

JERSEY CODE OF PRACTICE FOR THE WELFARE OF

POULTRY

THE CODE

The Code of recommendations for the welfare of poultry is intended to encourage all those responsible for looking after these birds to adopt the highest standards of husbandry. It takes account of five basic needs, known as the "Five Freedoms".

The Five Freedoms are:

1. FREEDOM FROM HUNGER AND THIRST

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

2. FREEDOM FROM DISCOMFORT

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

3. FREEDOM FROM PAIN, INJURY OR DISEASE

- by prevention or by rapid diagnosis and treatment;

4. FREEDOM TO EXPRESS NORMAL BEHAVIOUR

- by providing sufficient space, proper facilities and company of the animals' own kind;

5. FREEDOM FROM FEAR AND DISTRESS

- by ensuring conditions and treatment to avoid mental suffering.

The Code identifies good stockmanship as a key factor in animal welfare and this code is an essential tool for every poultry keeper. Everyone involved with domestic fowl should read it carefully and to bear its recommendations in mind at all times.

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 poultry keepers, particularly those who are young or inexperienced, to attain the required standards.

INTRODUCTION

1. The welfare of domestic fowls 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 skill of the poultry keeper.**

2. Consideration should be given to the question of animal welfare before installing more complex or elaborate equipment that 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 the 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 person in charge will be able to safeguard the welfare of the individual bird.
4. All poultry keepers should know the normal behaviour of domestic fowls and watch closely for signs of distress or disease and, where necessary, take prompt remedial action.
5. The good poultry keeper will know the signs which indicate good health in domestic fowls. 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 keeper'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 and 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 food 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.

HOUSING

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. Consideration 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, and perches should be designed, fitted and maintained so as to avoid distress or injury to the birds. Remedial action should be taken if any of these occurs.
12. Even where ladders are provided, nest boxes, roosting areas and perches should not be so high above floor level that birds have difficulty in using them or risk injury.
13. 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

14. 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.

15. Care should be taken to protect confined birds from draughts in cold conditions.
16. Birds should not be exposed to strong direct sunlight or hot surroundings long enough to cause heat stress as indicated by prolonged panting.
17. Young chicks should not be subjected to conditions which cause either panting due to the overheating or prolonged huddling and feather ruffling due to under-heating. Every effort should be made to avoid creating conditions which will lead to chilling, huddling and subsequent smothering.
18. Close confinement affects the birds' ability to maintain their normal body temperature, but under any management system ambient temperatures hot enough to cause prolonged panting may occur, particularly when humidity is relatively high. All 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.

Stocking rates

19. Irrespective of the type of enclosure or system of management used, all domestic fowls 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 perch or sit down without interference from other birds.

20. 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.

21. The following figures are a guide to the maximum stocking rates acceptable in most circumstances for domestic fowl husbandry systems in Jersey. These rates may be safely increased where suitable perching is provided. A perch of not less than 15 cm is generally appropriate for a bird but, even where such perching is provided for every bird, stocking should not be at more than 11.7 birds per square metre of available floor space.

SYSTEM	DENSITY (Live weight in relation to floor area)	QUALIFICATIONS
Deep Litter		
Birds being reared for laying	17 kg / m ²	
Adult laying birds	17 kg / m ²	No more than 7 birds/m ²
Table Chickens	34 kg / m ²	
Housing for free-range birds	As for Deep Litter systems	

22. If disease, particularly respiratory, or any vice becomes evident, 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

MANAGEMENT

Feed and water

23. Birds should have easy access to adequate, nutritious, and hygienic feed each day, and to adequate fresh water at all times except in the case of therapeutic or prophylactic treatment. Care should be taken at each change of system to ensure that the birds find the feed and water points.

24. 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. Feed stores should be vermin proof.

25. In no circumstances should birds be induced to moult by withholding feed and water.

Husbandry

26. 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. Injured or dead birds should be removed promptly, as should individual sick birds.

27. 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.

28. Precautions should be taken by adequate control measures to protect the birds from and avoid disturbances by rodents and other animals.

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

30. Premises and equipment should be regularly cleansed. Thorough disinfection should be carried out before restocking and at other suitable times to reduce the danger of continuing infection.

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

32. Artificial insemination is a highly-skilled procedure and can be carried out only in accordance with a licence issued by the Minister for Planning and Environment.

33. A programme to control vermin, without endangering the birds, should be in place.

Beak trimming

34. Beak trimming should be avoided by using suitable management practices but if it is necessary it should be done but only by a knowledgeable skilled operator or under his supervision.

Dubbing

35. If dubbing is necessary it must be done hygienically within the first 72 hours of life, using curved scissors. Dubbing of older birds is a difficult and severe operation which must be done only by a veterinary surgeon.

Toe-cutting

36. To avoid injury to hens during mating, the last joint of the inside toes of male breeding birds may be removed. This must be done hygienically 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. Toe cutting must not be carried out as a method of identification

Dewinging

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

Blinkers

38. The use of blinkers which pierce the nasal septum is illegal. Other forms of blinkering are not recommended.

Castration and devoicing

39. Surgical castration and devoicing must not be undertaken.

EMERGENCIES/FIRE PREVENTION

40. 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 an 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 the storage of straw should be kept separate from livestock accommodation, this will reduce the risk of fire and smoke.

HANDLING AND TRANSPORT OF STOCK ON THE PREMISES

41. The proper handling of birds requires skill, and it should be undertaken only by competent persons who have been 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 and smothering of the birds.

Growing and adult birds

42. 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.

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

ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS: RANGE BIRDS

Management

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 density of stocking. The stocking

rate to be used in Jersey should generally not exceed 200 birds per vergee. Heavy, poorly drained soil can carry fewer birds than land which is light and well drained. In general land can be stocked more heavily by birds in small flocks of 100 or so when accommodated in well spaced and regularly moved houses than when kept in larger flocks in static houses. Flocks and portable houses should be moved regularly to avoid fowl sick or continuously muddy conditions leading to ill-health or discomfort of the birds.

45. It is important to ensure that the land to which the birds have access is adequately covered with suitable, properly managed vegetation.

46. Precautions should be taken to protect the birds against predators, dogs and cats.

47. Shelter from rain and sun should always be available.

Housing

48. Housing used by range birds should be of sufficient standard to ensure that the birds are not subject to distress caused by extremes of temperature.

49. When birds are transferred to range houses, precautions should be taken to avoid overcrowding and suffocation, particularly during the first few nights. Cannibalism is a danger under this system, and birds should not be confined for too long during hours of daylight or subjected to direct sunlight during confinement.

50. All birds must have ready access to range and there should be sufficient openings spaced and of sufficient size to allow a reasonable proportion of birds to enter or leave at any one time.

51. Unless the house is moved frequently it is good practice to protect the ground immediately adjacent to it, e.g. by providing slatted or wire mesh platforms, covered verandahs or areas of gravel.

Feed and water

52. Feed and water should never be allowed to remain in a stale or contaminated condition. In freezing conditions, particular attention should be given to the provision of water.

LEGISLATION

53. The following legislation is of relevance:

- Animal Welfare (Jersey) Law 2004
- Animal Health (Jersey) Law 2016
- Veterinary Surgeons (Jersey) Law 1999
- Community Provisions (Welfare of Animals during Transport) (Jersey) Regulations 2013

13-02 AWC (31/01/07) (legislation amended 19/10/17)