

Interim guidance for keepers of conventionally reared meat chickens in relation to the Welfare of Farmed Animals (England) Regulations 2007 as amended by the Welfare of Farmed Animals (England) (amendment) Regulations 2010

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Contents

Introduction	4
Definitions	4
Training for keepers	5
Feed and water	6
Inspection	7
Disease Control and Slaughter/Killing on Farm	8
Mutilations.....	9
Beak trimming.....	9
Buildings and accommodation	10
Ventilation and temperature	10
Lighting	11
Litter	12
Stocking density and freedom of movement.....	13
Record Keeping	14

Introduction

1. The Welfare of Farmed Animals (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2010 implement the majority of the requirements of [Council Directive 2007/43](#) regarding meat chicken welfare. These Regulations amend the [Welfare of Farmed Animals \(England\) Regulations 2007](#), primarily through the addition of Schedule 5A. The mutilations provisions of Directive 2007/43 are implemented through the [Mutilations \(Permitted Procedures\) \(England\) \(Amendment\) Regulations 2010](#). These Regulations amend the [Mutilations \(Permitted Procedures\) \(England\) Regulations 2007](#) (as amended.)

2. The purpose of this interim guidance is to provide practical guidance in relation to the provisions in the Welfare of Farmed Animals (England) Regulations 2007 (as amended), and the Mutilations (Permitted Procedures) (England) Regulations 2007 (as amended) in relation to the welfare of conventionally reared meat chickens. This interim guidance should be read alongside the Code of Recommendations for the Welfare of Livestock: Meat Chickens and Breeding Chickens. It is our intention to publish a new Code in due course under section 14 of the Animal Welfare Act 2006.

3. Legal requirements are highlighted in text boxes with practical guidance provided underneath.

Definitions

4. For the purposes of this interim guidance a number of definitions are summarised below.

‘keeper’ means any natural or legal person responsible for or in charge of chickens in terms of contract or by law whether on a permanent or temporary basis;

‘meat chicken’ means an animal of the species *Gallus gallus* kept for meat production or breeding stock used to produce such chickens

“conventionally reared meat chickens” are meat chickens except for those:

(a) on holdings with fewer than 500 meat chickens or with only breeding stocks of chickens;

(b) on hatcheries;

(c) to which the term “Extensive indoor (barn reared)”, “Free range”, “Traditional free range” or “Free range – total freedom” can be used within the meaning of point (b), (c), (d) or (e) of Annex V to Commission Regulation (EC) No 543/2008 laying down detailed rules for the application of Council Regulation (EC) No 1234/2007 as regards the marketing standards for poultrymeat; or

d) organically reared in accordance with Council Regulation (EC) No 834/2007 on organic production and labelling of organic products and repealing Regulation (EEC) No 2092/91.

‘holding’ means a production site on which chickens are kept;

‘house’ means a building on a holding where a flock of chickens are kept;

‘useable area’ means a littered area accessible to the chickens at any time;

‘stocking density’ means the total live weight of chickens which are present in a house at the same time per square metre of useable area;

‘flock’ means a group of chickens which are placed in a house of a holding and are present in this house at the same time;

'daily mortality rate' means the number of chickens which have died in a house on the same day including those that have been culled either for disease or because of other reasons divided by the number of chickens present in the house on that day, multiplied by 100;

'cumulative daily mortality rate' means the sum of daily mortality rates.

Training for keepers

Schedule 5A Part 2 of the Welfare of Farmed Animals (England) Regulations 2007 (as amended) states:

2(1) A keeper must hold a certificate recognised by the Secretary of State for the purposes of Article 4(3) or (4) of Council Directive 2007/43/EC (certificates of completion of training courses or equivalent experience).

(2) The Secretary of State must publish from time to time, in such a way as the Secretary of State considers appropriate, a list of certificates recognised by the Secretary of State for the purposes of sub-paragraph (1).

5. Stockmanship is one of the most important influences on the welfare of farmed animals. The Farm Animal Welfare Council's Three Essentials of Stockmanship encompass the desired attributes of a good stockperson:

Knowledge of animal husbandry: demonstrated through an understanding of the biology and husbandry of farm animals, including how their needs may be best provided for in all circumstances;

Skills in animal husbandry: demonstrable skills in observation, handling, care and treatment of animals, and problem detection and resolution;

Personal qualities: Affinity and empathy with animals, dedication and patience.

6. All keepers of meat chickens in conventional systems must have a certificate attesting to a completion of a recognised training course. The course must cover in particular the areas covered by Annex IV to Directive 2007/43/EC:

- Annexes I and II of the Directive
- Physiology, in particular drinking and feeding needs, animal behaviour and the concept of stress;
- The practical aspects of the careful handling of chickens and catching, loading and transport;
- Emergency care for chickens, emergency killing and culling; and
- Preventative biosecurity measures.

Further guidance on training and qualifications is available from the Defra website.

<http://www.defra.gov.uk/foodfarm/faranimal/welfare/onfarm/meatchks.htm>

7. A grandfather rights scheme will also operate in order to recognise prior experience. A copy of the application form (the Meat Chicken Notification Form) can be obtained from Newcastle Animal Health Office in writing (North

East Animal Health Regional Office, Quadrant, Newburn Riverside, Newcastle Upon Tyne, NE15 8NZ). Alternatively, you can call the Animal Health Broiler Directive Helpline on 0845 601 4858.

To qualify for Grandfather Rights, a keeper must be at least 21 years of age; and have a minimum of 5 years experience of keeping meat chickens in the last 10 years; have never been convicted of any animal welfare offence and understand and be competent in the following:

- Annex I & II of Council Directive 2007/43/EC
- Physiology, in particular drinking and feeding needs, animal behaviour and the concept of stress;
- The practical aspects of the careful handling of chickens, and catching, loading and transport
- Emergency care for chickens, emergency killing and culling and
- Preventive bio-security measures

Keepers of meat chickens will have until 30 June 2011 to sign up for Grandfather Rights.

After this date, no more applications will be processed. There will be no pre-checks and the granting of Grandfather Rights will be carried out by self declaration. If a keeper is granted Grandfather Rights and it is demonstrated that they are responsible for a welfare non-compliance, Animal Health may request, through an action plan, that the keeper undergoes formal training.

Feed and water

Schedule 5A, paragraph 6 of the Welfare of Farmed Animals (England) Regulations 2007 (as amended) states that:

- (1) Drinkers must be positioned and maintained in such a way that spillage is minimised.
- (2) Feed must be either continuously available or be meal fed.
- (3) Feed must not be withdrawn from chickens more than 12 hours before the expected slaughter time.

8. All birds should have daily access to feed. When introducing birds to a new environment, the keeper should ensure that the birds can find feed and water

9. Correctly balanced nutrition designed specifically for the age and strain of the bird is important for rearing healthy meat chickens. Feed management practices should incorporate nutritional guidance for strain type provided by the breeder's recommendations and company supplying the birds, in addition to any veterinary advice.

10. Rapid growth rates in meat chickens can contribute to the development of certain conditions such as ascites, sudden death syndrome and lameness.

Whilst environment and genetics should also be considered as part of managing such conditions, control of growth rate by careful nutrient management, whilst not impacting overall on final body weight may reduce the incidence of such conditions. However, any changes in diet quantity or quality should be managed collaboratively with nutrition specialists and veterinary advisers. Consideration should also be given to breeder recommendations. Sudden changes in the type, quantity and make-up of feed should be avoided.

11. Feed must not be withheld from meat chickens for more than 12 hours before expected slaughter time. Prior to transport water should be provided up to the start of the loading procedure. Feed and water must be provided when journeys last more than 12 hours, not counting loading and unloading time. Provided chicks arrive at their destination within 72 hours after hatching and the duration of travel is not more than 24 hours, then feed and water need not be provided in transit. However, if any of these parameters are exceeded then feed and water must be provided.

12. Leakage or spillage from the water drinkers can significantly increase the moisture content of the litter with a negative impact on litter quality and thus bird health. This should therefore be resolved as soon as possible. Litter replacement may be necessary in the short term in badly affected areas in conjunction with raised ventilation and temperatures to remove large amounts of excess moisture. However long term solutions need to be found and appropriate specialist advice should be sought where appropriate.

Inspection

Schedule 5A, paragraph 11 of the Welfare of Farmed Animals (England) Regulations 2007 (as amended) states:

- A keeper must ensure that all chickens kept on the holding must be inspected at least twice a day.
- Special attention must be paid to signs indicating a reduced level of animal health or welfare.
- Chickens that are seriously injured or show evident signs of health disorder (including those having difficulties in walking, severe ascites or severe malformations), and are likely to suffer, must receive appropriate treatment or be culled immediately.

13. In order to reduce the risk of welfare problems developing a systematic inspection of all flocks must be undertaken at least twice each day at appropriate intervals. Young birds in the first few days of life should be inspected at least three times a day.

14. Light levels during inspection should be sufficient to ensure that all birds in all parts of the house are clearly visible. In order to ensure a thorough inspection the keeper should walk within three metres of every bird and encourage it to move, taking care not to frighten the birds with sudden, unaccustomed movement, noise or changes in light levels. The aim should be to pass close enough to the birds to see them clearly and for them to be

disturbed and so move away. This should enable the identification of any individual that is sick, injured or weak.

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

16. While it may not be possible to examine each bird individually during routine inspection a good indication of flock health should be gained on each occasion. Keepers should establish in advance the best course of action to take should problems be identified and ensure that veterinary or other expert advice is available when needed.

Disease Control and Slaughter/Killing on Farm

Schedule 5A, paragraph 11 of the Welfare of Farmed Animals (England) Regulations 2007 (as amended) states that:

- Special attention must be paid to signs indicating a reduced level of animal health or welfare.
- Chickens that are seriously injured or show evident signs of health disorder (including those having difficulties in walking, severe ascites or severe malformations), and are likely to suffer, must receive appropriate treatment or be culled immediately.

Schedule 5A, paragraph 12 of the Welfare of Farmed Animals (England) Regulations' 2007 (as amended) states that:

After the final depopulation of a house and before a new flock is introduced:

- (a) Any part of a house and any equipment or utensil which has been in contact with chickens must be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected; and
- (b) All litter must be removed and clean litter provided.

17. A health and welfare plan should be implemented for each holding which sets out health and husbandry activities covering the whole of the production cycle for each type of house used . It should also establish management procedures and control measures to reduce the risk of infections and injury. The plan should outline the biosecurity for both staff and other possible items e.g equipment and detail the hygiene and disinfection procedures to be used. This may be in the form of a documented standard operating procedure. The plan should be developed with appropriate veterinary advice, reviewed against performance and updated accordingly.

18. Any sick, injured or weak birds should immediately be removed to a hospital pen, providing that they are able to eat, drink and stand unassisted, and examined frequently throughout the day. However, if a bird is suffering and cannot be treated or if it fails to show significant improvement within 24 hours of being placed in the hospital pen it should be humanely killed without delay. Birds with considerable difficulty in walking, severe ascites, malformations, severe wounds or seizures should be culled immediately

unless they can be treated and are likely to recover without unnecessary suffering. Dead birds should be removed and disposed of appropriately without delay.

19. All those in contact with birds should practice strict hygiene and disinfection procedures and comply with any standard operating procedures particularly when moving between houses, to limit disease spread. Where possible the site should be managed so that all houses are empty simultaneously to facilitate effective cleaning, disinfection and disinfection. An “all in – all out” approach with periods when there are no birds on site will also act to provide a disease break. Where multi-age sites are managed, a regular routine should be followed in attending to youngest flocks first through to oldest

20. Once empty, bird accommodation should be first dry cleaned to remove organic material, washed and then disinfected. When houses are emptied and cleaned, old litter must be removed from the site before re-stocking so as to reduce the risk of carryover of disease.

Mutilations

Schedule 4, paragraph A1 of the Mutilations (Permitted Procedures) (England) Regulations 2007 (as amended) states that:

none of the permitted procedures set out in the Schedule may be performed on conventionally reared meat chickens (except for beak trimming in certain circumstances).

Beak trimming

Schedule 4, paragraph 5 of the Mutilations (Permitted Procedures) (England) Regulations 2007 (as amended) states that:

beak trimming may only be carried out on conventionally reared meat chickens which are less than 10 days old, in order to prevent feather pecking and cannibalism. The procedure:

(a) may only be performed in order to prevent feather pecking and cannibalism;

(b) may not be performed on birds which are aged 10 days or over;

(c) must be carried out by a person who has been provided with suitable and sufficient information, instruction and training so that they are qualified to perform the procedure; and

(d) must only be carried out following a consultation and on the advice of a veterinarian.

21. Beak trimming of birds reared for meat should not be necessary because they are normally slaughtered before reaching sexual maturity.

Buildings and accommodation

Ventilation and temperature

For birds being stocked at the higher densities provided for (more than 33kg/m² up to a maximum of 39kg/m²) under the Welfare of Farmed Animals (England) Regulations 2007 (as amended), Schedule 5A, paragraph 5 requires the flock keeper to:

(a) Maintain and, on request, make available documentation in the house giving a detailed description of the production systems, in particular information on technical details of the house and its equipment including:

(i) A plan including the dimensions of the surfaces occupied by the chickens;

(ii) Ventilation and any relevant cooling and heating system (including their location) and a ventilation plan, detailing target air quality parameters (including airflow, air speed and temperature);

(iii) Feeding and watering systems (and their location);

(iv) Alarm and backup systems in the event of failure of any equipment essential for the health and well-being of any of the chickens;

(v) Floor type and litter normally used; and

(vi) Records of technical inspections of the ventilation and alarm systems.

(b) Keep up to date the documentation referred to;

(c) Ensure that each house is equipped with ventilation, and if necessary, heating and cooling systems designed, constructed and operated in such a way that:

(i) The concentration of ammonia (NH₃) does not exceed 20 parts per million measured at the level of the chickens' heads; and

(ii) The concentration of carbon dioxide (CO₂) does not exceed 3000 parts per million measured at the level of the chickens' heads; and

(iii) When the outside temperature measured in the shade exceeds 30 degrees C, the inside temperature does not exceed the outside temperature by more than 3 degrees C; and

(iv) The average relative humidity measured inside the house during 48 hours does not exceed 70% when the outside temperature is below 10 degrees C.

22. The keeper must have available for each house the following documented information:

Information on the technical details of the ventilation and, if relevant, the cooling and heating system including their location, the size of the inlets and outlets and fans number, size and anticipated performance.

A ventilation plan; and

Records of technical inspections of the ventilation and alarm systems.

23. The documentation shall be made available to inspectors on request and must be kept up-to-date e.g. to account for changes to the structure of the house or the ventilation system.

24. The **ventilation plan** must provide details of the operational parameters such as airflow, air speed and temperature that will ensure that:

- i. The concentration of NH₃ does not exceed 20ppm measured at the level of the chickens' heads;
- ii. The concentration of CO₂ does not exceed 3000ppm measured at the level of the chickens' heads;
- iii. The inside temperature, when the outside temperature measured in the shade exceeds 30°C, does not exceed this temperature by 3°C; and
- iv. The average relative humidity measured inside the house during 48 hours* does not exceed 70% when the outside temperature is below 10°C. It is recommended that relative humidity be measured daily and the average should not exceed 70% when the outside temperature is continually below 10°C for any 48 hour period.

25. Evidence that the plan is meeting these operational requirements may be provided by maintaining a record of direct measurements of NH₃, CO₂, relative humidity and temperatures.

26. Continuous measurement of CO₂ and NH₃ is not required but as a minimum, measurements of CO₂ and NH₃ should be taken when these agents pose the maximal risk. Usually for CO₂ this is during brooding and for NH₃ during periods of maximum stocking density especially during colder weather.

27. The plan must also include details of the alarm and back-up systems and a procedure for dealing with heat stress. The plan should be revised whenever there are any major changes to the structure of the house or to the ventilation system.

28. As regards **technical inspections**, it is recommended that between crops, a visual inspection should be made of the air inlets and fans. The function of the heaters, temperature probes and the control system should also be checked. It is also advisable to carry out periodic safety checks on the electrical and gas installations. Any technical inspections of the ventilation and alarm systems must be recorded.

Lighting

Schedule 5A, paragraph 10 of the Welfare of Farmed Animals (England) Regulations 2007 (as amended) states that:

(1) All houses must have lighting with an intensity of at least 20 lux during the lighting periods, measured at bird eye level and illuminating at least 80% of the usable area.

(2) A temporary reduction from that lighting level is permitted where necessary following veterinary advice.

(3) Within 7 days from the time when the chickens are placed in the house and until 3 days before the expected time of slaughter, the lighting must follow a 24-hour rhythm and include periods of darkness lasting at least 6 hours in total, with at least one uninterrupted period of darkness of at least 4 hours, excluding dimming periods.

29. Throughout the rearing period, meat chickens must be housed at light levels which allow them to see clearly and which stimulate activity. This will be achieved by lighting systems designed, maintained and operated to give a minimum light of 20 lux at bird height over at least 80% of the useable area. If a behavioural problem such as cannibalism occurs, it may be necessary following veterinary advice to dim the lights for a few days.

30. Throughout the rearing period, meat chickens must be provided with at least 6 hours of darkness in a 24-hour rhythm with an uninterrupted period of darkness of at least 4 hours. Keepers should be mindful that this will lead to a significant increase in bird activity when the lighting level is restored. Greater attention to management practices will therefore be required to ensure that the birds' welfare is maintained at this time. For example, sufficient feeders and drinkers must be available to allow all birds to eat and drink at the same time following the period of darkness. Attention will also need to be paid to litter condition, particularly under nipple lines, which could become wet due to the number of birds drinking at the same time.

31. A "dawn and dusk" light provision with gradual increases and reduction in lighting may help manage the change in activity levels of birds. Buildings that expose birds to natural daylight can effectively provide this transition and, because the bird is exposed to the natural UV spectrum, this may have additional beneficial effects on birds' behaviour. However there should be a facility to reduce exposure to natural daylight if bird welfare is compromised by high light levels or for specific management procedures, for example catching.

Litter

Regulation 2 (1) of the Welfare of farmed Animals (England) Regulations 2007 (as amended) state that:

"litter" means in relation to laying hens and conventionally reared meat chickens, any friable material enabling those birds to satisfy their ethological needs:

Schedule 5A, paragraph 7 of the Welfare of Farmed Animals (England) Regulations 2007 (as amended) states that:

All chickens must have permanent access to litter which is dry and friable on the surface.

32. Meat chickens spend their lives in contact with litter and their health and welfare are linked to its quality. Conditions such as hock burn, pododermatitis (foot pad lesions) and breast blisters are usually consequences of poor litter quality. Well-designed equipment and high standards of management are important if good litter quality is to be maintained. The ventilation capacity should be sufficient to avoid overheating and to remove excess moisture. The feed composition should be well balanced to avoid problems with wet or sticky droppings.

33. Litter must be kept loose and friable and measures should be taken to minimise the risk of mould and mite infestation. It should be inspected frequently for signs of deterioration and appropriate action should be taken to rectify any problem. Litter should also be inspected to ensure it does not become excessively wet or dry. A drinker system which minimises water spillage should be used, such as water nipples with drip cups positioned at an appropriate height for all birds. Nipple drinkers without cups may be used if they are well managed and the water pressure is checked frequently.

Stocking density and freedom of movement

Schedule 5A, paragraph 3 of the Welfare of Farmed Animals (England) Regulations 2007 (as amended) states that :

(1) Unless sub-paragraph (2) applies, the stocking density must not exceed 33 kilograms per m² of usable area.

(2) A stocking density in excess of 33 kilograms and up to 39 kilograms per m² of usable area may be used if the requirements of paragraph 5 are complied with.

Schedule 5A , paragraph 4 of the Welfare of Farmed Animals (England) Regulations 2007 (as amended) states that:

(1) A keeper must ensure that the Secretary of State is notified of the intended stocking density of each house where it is intended to keep chickens at a density in excess of 33 kilograms per m² of usable area, and of any subsequent change to that notified density.

(2) Notification must be made in such manner and form as the Secretary of State may require.

(3) Notification (including notification of any change) must be given at least 15 working days before stocking at that density or changed density takes place.

(4) In this paragraph “working day” means a day other than a Saturday or a Sunday, Christmas Day, Good Friday or a day which is a bank holiday in England and Wales under the Banking and Financial Dealings Act 1971.

34. A variety of factors need to be taken into account when setting and monitoring stocking densities in order to promote good welfare. Whilst stocking density is important it cannot, by itself, ensure the welfare of the birds. There is a close relationship between stockmanship, environmental

control and stocking density. Birds will be maintained in good condition only if the balance is right, and the onus is on the keeper to demonstrate that welfare is not compromised, whatever the stocking density.

35. Stocking density should be set taking account of reports of post-mortem inspection results from the slaughterhouse, the house facilities and the competence of the keeper. In order to stock above 33kg/m² up to a maximum of 39kg/m² there must be compliance with the additional requirements of Schedule 5A, paragraph 5 of the Welfare of Farmed Animals (England) Regulations 2007 (as amended).

36. Poor locomotion and gait may be associated with higher stocking densities. Irrespective of the type of system, all chickens should have sufficient freedom of movement to be able, without difficulty, to stand normally, turn around and stretch their wings. They should also have sufficient space to be able to sit without interference from other birds.

37. Stocking density should be reduced and specialist advice taken if problems occur; in particular, excessive heat or humidity due to inadequate ventilation, and poor litter quality. If disease or environmental problems arise in a particular building or system, reducing the stocking density in subsequent flocks may lessen the likelihood of recurrence.

38. Thinning can be stressful and should only be carried out if done with care to ensure minimal disturbance to the birds and to their feeding and watering, and to maintain biosecurity.

39. Keepers will need to notify Animal Health of their intention to stock chickens above 33kg/m² up to a maximum of 39kg/m². This can be done by completing a Meat Chicken Notification Form. Keepers in England will receive a form early in 2011 from Animal Health which will be pre-populated based on details contained in the GB Poultry register. If you do not receive a form or are new to meat chicken production, then please contact the Newcastle Animal Health Office in writing (North East Animal Health Regional Office, Quadrant, Newburn Riverside, Newcastle Upon Tyne, NE15 8NZ) to request a form or call the Animal Health Broiler Directive Helpline on 0845 601 4858. Please note that the same form can be used to apply for Grandfather Rights in respect of formal training.

Record Keeping

Schedule 5A, paragraph 13 of the Welfare of Farmed Animals (England) Regulations 2007 (as amended) states:

- 13.—(1) A keeper must maintain, for each house, a record of—
- (a) the number of chickens introduced;
 - (b) the usable area;
 - (c) the hybrid or breed of the chickens (if known);

(d) the number of chickens found dead, with an indication of the causes (if known), as well as the number of chickens culled with cause, on each inspection; and

(e) the number of chickens remaining in the flock following the removal of chickens for sale or slaughter.

(2) The record must be retained for at least 3 years.

Schedule 5A, paragraph 14 of the Welfare of Farmed Animals (England) Regulations 2007 (as amended) states:

14.- (1) For the purposes of Section III (food chain information) of Annex II to Regulation 853/2004, the daily mortality rate and cumulative daily mortality rate and the hybrid or breed of chickens from a flock with a stocking density in excess of 33 kilograms per m² of useable area is treated as relevant food safety information.

40. An example calculation of the cumulative daily mortality rate can be seen at www.defra.gov.uk/foodfarm/farmanimal/welfare/onfarm/documents/cdm-rate.pdf An excel spreadsheet is also available that producers can use to calculate cumulative daily mortality rate for their own flocks.

www.defra.gov.uk/foodfarm/farmanimal/welfare/onfarm/meatchks-stock33.htm