg killing pliers) is neither quick nor humane and must not be used.
- H 2.4** All personnel must be properly trained and competent to humanely slaughter birds.
- H 2.5** If there is any doubt as to how to proceed, the veterinary surgeon must be called at an early stage to advise whether treatment is possible or whether humane slaughter is required to prevent suffering.
- H 2.6** If a bird is in severe pain that is uncontrollable, then the bird must be promptly humanely slaughtered.
- H 2.7** Where any bird is slaughtered, it must be checked thoroughly to ensure it is dead.
- H 2.8** All carcasses must be disposed of through outlets or methods approved of or registered with MAFF, or must be buried or burned.

- H 2.9** An accurate record must be kept of how and where all such carcasses are disposed of, including those disposed of on-farm.
- H 2.10** On farm disposal must be in line with the relevant MAFF Code of Good Agricultural Practice (Air, Water, Soil).

TRANSPORT

Animal transport systems must be designed and managed to ensure livestock are not caused unnecessary distress or discomfort. The transport and handling of livestock must be kept to an absolute minimum. Personnel involved in transport must be thoroughly trained and competent to carry out the tasks required of them.

Depopulation

- T 1.1** All personnel involved in the catching and transportation of birds must be properly trained and competent.
- Where possible this training should be validated.
- T 1.2** Managers must prepare full and detailed written instructions for the catching staff.
- T 1.3** All catching staff must have a copy of these instructions and be aware of their duties
- T 1.4** A nominated member of the catching team must be made responsible for supervising, monitoring and maintaining high welfare standards throughout the depopulation of the house and loading of birds onto the transport vehicle, including inspections to ensure that transport modules are intact to eliminate the risk of injury to the birds during loading and transport.
- T 1.5** Catching teams must never put speed of operation before bird welfare.
- T 1.6** Sufficient time must be made available to ensure birds are handled with care.
- T 1.7** Adequate draught free ventilation at bird height must be provided for uncaught birds up to the time of loading.
- T 1.8** Chickens must not suffer prolonged hunger, thirst or deprivation of rest.
- T 1.9** Birds must have access to water up to the time of catching.
- T 1.10** Water must be given regularly to the uncaught birds by periodically lowering the drinkers, ensuring that sufficient light is available for the purpose.
- T 1.11** No bird must be deprived of food for more than 12 hours (including the period up to the time of slaughter).
- T 1.12** Catching must take place in low or blue lighting to minimise fear reactions of the birds.

T 1.13 Chickens must not be caught or carried by a single leg.

T 1.14 Chickens must be caught individually by grasping both legs, just above the feet.

T 1.15 No more than three birds should be carried in one hand.

If carried in groups, care must be taken to ensure birds can be held comfortably without distress or injury, and carrying distances must be kept to a minimum.

T 1.16 During depopulation, actions must be taken to prevent chickens from crowding together.

T 1.17 Where crowding occurs, the house lights must be raised, the birds spread out calmly and quietly, then allowed to settle before catching is resumed.

T 1.18 Only carriers of the tray type with completely open tops and with a depth of not less than 220mm must be used.

T 1.19 Chickens must be put in transport trays in the house.

T 1.20 The stocking density in each tray must not exceed 57kg of birds/m² of tray floor area, which must be reduced when birds are being transported during hot weather.

T 1.21 Birds which are visibly unfit before loading must not be transported, but humanely slaughtered immediately.

The mechanical harvesting of birds has been shown to offer some welfare advantages compared with manual catching. Units considering using such a system should liaise with the Freedom Food Assessor or RSPCA Farm Livestock Officer.

Transport

T 2.1 Personnel in charge of chicken transporters must have:

- a) completed an approved training course
- b) be able to demonstrate their competence in handling chickens when loading and unloading them and while in transit.

★ **T 2.1.1** All hauliers must have a written "Standard Operating and Emergency Procedure" to implement during transportation, the content of which must be agreed with the Freedom Food Assessor (see Appendix 1 attached).

T 2.2 Where causes of mortality have been identified, prompt action must be taken to prevent further deaths, injury or suffering occurring.

- T 2.3** Levels of transport mortality (in chickens from any single source) above 0.1% in any three month period must:
- a) be the subject of investigation
 - b) be reported to the Freedom Food Assessor and RSPCA Farm Livestock Officer.
- T 2.4** The time between the start of loading and the completion of unloading must be less than 6 hours.
- T 2.5** Noise levels, from all sources, must be minimised during loading, unloading and transport.
- T 2.6** Every effort must be made to ensure journeys are completed without unnecessary delays and that drivers are aware of any potential traffic problems and plan their journey accordingly.
- T 2.7** The person supervising the catching and loading of birds must liaise closely with the abattoir to minimise the time birds spend waiting on the vehicle.
- T 2.8** If it is necessary to keep birds on board a stationary vehicle, the driver must take action to avoid heat/ cold stress to the birds.
- T 2.9** The transport vehicle must be equipped with suitable curtains to provide additional protection against cold weather.
- The technology is now becoming available to monitor temperature and humidity on board transport vehicles. This allows drivers to take appropriate action to maintain ideal conditions for birds. The use of such equipment is encouraged by the RSPCA and Freedom Food Ltd. The RSPCA will monitor the development of such technology and review its use for future inclusion in these standards.
- T 2.10** Plans must be made in advance, and appropriate action taken to reduce the risk, including the daily receipt of meteorological forecasts of predicted temperatures.
- At times of high ambient temperature or when high humidity poses a threat to the birds, catching, loading and transportation create particular risks of heat stress.
- T 2.11** In periods of hot weather (in excess of 25°C) chickens must be transported at night or in the coolest parts of the day.

SLAUGHTER

All slaughter systems must be designed and managed to ensure livestock are not caused unnecessary distress or discomfort. The pre-slaughter handling of livestock must be kept to an absolute minimum. Personnel involved in slaughter must be thoroughly trained and competent to carry out the tasks required of them.

- S 1.1** Chickens must be slaughtered as close as possible to the point of production.

Management

- S 2.1** To assist in the monitoring of on-farm welfare, routine assessments must be made of birds at the processing plant and records made available to the Freedom Food Assessor and RSPCA Farm Livestock Officer.

This should involve the assessment of bird foot health, ie the incidence of foot pad dermatitis, or the incidence of hock burn/breast blisters.

- S 2.2** Managers must develop and implement an animal welfare policy which must include written procedures with regard to maintaining animal welfare in the abattoir, including the responsibilities and duties of staff and emergency procedures.

- S 2.3** The animal welfare policy must be regularly reviewed and updated.

- S 2.4** Managers must appoint at least one trained Poultry Welfare Officer (PWO) who is responsible for the implementation of the animal welfare policy.

Where possible, the PWO must have attended a recognised, validated training course, eg Bristol University Poultry Welfare Officer training programme.

- S 2.5** Managers, in conjunction with the PWO, must develop and implement a training programme for all staff handling and slaughtering birds and ensure that staff are properly trained to carry out their duties and be competent to perform them.

Where possible, this training should be validated.

- S 2.6** The PWO must make frequent checks throughout the day to ensure that birds are being effectively stunned and are insensible throughout the slaughter operation.

- S 2.7** Where birds are not being effectively stunned, the PWO must take immediate remedial action.
- S 2.8** The Managers and PWO must have access to a copy of the MAFF guidelines *Welfare of Poultry at Slaughter: a pocket guide* (PB 3476, 1998), and be familiar with its content.

Lairage

A number of abattoirs have installed closed circuit television (CCTV) monitors within the pre-slaughter handling and slaughter areas. This allows those responsible for animal welfare within the abattoir to ensure that welfare standards are maintained. The installation of CCTV systems is recommended by the RSPCA.

- S 3.1** Where possible, chickens must be unloaded immediately on arrival at the slaughterhouse and placed in an environmentally controlled lairage.
- S 3.2** Chickens which are held in the lairage must:
- be protected from direct rays of sun and from adverse weather, ie wind, rain, hail, snow etc
 - be provided with adequate ventilation; temperature and humidity in the lairage must be regularly monitored and controlled
- S 3.3** The lairage must have reduced or blue lighting.
- S 3.4** All chickens must be slaughtered as soon as possible after arrival at the lairage. This must be within 6 hours.
- S 3.5** All transport trays or fixed crates must be examined on arrival at the slaughterhouse to identify any birds suffering from injury, heat or cold stress.
- S 3.6** Any bird identified as suffering from injury, heat or cold stress must be slaughtered immediately and humanely.
- S 3.7** All deaths and injuries must be recorded and reported to:
- the driver
 - the haulier
 - the PWO
 - the farm manager

before the next consignment from the same source is collected.

- S 3.8** Records must be made available to the Freedom Food Assessor and RSPCA Farm Livestock Officer.
- S 3.9** Where causes of mortality have been identified, prompt action must be taken to prevent further deaths, injury or suffering occurring.
- S 3.10** Levels of transport mortality (in chickens from any single source) above 0.1% in any three month period must be the subject of investigation and reported to the Freedom Food Assessor.
- S 3.11** Once chickens have arrived at the premises at which they are intended to be slaughtered, they must not be moved on to other premises for slaughter.
- S 3.12** Standby equipment, eg a generator, must be available for emergency breakdowns.

Shackling

- S 4.1** Shackling teams must be thoroughly trained to handle the birds in such a way to avoid injury and bone breakage.
- S 4.2** Slaughterhouse managers must ensure that sufficient personnel are employed on shackling lines at all times to ensure due care and diligence.
- S 4.3** Shackles must be of a size and type, and the slaughter line run at a speed, which permits chickens to be hung on without causing unnecessary pain or distress.
- S 4.4** Birds must be hung on by both legs.
- S 4.5** Appropriate measures must be taken to prevent wing flapping and birds raising their heads before reaching the stunning bath.

The use of a breast bar, curtains, reduction in noise, low light intensity, running hand down birds at shackling can reduce stress.
- S 4.6** Care must be taken to ensure that birds cannot escape from the holding area or fall from the shackle line.
- S 4.7** Where loose birds are found they must be taken immediately to the hanging on area or, if injured, immediately humanely destroyed away from the line.
- S 4.8** Chickens must not be suspended for more than 1 minute before they are stunned.
- S 4.9** All crates must be checked to ensure no chickens are left inside them.

Stunning

S 5.1 The following types of stunning equipment are acceptable:

- a) Electrically live stunning bath.
- b) Dry stunner incorporating an electrically-live metal grid or bar.
- c) Hand operated stunner.

Gas killing systems are currently being developed by the industry. The use of such systems can offer welfare improvements to the birds. The RSPCA will review the use of gas killing systems in the future development of these standards. Producers considering using such a system should liaise with RSPCA Farm Animals Department.

S 5.2 Unstunned birds must be screened from dead birds.

S 5.3 The line to the stunning bath must be darkened or lit with blue light.

S 5.4 Where an electrical stunning bath is used:

- a) The stunning bath must be set at a height appropriate for the size and number of birds.
- b) The height must be set such that the heads of all birds make an effective contact with the water bath.
- c) A voltage sufficient to produce an average minimum current of 120mA per bird with a minimum of 105mA (50Hz sinusoidal) must be maintained.
- d) Each bird must be in contact with the current for a minimum of 4 seconds.
- e) The water level must be of sufficient depth, and the water must not overflow at the entrance.
- f) The electrode which is immersed in the water must extend the length of the water bath.
- g) The water bath stunner must be designed and set up to prevent birds receiving pre-stun shocks.
- h) The water bath must be fitted with an ammeter to accurately monitor current flow through the bath when loaded with birds.

S 5.5 All stunning and bleeding equipment must:

- a) be properly maintained

- b) be regularly cleaned
- c) be checked daily to ensure that it is in full and proper working order.

- S 5.6** Any problems must be reported to the PWO and rectified immediately.
- S 5.7** All birds leaving the water bath must be checked to ensure they have been effectively stunned or killed.
- S 5.8** Birds which fail to be properly stunned must be humanely slaughtered before entering the scalding tank.
- S 5.9** Staff must be trained to recognise the signs of an effective stun, to ensure that birds have been effectively stunned or are dead.

The most reliable indicator that a bird is properly stunned by the low voltage method is the electroplectic fit. The characteristics of this condition are:

- ◆ neck arched with head directed vertically
- ◆ open eyes
- ◆ wings held close to the body
- ◆ rigidly extended legs and constant rapid body tremors.

The physical conditions of the electroplectic fit are shorter lasting and less pronounced when cardiac arrest is induced at stunning. They are followed by:

- ◆ completely limp carcass
- ◆ no breathing
- ◆ loss of nictitating membrane reflex
- ◆ dilated pupil.

- S 5.10** Contingency plans must be in place to deal with occasions when unavoidable delays may occur .
- S 5.11** If the slaughter line is stopped, birds between the point of shackling and the killer must be removed and any birds which have already been stunned must be humanely killed.

Bleeding

- S 6.1** Carotid arteries and jugular veins must be effectively severed using a ventral cut.
- S 6.2** This must be checked by the appointed member of staff who must be given sufficient time to sever the blood vessels manually, if necessary.

- S 6.3** No more than 10 seconds must elapse between stunning and neck cutting.
- S 6.4** All birds must be checked to ensure that they are dead before entering the scalding tank.
- S 6.5** Chickens must not be immersed in a scalding tank or plucked until at least 90 seconds have elapsed since the major blood vessels in their necks have been severed.

APPENDIX TO RSPCA WELFARE STANDARDS FOR BROILERS

RSPCA WELFARE STANDARDS FOR BROILERS - TRANSPORT

STANDARD OPERATING & EMERGENCY PROCEDURE

Items to be included

1. Out of hours telephone numbers and 'Emergency Procedure'.
2. Accident procedure.
3. Certificate of Motor Insurance and MOT.
4. Tyres - Punctures Code of Practice.
5. Mobile 'phones or other communication equipment (and procedures for use).
6. Guidelines on correct environmental conditions during the journey, depending on length of journey and ambient temperature.
7. RSPCA Welfare Standards relating to transport of broilers.
8. Procedure for loading / unloading of poultry transporters.
9. Procedure for delivery of poultry to customer sites.
10. FTA - The Drivers Handbook (1996) including Tachograph Regulations.
11. Fire extinguisher.
12. Operating procedures for roadside checks.
13. MAFF/DEFRA leaflet *Guide to Alleviation of Thermal Stress in Poultry in Lairage* (PB 3724, 1998).