

**THE ROYAL NEW ZEALAND SOCIETY FOR THE  
PREVENTION OF CRUELTY TO ANIMALS**



**WELFARE STANDARDS**

**for**

**BARN LAYER HENS**

***MINIMUM STANDARDS***

# SOURCE OF SUPPLY

Function of the hatchery must be humane; hatcheries are usually more sophisticated but must be monitored to ensure:

- humane management;
- destruction of male chicks must be in accordance with the Code of Recommendations and Minimum Standards for the Welfare of Layer Hens;
- all hatchery waste must be treated so as to kill instantaneously any living embryos. Instantaneous fragmentation and carbon dioxide are accepted methods;
- transportation from the hatchery must be in accordance with the Code of Recommendations and Minimum Standards for the Welfare of Layer Hens.

## GROWTH PERIOD

Hens (from chick to layer) to be raised in circumstances designed to develop natural behaviour. It is important that only suitable breeds of birds are used for barn system egg production. Genetic development of breeds should address suitable temperament as well as health, bone growth and production capabilities.

- Chicks must be raised on litter in a secure, non chemically treated draught proof area.
- Young chicks must have a temperature maintained initially at between 30° - 37°C, reducing to 23° - 25°C at five weeks. Check breeder recommendations for the optimum temperature and humidity for the bird being reared. In the absence of breeder recommendations for relative humidity, a range of 40 – 60% is preferable.

## LAYER PERIOD

HENS MUST HAVE:

- freedom and capacity to socialise and escape aggression;
- freedom to move freely, stretch, perch, nest, dust bathe, flap wings. Adequate nests provided to accommodate the needs of all Hens. Any more than 2% floor eggs, once full lay is attained, indicates a problem and should trigger investigation in the nest accommodation. Indoor solid floors must be completely covered with litter material.

## **PERCHES**

- No more than 20 Hens per square metre for a slatted area and at least 600mm off the ground. For wooden perches 150mm allowance per hen. All perching systems must be smooth to avoid foot injuries. Where flocks are relatively small (under 1000 Hens) and where the welfare of the bird is not compromised, the Auditor may use discretionary powers.

## **STOCKING DENSITY**

- Stocking density is a maximum of 7 hens per square metre covered/roof area. This excludes raised surfaces such as mezzanine floors and platforms under which birds can gain access.

## **FEED SYSTEMS**

There are two feeding systems, ad lib and regulated.

- **AD LIB FEEDING:** where feeding is always available. For ad lib feeding, 3.5 cm per hen should be available for circular systems and 5 cm for rectangular systems. In ad lib systems not all hens will feed at the same time, however, feed hoppers need to be checked regularly and continuously kept full.
- **REGULATED FEEDING SYSTEMS:** 10cm of feeding space is required per hen to obtain the required amount of feed.
- The amount of feed consumed must be recorded and monitored on a per flock basis to ensure the hens' requirements are met. Representative samples of rearing and laying flocks must be weighed on a weekly basis and these weights recorded and compared to relevant industry standards. The minimum of hens to be weighed for rearing is 100 birds and for in lay birds, 50.

## **DRINKING SYSTEMS**

- Drinking space should be sufficient to meet the specifications of the manufacturer, where nipple feeders are used exclusively, one nipple per 10 hens or adequate in number and position to allow ad lib drinking at all times.
- Hens must have continuous access to water with a minimum of either 10cm of linear drinking trough per hen, or 5cm of circular drinking trough per hen.
- There is a preference for circular drinking troughs.

## HEALTH

### Health requirements:

- Adequate and readily available supply of clean water which is not deleterious to the hens' health (tested to meet NZ biological standards at least once a year and results made available to audit).
- Balanced food from a sufficient number of consoles to ensure ready access; **there must not be access to offal.**
- Manure removal on an all in all out basis at depopulation with the sheds being cleaned, disinfected and sanitised before restocking.
- Administration as necessary, subject to veterinary advice, of appropriate vaccinations, prophylactic and corrective medicines. Antibiotics should be used only under veterinary advice for specific illness and not as a growth promotant.
- Clean air - ammonia levels to be no higher than 15ppm and dust levels which can be potentially harmful must be kept to an absolute minimum. Dust levels over 3.4 mg per cubic metre must trigger corrective action. All ventilation systems must have the ability to prevent the build up of harmful gases, e.g. Ammonia and CO<sub>2</sub>.
- Temperature control is necessary. The optimum temperature for bird comfort is 20° - 23°C.
- Complete protection from predators.
- Adequate shelter from all the elements, including draughts, temperature extremes and weather.
- Friable, dry litter. Litter material must not contain toxins (tanalising agents and fungi) or other contaminants, at sufficient levels to cause respiratory and other health problems.
- A minimum depth of litter material should be appropriate to the choice of litter material. At house placement time, wood shavings should be 50 – 75mm deep.
- Natural light - with artificial light only to an all light total of 16 hours per day.
- Lameness control – manure build up checks (keep litter dry); and
- Monitoring and maintenance of proper nutritional levels.

### Note:

A mortality rate of 1% of shed population per month is the maximum allowable. However, this level must trigger diagnostic and corrective action which must be documented. The maximum annual loss must not exceed 5%.

## MANAGEMENT

Acceptable and consistent management would require:

- stock workers to be trained to a high standard by whatever methods available either formally or informally. Courses are available;
- stock workers to be alert to problems (prevention);
- stocking density no greater than 7 birds per square meter;
- flock/group size - maximum 5,000 birds per enclosure;
- forced moulting is not permitted;
- the complete protection from predation and the elements.

The RNZSPCA prefers even smaller flock sizes, especially taking into consideration climate and ground conditions.

- The RNZSPCA is opposed to the use of electric lines above water pipes and feeders, and encourages producers to move away from this practice. However, until a more appropriate method of protecting water pipes and feeders can be found, the RNZSPCA will allow the limited use of standard electric lines for poultry. Electric lines should be turned off as soon as practicable, taking into consideration the dynamics of each particular flock, but in any case are limited to a maximum period of 15 weeks from the time a flock is introduced to a shed. The RNZSPCA would like to see the use of electric lines phased out as soon as practicably possible, and will work with producers to this end.
- A reliable veterinary arrangement/relationship to provide consistent/reliable advice.

## BEAK BLUNTING

The RNZSPCA, after consideration of alternatives, considers beak blunting to be an acceptable practice to avoid cannibalism in flocks. It is accepted that in both Barn and Free Range systems there is considerable risk of outbreaks of cannibalism. The pain and suffering of hens that are being pecked can be appalling. If they are not immediately identified and removed, the problem may quickly affect a considerable proportion of the flock. It is recognised that a number of factors influence feather pecking and cannibalism, including lighting intensity, redirected behaviour, genetic strain, (modern layer hen hybrids have been selectively bred for decades for the exclusive use in intensive cage egg systems) food access, composition and environmental enrichment.

***Producers trialled some flocks without beak blunting with results confirming that unacceptable levels of cannibalism occurred.***

Management and husbandry techniques have a high priority in this area and will be carefully scrutinised at audit.

## **REMOVAL AND SLAUGHTER**

Removal and slaughter must be undertaken by:

- clearing out at night;
- using crates appropriately designed for poultry to minimise injury and maximise comfort, taking only the allowable number of hens for size and in accordance with the Code of Recommendations and Minimum Standards for the Welfare of Layer Hens.
- transport and slaughter by methods as approved by Code of Recommendations and Minimum Standards for the Welfare of Layer Hens.

## **RECORDING AND STANDARDS CONTROL**

Suitable records and standards must be maintained for:

- mortality rates, including culls;
- use of veterinarian/s;
- injury and disease numbers;
- diagnostic and corrective action must be documented;
- feeding regimes;
- premises and equipment must be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected before restocking to prevent the carry over of disease-causing organisms to incoming birds. A record shall be kept of actions taken and chemicals used in the process;
- number of floor eggs;
- other management regimes, such as temperature monitoring, checks for parasites, and removal of clucky hens;
- controlled environment houses must have backup generators (and backup gas supply where appropriate) and alarms must be checked and tested at least monthly and problems immediately rectified;

Access to all records must be available to RNZSPCA Accreditation Officer/s at any reasonable time and is a requirement for Certification. The Animal Care Statement is an integral part of the standards requirement and the RNZSPCA must hold a completed copy. The RNZSPCA guarantees security and confidentiality of the Animal Care Statement provided by the producers.

## **PACKAGING**

An accredited egg package will carry the distinctive SPCA Blue Tick 'accreditation logo' on the outside of the packaging. All artwork on packaging or labels must be registered and signed off by the RNZSPCA.

**Note:** RNZSPCA standards for egg production will be accompanied by an animal care statement (attached): this identifies areas of responsibility and is, in effect, a routine and crisis management guide.

The animal care statement will act as a checklist for RNZSPCA inspection of farms and is part of this document.

## **APPROVAL OF VARIANCES FROM THE STANDARDS**

The RNZSPCA acknowledges that there may be production variances between individual producers, which are not fully addressed in these standards. The RNZSPCA may at its discretion, therefore, approve variances from these standards for individual producers, subject to confirmation being received from the auditor that there is no compromise to the hens' welfare.