

Codes of Recommendations for the Welfare of Livestock – Turkeys



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An Introduction by Ministers

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The Code, which has the approval of Parliament, embodies the latest scientific advice and the best current husbandry practices and takes account of five basic needs: freedom from thirst, hunger and malnutrition; appropriate comfort and shelter; the prevention, or rapid diagnosis and treatment of, injury, disease and infestation; freedom from fear, and freedom to display most normal pattern of behaviour. In particular, the Code mentions the need for technical and managerial skills where specialist buildings and complex mechanical and electrical equipment exist and more emphasis is given to the importance of precautions against fire or other emergencies.

The preface to the Code identifies good stockmanship as a key factor in farm animal welfare. We are convinced that this Code is an essential tool for every stockman. We therefore ask you, and all involved with turkeys on your farm, to read it carefully and to bear its recommendations in mind at all times. The note on the opposite page explains the status of the Code in relation to the law of the land.

Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food
Secretary of State for Scotland
Secretary of State for Wales
Agriculture (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1968 Part I

Note

The following Code, comprising paragraphs 1 to 63 is issued with the authority of Parliament and has been prepared following consultation as required by section 3 (1) of the Agriculture (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1968 which reads as follows:

3(1) The Ministers may from time to time, after consultation with such persons appearing to them to represent any interests concerned as the Ministers consider appropriate-

(a) prepare codes containing such recommendations with respect to the welfare of livestock for the time being situated on agricultural land as they consider proper for the guidance of persons concerned with the livestock; and (b) revise any such code by revoking, varying, amending or adding to the provisions of the code in such manner as the Ministers think fit.

The following further extracts from the Agriculture (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1968 explain the status of the Code in relation to the law of the land:

1(1) Any person who causes unnecessary pain or unnecessary distress to any livestock for the time being situated on agricultural land and under his control or permits any such livestock to suffer any such pain or distress of which he knows or may reasonably be expected to know shall be guilty of an offence under this section.

3(4) A failure on the part of any person to observe a provision of a code for the time being issued under this section shall not of itself render that person liable to proceedings of any kind; but such a failure on the part of any person may, in proceedings against him for an offence under section 1 of this Act, be relied upon by the prosecution as tending to establish the guilt of the accused unless it is shown that he cannot reasonably be expected to have observed the provision in question within the period which has elapsed since that provision was first included in a code issued under this section.

The Code came into operation on 1 September 1987.

Preface

This preface is not part of the Code, but is intended to explain its purpose and to indicate the broad considerations upon which it is based.

The basic requirements for the welfare of livestock are a husbandry system appropriate to the health and, so far as practicable, the behavioural needs of the animals and a high standard of stockmanship.

Stockmanship is a key factor because, no matter how otherwise acceptable a system may be in principle, without competent, diligent stockmanship the welfare of the birds cannot be adequately catered for. The recommendations which follow are designed to help stockmen, particularly those who are young or inexperienced, to attain the required standards. The part that training has to play in the development of the stockman's awareness of welfare requirements cannot be overstressed.⁽¹⁾ Detailed advice on the application of the Code in individual circumstances is readily available through the official advisory services and in advisory publications.

Nearly all livestock husbandry systems impose restrictions on the stock and some of these can cause an unacceptable degree of discomfort or distress by preventing the birds from fulfilling their basic needs. Provisions meeting these needs, and others which must be considered, include:

- comfort and shelter;
- readily accessible fresh water and a diet to maintain the birds in full health and vigour;
- freedom of movement;
- the company of other birds particularly of like kind;
- the opportunity to exercise most normal patterns of behaviour;
- light during the hours of daylight, and lighting readily available to enable the birds to be inspected at any time;
- flooring which neither harms the birds, nor causes undue strain;
- the prevention, or rapid diagnosis and treatment of vice, injury, parasitic infestation and disease;
- the avoidance of unnecessary mutilation; and

- emergency arrangements to cover outbreaks of fire, the breakdown of essential mechanical services and the disruption of supplies.

Not all husbandry systems in use for turkeys equally meet the physiological and behavioural needs of the birds. An attempt has been made, on the basis of the latest scientific knowledge and the soundest current practices, to identify those features which could place the welfare of birds at risk unless precautions are taken. The Code sets out what these precautions should be, bearing in mind the importance to the birds of their total environment and the fact that there is often more than one way in which their welfare can be safeguarded.

Certain aspects of livestock husbandry can present hazards to the health and safety of the stockman. Advice on these matters is available from the local Agricultural Safety Inspector of the Health and Safety Executive.

Introduction

1. The welfare of turkeys can be safeguarded and their physiological and behavioural needs met under a variety of management systems. The system, and the number and the stocking rate of birds kept at any one time, should depend on the suitability of the conditions and the skills of the stockman.
2. Consideration should be given to the question of animal welfare before installing more complex or elaborate equipment than has previously been used. In general the greater the restriction imposed on the bird and the greater the complexity of the system or of the degree of control which is exercised over temperature, air flow or food supply, the less the bird is able to use its instinctive behaviour to modify the effect of unfavourable conditions and the greater the chance of suffering if mechanical or electrical failures occur. Thus systems involving a high degree of control over the environment should only be installed where conscientious staff skilled in both animal husbandry and the use of the equipment will always be available.
3. Large flocks can be managed successfully, but in general the larger the size of unit the greater the degree of skill and conscientiousness needed to safeguard welfare. The size of a unit should not be increased nor should a unit be set up unless it is reasonably certain that the stockman in charge will be able to safeguard the welfare of the individual bird.
4. All stockmen should know the normal behaviour of turkeys, watch closely for signs of distress or disease and, where necessary, take prompt remedial action
5. The good stockman will know the signs which indicate good health in turkeys. He should be able to recognise impending trouble in its earliest stages and may often be able to identify the cause and put matters right immediately. If the cause is not obvious, or if the stockman's immediate action is not effective, veterinary or other expert advice should be obtained as soon as possible.
6. Important indications of health are alertness, clear bright eyes, good posture, vigorous movements if unduly disturbed, active feeding and drinking, and clean healthy skin, shanks and feet. Attention should be paid to any departure from the normal.

7. The early signs of ill-health may include changes in feed and water intake, in preening, in "chatter" and in activity. In laying birds there may also be a drop in egg production, and changes in egg quality such as shell defects.

8. Ailing birds, and any birds suffering from injury such as open wounds or fractures or from prolapse of the vent should be segregated and treated or, if necessary, be humanely killed without delay. (2)

Housing

General

9. Advice on welfare aspects should be sought when new buildings are to be constructed or existing buildings modified. Some intensive systems depend on specialised buildings and complex mechanical and electrical equipment, which require a high level of technical and managerial skills to ensure that husbandry and welfare requirements are met. Considerations should be given to the incorporation of weighing, handling and loading facilities.

10. Ventilation, heating, lighting, feeding, watering and all other equipment should be designed, sited and installed so as to avoid risk of injuring birds.

11. All floors, particularly slatted or metal mesh ones, should be designed, fitted and maintained so as to avoid injury or distress to the birds. Remedial action should be taken if either of these occurs.

12. Nest boxes, (and perches if used), should not be so high above floor level that birds have difficulty or risk injury in using them.

13. Accommodation should be designed and maintained so as to minimise discomfort, distress or injury to the birds.

14. The type and arrangement of accommodation should allow for efficient working and for each bird to be properly inspected. (See also paragraph 29).

15. Accommodation should be of sufficient height to allow standing birds free movement of the head and neck. Part of the floor area for adult birds should be solid. In the case of adult breeding males the whole of the floor area should be solid.

16. The fronts of rearing cages should be kept properly adjusted so that birds have access to feed and water but cannot escape and fall to the floor.

Fire and other emergency precautions

17. Farmers should make advance plans for dealing with emergencies such as fire, flood or disruption of supplies, and should ensure that all staff are familiar with the appropriate emergency action. At least one responsible member of the staff should always be available to take the necessary action.

18. Fire precautions should be a major priority for all stockmen. The provisions of Section 1.3 of the British Standard BS 5502 relating to fire precautions should therefore be followed. Expert advice on all fire precautions is obtainable from fire prevention officers of local fire brigades and from the Fire Prevention Association.

19. In the design of new buildings or alteration of existing ones there should be provision for livestock to be released and evacuated quickly in the case of emergency. Materials used in construction should have sufficient fire resistance and adequate doors and other escape routes should be provided to enable an emergency procedure to be followed in the event of a fire. Where possible straw storage should be separated from livestock accommodation to reduce the risk to stock from fire and smoke.

20. All electrical, gas and oil services should be planned and fitted so that if there is overheating or flame is generated, the risk of flame spreading to equipment, litter or straw (where used) or to the fabric of the building is minimal. It is advisable to site main power on/off controls outside buildings. Consideration should be given to installing fire alarm systems which can be heard and acted upon at any time of the day or night.

21. In case a 999 call has to be made, notices should be prominently displayed in turkey houses where the nearest phone is located. Each phone should have fixed by it a notice giving instructions for the Fire Brigade on how to reach the turkey houses.

22. There is usually some warning of interruptions in the supply of feedingstuffs and, so far as possible, arrangements should be made to lay in adequate stocks of feed or water to offset the worst effects of such a contingency

Ventilation and temperature

23. Ventilation rates and house conditions should at all times be adequate to provide sufficient fresh air for the birds. In particular, accumulations of ammonia, hydrogen sulphide, carbon dioxide, carbon monoxide and dust should be avoided. (3)

24. Care should be taken to protect confined birds from draughts in cold conditions.

25. Birds, particularly those in cages, should not be exposed to strong direct sunlight or hot surroundings long enough to cause heat stress as indicated by prolonged panting.

26 A newly hatched bird has poor control of its body temperature. Environmental conditions during the early part of a poult's life should therefore allow it to maintain its normal body temperature without difficulty. Whatever method of heating is used, the behaviour of the poult should be regarded as the best indicator of the adequacy of the environment. Young poults should not be subjected to conditions which cause either panting due to overheating or prolonged huddling and feather ruffling due to under-heating. After about four to five weeks birds can tolerate a fairly wide range of temperatures; but every effort should be made to avoid creating conditions which will lead to chilling, huddling and subsequent smothering.

27. Close confinement affects the birds' ability to maintain their normal body temperature, but under any management system temperatures hot enough to cause prolonged panting may occur, particularly when humidity is relatively high. All turkey accommodation should therefore be so designed that even when fully stocked its ventilation is adequate to protect the birds from overheating under any weather conditions that can reasonably be foreseen.

Lighting

28. Provision should be made for a period of darkness in each 24-hour cycle, but where birds do not have access to daylight they should be given at least 8 hours lighting per day.

29. Enough light should be available to enable all birds to be seen clearly when they are being inspected. (See also paragraph 39).

Mechanical equipment and services

30. All equipment and services including feed hoppers, drinkers, ventilating fans, heating and lighting units, fire extinguishers and alarm systems should be cleaned and inspected regularly and kept in good working order. (4) All automated equipment should incorporate a fail-safe device and, where the birds' welfare is dependent upon such equipment, an alarm system to warn the stockman of failure. Defects should be rectified immediately or alternative 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.

31. All electrical installations at mains voltage should be inaccessible to the birds and properly earthed. (5)

Stocking rates

32. Irrespective of the type of enclosure or system of management used, all turkeys should have sufficient freedom of movement to be able, without difficulty, to stand normally, turn round and stretch their wings. They should also have sufficient space to be able to perch or sit down without interference from other birds.

33. It cannot be too strongly emphasised that birds kept under any system can be prone to stress, injury and disease if management and husbandry are not of a high standard. Within the present limits of scientific knowledge it is not possible to relate stocking rate to welfare in any simple manner. Stocking rate is only one aspect of a complex situation involving such things as breed, strain and type of bird, colony size, temperature, ventilation, lighting and quality of housing. The observance of any particular rate cannot, by itself, ensure the welfare of the birds.

34. The following figures are a guide to the minimum available floor area per bird which is acceptable in most circumstances:

Rearing

Broiler-type housing	260 cm ² per kg
Tier brooders	515 cm ² per kg
Carry-on cages	
- Hay boxes raised on wire or slats, and verandahs	300 cm ² per kg
Pole barns	410 cm ² per kg
Enclosed range areas	10 m ² per bird

Breeding

On floors

Hens kept for insemination, and hens and males kept together for natural mating	515 cm ² per kg
Males kept for artificial insemination	1 m ² per bird

In individual pens

- Hens	345 cm ² per kg
- Males	1 m ² per bird
In enclosed range areas (590 birds per hectare)	17 m ² per bird

35. If disease (particularly respiratory) or vice becomes evident, by observation or by rejections from processing plants, expert qualified advice should be sought to deal with the problem. Stocking and ventilation rates should also be checked and variations in stocking and ventilation should be considered in order to minimise the likelihood of recurrence of the problem.

Feed and Water

36. Birds should have easy access to adequate fresh feed each day and to adequate fresh water at all times. Care should be taken at any change of system to ensure that the birds find the feed and water points.

37. Stale or contaminated feed or water should not be allowed to accumulate and should be replaced immediately. Efforts should be made to minimise the risk of drinking water freezing.

38. In no case should birds be without feed or water for more than 24 hours.

Management

General

39. Frequent inspection of the stock is essential because the condition and reactions of the birds are the main guides to their welfare. An inspection must be made at least once daily in addition to the looking-over which birds receive during routine management work (see also paragraph 29).(4)
Injured or dead birds should be removed promptly, as should individual sick birds.

40. It is desirable to establish a regular work routine. Care should be taken not to frighten the birds with sudden unaccustomed movement or noise, but without placing too much emphasis on quietness.

41. Adequate control measures should be taken to protect the birds from disturbance by foxes, rodents and other animals.

42. Mouldy litter should not be used. There should be frequent checks to ensure that the litter does not become excessively wet or dry, or infested with mites or other harmful organisms.

43. Premises and equipment should be regularly cleansed. Thorough disinfection should be carried out at suitable times (for example, before restocking) and to reduce the danger of continuing infection.

44. Land on which 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 poultry on the land. The time taken for land to become fowl sick depends on the type of land and the stocking rate. Flocks and portable houses should be moved with sufficient regularity to avoid fowl sick or continuously muddy conditions leading to ill-health or discomfort of the birds.

45. Vaccinations, injections and similar procedures should be undertaken by competent, trained operators. Care should be taken to avoid injury and unnecessary disturbance of the birds.

46. Artificial insemination is a highly-skilled procedure and should be carried out only by competent, trained personnel maintaining a high standard of hygiene and taking care to avoid injury and unnecessary disturbance of the birds

Saddling of hens

47. Before hens are mated they should be fitted with strong saddles, made for example of canvas, to prevent injury to the backs and sides by the males

Toe cutting

48. To avoid injury to hens during mating, even when saddled, the last joint of the inside toes of the male breeding birds should be removed. This must be done within the first 72 hours of life. A veterinary surgeon must carry out the operation if it is performed after the first 72 hours of life.

Beak trimming

49. When birds are kept in daylight conditions they can be vicious, and beak trimming is an essential aid to management. It is usual to trim beaks as a routine measure before birds leave the brooder or the rearing accommodation and normally it need be done once in the lifetime of the stock.

50. When birds are kept in buildings with a light control system, beak trimming should be carried out only when it is clear that more suffering would be caused in the flock if it were not done.

51. Beak trimming should be done by a skilled operator or under his supervision.

Desnooding

52. When desnooding is done, this should be as soon as possible after hatching. A veterinary surgeon must carry out the operation if it is performed after the first 21 days of life.

Dewinging

53. Dewinging, pinioning, notching or tendon severing, which involve mutilation of wing tissue, must not be undertaken. When it is necessary to reduce the effects of flightiness, the flight feathers of one wing may be clipped.

Disposal of unwanted poults and hatchery waste

54. Unwanted poults awaiting slaughter should be treated as humanely as those intended for retention or sale.

55. Poults should always be killed humanely by a skilled operator. The method which should be used is to place them in an atmosphere with the highest obtainable concentration of CO₂ and a source of 100% CO₂ should therefore be used as the disposing agent. This is the most humane method and detailed advice on its use is given in ADAS advisory publication P568. However, where very small numbers of poults are involved they may be killed humanely by dislocation of the neck or by decapitation. Whatever method is used the poults should be thoroughly inspected afterwards to ensure that all are dead.

56. Methods of killing which involve suffocation by tightly packing the unwanted poults in a confined space, or by drowning, or in which irritant liquids such as carbon tetrachloride are allowed to come into direct contact with the poults, are inhumane and should not be used.

57. All hatchery waste should be treated (for example, by rapid maceration) so as to kill instantaneously any living embryos

Handling and transport of stock on the premises

General

58. The proper handling of birds requires skill, and it should be undertaken only by competent persons who have appropriately trained. It should be carried out quietly and confidently, exercising care to avoid unnecessary struggling which could bruise or otherwise injure the birds. Care must be taken in catching birds in loose-housed systems in order to avoid creating panic and subsequent injury to or smothering of the birds. Particular care is also needed so as to avoid injury to birds being placed in or removed from cages, especially where the whole of the cage front does not open.

Day-old poults

59. Poults for despatch should be healthy and vigorous, and should be placed in suitably ventilated boxes without overcrowding. Care should be taken to ensure adequate ventilation of the boxes, particularly when they are stacked, and to protect the poults from direct sunlight and cold draughts.

60. Packing materials used inside boxes should be dry and free from moulds.

61. Poults should be transferred to the brooders as soon as possible.

Handling and transport of stock on the premises

Growing and adult birds

62. The design, size and state of repair of any container used to carry birds should allow them to be put in, conveyed and taken out without injury. Care should also be taken when crates are loaded on to vehicles and in their transportation and unloading. Adequate ventilation for the birds is essential at all times.

63. Birds should be protected from bad weather and from excessively hot or cold conditions. They should not be allowed to become distressed (as indicated by prolonged panting) by being left in containers exposed to strong sunlight.

References

(1) Training courses which follow the Code recommendations are arranged for stockmen by the Agricultural Training Board, Agricultural Colleges and local education authorities. Proficiency testing in relevant subjects is carried out in England and Wales by the National Proficiency Test Council, and in Scotland by the Scottish Association of Young Farmers' Clubs.

(2) The Slaughter of Poultry Act 1967, as amended by the Animal Health and Welfare Act 1984, lays down provisions concerning the welfare of poultry at the time of slaughter wherever it takes place. More detailed provisions concerning the slaughter of poultry for a commercial purpose are laid down in the Slaughter of Poultry (Humane Conditions) Regulations 1984 (SI 1984 No 2056).

(3) The Health and Safety Executive recommends that, for human safety, the following levels should not be exceeded.

Name of Gas	Long term exposure limit (ppm) (8 hour day)	Short term exposure limit (ppm) (10 minutes)
Ammonia	25	35
Carbon Monoxide	50	400
Carbon Dioxide	5,000	5,000
Hydrogen Sulphide	10	10

(4) The Welfare of Livestock (Intensive Units) regulations 1978 (SI 1978 No 1800) require stock keepers of intensive units to inspect their livestock and the equipment upon which such stock depend at least once daily.

(5) Any installation or extension involving mains electricity should comply with the Regulations for the Electrical Equipment of Buildings issued by the Institution of Electrical Engineers.

(6) The Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966 (Schedule 3 Amendment) Order 1988 (SI 1988 No 526) permits only a veterinary surgeon to desnood a turkey which has reached the age of 21 days or to cut the toes of a turkey which has reached the age of 72 hours.

(7) Beak trimming (sometimes known as debeaking) means the removal from a bird of not more than one-third of the beak measured from the tip up towards the entrance of the nostrils. The operation, if not undertaken by a veterinary surgeon, must be carried out as prescribed in the Veterinary Surgery (Exemptions) Order 1962 (SI 1962 No 2557).

(8) The Welfare of Livestock (Prohibited Operations) Regulations 1982 (SI 1982 No 1884) prohibit the fitting of blinkers to poultry by a method involving mutilation of the nasal septum, operations on birds (other than feeder clipping) to impede their flight and the surgical castration of male birds.

(9) Regulations for the protection of poultry when being carried by water, rail or road, or exposed for sale, as contained in the Conveyance of Live Poultry Order 1919 (SI 1919 No 10091), the Poultry (Exposure for Sale) Order 1937 (SI 1937 No 5494), and the Transit of Animals (General) Order 1973 (SI 1973 No 1377). The recommendations made in this Section of the Code relate to handling and transport operations which are not covered by those Orders.