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RSPCA welfare standards for Pullets (laying hens)

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Introduction

The 'RSPCA welfare standards for pullets (laying hens)' are used to provide the only RSPCA-approved scheme for the rearing, handling and transport of pullets (laying hens). The 'RSPCA welfare standards for pullets (laying hens)' take account of legislation, government welfare codes, scientific research, veterinary advice, recommendations of the Farm Animal Welfare Committee (FAWC) and the practical experience of the farming industry.

The standards are based upon the 'Five Freedoms' as defined by FAWC. Although these 'freedoms' define ideal states, they provide a comprehensive framework for the assessment of animal welfare on farm and in transit, 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/provide:

- **caring and responsible planning and management**
- **skilled, knowledgeable and conscientious stockmanship**
- **appropriate environmental design**
- **considerate handling and transport**
- **humane culling/euthanasia.**

Guide to the use of the RSPCA welfare standards

- i) The numbered requirements are the standards, all of which must be complied with.
- ii) Boxed sections (indicated by **(i)**) give additional information, including: providing the reasoning behind a standard, expanding on a standard, stating how a standard can/will be assessed and/or highlighting areas where the standards will be reviewed in the future.
- iii) It is expected that all relevant UK legislation regarding farm animal husbandry and welfare on-farm and during transport, will be fully implemented in addition to the RSPCA welfare standards.
- iv) **It is expected that pullet rearers have a thorough knowledge of the 'Defra Code of practice for the welfare of laying hens and pullets'**



RSPCA Farm Animals Department

The RSPCA's Farm Animals Department develops the RSPCA welfare standards for farm animals. These detailed documents are intended to represent 'best practice' in the care and welfare of farm animals.

The RSPCA works to continually develop and improve the welfare standards using a range of information, including the latest scientific research and practical farming experience. We regularly consult with other animal welfare and agricultural scientists, veterinary surgeons, and farming industry representatives. This helps to ensure that the RSPCA welfare standards continue to be at the forefront of farm animal care and welfare, and are also achievable on commercial farms.

The standards also take account of feedback from RSPCA Farm Livestock Officers who carry out monitoring of the RSPCA Assured scheme, RSPCA Assured Assessors who audit scheme members, and the scheme members themselves.

We always value constructive feedback and ideas for improvement from those who are implementing the RSPCA welfare standards. Comments/feedback can be discussed with:

- i) RSPCA Farm Animals Department scientific staff, by contacting them on the below details:

Address: Farm Animals Department

RSPCA
Wilberforce Way
Southwater
Horsham
West Sussex
RH13 9RS

Telephone: 0300 123 0183

Email: farm-animals@rspca.org.uk

- ii) RSPCA Farm Livestock Officers, who can discuss any issues during farm visits and offer advice, and can provide feedback to the RSPCA Farm Animals Department scientific staff.



RSPCA Assured

RSPCA Assured is the RSPCA's farm assurance and food labelling scheme. RSPCA Assured assesses and approves farms, hauliers and abattoirs that meet all of the applicable RSPCA welfare standards. (Please note that RSPCA Assured does not approve equipment).

Products from animals reared under the RSPCA Assured scheme can be labelled with the scheme's food label: 'RSPCA Assured'. Use of the RSPCA Assured name and mark are strictly subject to RSPCA Assured membership, traceability, licence fee and artwork approval. Membership of the scheme is subject to an annual fee and successful assessment, as well as monitoring visits by Farm Livestock Officers from the RSPCA's Farm Animals Department.

RSPCA Assured is a charity in its own right and not for profit. Any surplus income goes back into improving farm animal welfare.

Any queries relating to the operation of the RSPCA Assured scheme (e.g. administration, assessments etc.) should be directed to the RSPCA Assured office (0300 123 0014; help@rspcaassured.org.uk).

Food and water

Livestock need to have ready access to fresh water and a diet to maintain full health and promote a positive state of well-being.

- FW 1.1** Food and water must be provided immediately prior to the placement of chicks to ensure there is no deterioration caused by heat during brooding.
- FW 1.2** Examples of the feeding and watering equipment to be used post-brooding must be included within the brooder area (either the surround or the whole house).
- FW 1.3** Where spot brooding is used, care must be taken to ensure feeders and drinkers do not become hot, especially where metal feeders are used.
- FW 1.4** Stock-keepers must ensure that chicks are feeding and drinking properly and should check the birds' crops following placement.
- FW 1.5** Feeders and drinkers must be equally spaced within the house.

i The use of box lids, new egg box cartons or special chick feeders is permitted.

- FW 1.6** Feeders and drinkers must be hygienically managed.
- FW 1.7** Particular attention must be given to the provision of food and water in areas frequented by subordinate birds.
- FW 1.8** Wire over feeders and drinkers must:
- not be electrified
 - be demonstrated not to be ever connected to an electricity source.

i Where there is a risk of contamination of food and water, producers should use alternative devices, such as roller bars, to discourage the birds from perching over feeding and drinking facilities.

Food

- FW 2.1** All units must have a written feeding programme to ensure that birds are fed a wholesome diet which:
- is appropriate to their stage of production
 - is fed to them in sufficient quantity to maintain them in good health
 - satisfies their nutritional needs
 - is provided at all times each day, except when required by the attending veterinary surgeon
 - includes a written record of the nutrient content of the feed as declared by the feed compounder
 - includes provision of insoluble grit designed for use by poultry (e.g. flint) of appropriate size and quantity
 - includes provision of insoluble grit no less than once weekly.

i The provision of insoluble grit for laying hens is considered to be very important to aid digestion, and can be beneficial to young pullets as well as to laying hens. Birds should be provided with an appropriate quantity of insoluble grit from 3 weeks of age and throughout their lives. The recommended size and amount given per bird should be as follows:

Age of bird	Size of grit	Quantity of grit
Chicks (from 3 weeks of age)	0.2mm	1g per bird (maximum) given once a week with food.
Pullets (6 to 11 weeks old)	3.24 to 4.75mm	2g per bird given once a week with food.
Pullets (11 weeks to point of lay)	4.75 to 6.35mm	4 to 5g per bird given once a week with food or placed in a separate feeder.

- FW 2.2** Food must be readily available at all times throughout the lighting period.
- FW 2.3** 2.5cm of (actual) linear track (5cm single side) or 2cm circular feeding space must be provided per bird.
- FW 2.4** No feedstuffs containing mammalian or avian derived protein are permitted.
- FW 2.5** The use of in-feed growth promoters is prohibited.
- FW 2.6** In-feed antibiotics may only be given for therapeutic reasons under the direction of the attending veterinary surgeon.
- FW 2.7** All foodstuffs fed must be safely and hygienically stored, transported and delivered to stock to prevent infestation, contamination or wetting.
- FW 2.8** Food must not be allowed to remain in a contaminated or stale condition.
- FW 2.9** Hand replenished feed systems with no integral store of food are prohibited.
- FW 2.10** Feed distribution must ensure uniform feed availability throughout the entire feeder system.

Water

- FW 3.1** Pullets must be provided with water:
- a) that is clean and fresh
 - b) at all times, except when required by the attending veterinary surgeon.

i Tepid water should be provided for the chicks during the first few days of placement. Care should be taken to ensure that water temperature does not become too hot.

- FW 3.2** Provision must be made for supplying water in freezing conditions.

- FW 3.3** The minimum number of drinkers must be provided as follows:

nipples	1/12.5 pullets
bell drinkers	1/125 pullets
cups	1/20 pullets
circular trough space	0.8 cm per pullet

- FW 3.4** Supplementary chick drinkers must be provided for the first 3 to 4 days.

i Once chicks are using all the drinkers the supplementary supply should be removed to ensure that chicks do not become reliant on them.

- FW 3.5** All drinkers must be in working order.

- FW 3.6** The drinking quality of non-mains water must be:

- a) independently tested
- b) tested every 6 months
- c) tested using water samples collected from the source of the supply.

- FW 3.6.1** The water quality test records relating to standard FW 3.6 must:

- a) explicitly state whether the water is considered an acceptable source of drinking water for livestock
- b) be kept for at least 2 years.

i It is important to stress that water quality may change over time. Therefore, in between routine tests, one should remain vigilant for signs that indicate deterioration in water quality such as changes in water smell, clarity or taste, or changes in animals' eating and drinking habits, loss of performance, or health problems, which should immediately trigger the need for re-testing.

i Irrespective of source, drinking water hygiene should be tested regularly at the point where the birds drink it and the results recorded.

For methods of hygiene monitoring that involve bacterial culturing, testing should be undertaken at least twice annually. Results of ZERO for total viable counts and for coliforms are desirable and achievable. However, the following are acceptable results:

Coliforms: < 100 colony forming units (cfus) per ml

Total viable counts: < 1000 cfus per ml

Other methods of hygiene monitoring, including acceptable results, are:

Oxidation-Reduction Potential (ORP) testing (if using oxidative water sanitisers, such as Chlorine, Chlorine Dioxide or Hydrogen Peroxide). Electronic readings of >700 mV, and preferably >750 mV should be the target.

ATP Bioluminescence:

Less than 100 = good

Between 100 and 500 = needs attention

Above 500 = poor

Above 1000 = immediate action required

Hygiene monitoring by these methods generate more rapid results compared to culturing, and may be undertaken more frequently.

FW 3.7 Header tanks must be covered at all times.

FW 3.8 Drinkers must be:

- a) placed at optimum height for the size and age of the birds
- b) of an appropriate design.

FW 3.9 The rearer must provide a drinking system similar to that provided by the laying unit and, if the rearer is not sure, then both systems must be provided.

i Providing a drinking system in rear that is similar to that provided in lay helps to minimise the stress involved in the transition to the new environment of the laying house. The RSPCA is aware that pullets reared on bell drinkers and subsequently provided with nipples in the laying house may, in particular, experience difficulties.

Recent research suggests that the provision of nipple drinkers can help to reduce the risk of injurious feather pecking.

FW 3.10 Pullets destined for multi-tier laying units must have access to nipple drinkers.

Environment

The environment in which livestock are kept needs to 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 1.0** 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.
- E 1.1** Buildings must be designed, constructed, maintained and sited to:
- a) protect birds from thermal discomfort
 - b) be suitable for local weather conditions and withstand expected seasonal extremes of weather.
- E 1.2** Where changes are being made to existing buildings or new equipment installed that has not previously been assessed, managers must inform RSPCA Assured at the time the change is being made.

i It is strongly recommended to discuss any proposed changes, referred to in standard E 1.2, in relation to the RSPCA welfare standards with the RSPCA Farm Animals Department.

Building preparation

i Rearing pullets in a system which is similar to that of the laying unit can help birds better adjust to the laying environment and minimise stress.

- E 2.1** All old litter must be cleared from the house before the house is cleaned and disinfected.
- E 2.2** All poultry buildings must be effectively cleansed and disinfected before chicks are placed in the house.

i Single age site (all in/all out) rearing is highly desirable.

- E 2.3** The poultry house must be ready to receive chicks 24 hours before placement.
- E 2.4** All equipment on which the chicks depend must be properly functional prior to the chicks being placed.

Buildings

- E 3.1** For all accommodation, a notice containing a checklist of the key points relating to welfare (see standard E 3.2) must be prominently displayed at, or near, the entrance to each building and be amended accordingly.
- E 3.2** The checklist to satisfy standard E 3.1 must include:
- a) total usable area available to the birds
 - b) total number of birds and stocking density
 - c) total number of drinkers and feeders
 - d) target air quality parameters
 - e) lighting levels and regimes
 - f) emergency procedures, i.e. actions in the case of fire, failure of automatic equipment, when temperatures move outside acceptable limits and extremes of weather such as flooding and storm damage.
- E 3.3** There must be nothing in the pullets' environment that is likely to cause injury or distress to the birds that can be avoided.
- E 3.4** Except where preservatives with an insecticidal role are used, pullets must not come into contact with toxic fumes, for example from paints, wood preservatives or disinfectants.
- E 3.5** All electrical installations at mains voltage must be maintained in order to be:
- a) inaccessible to the birds
 - b) well insulated
 - c) safeguarded from rodents
 - d) properly earthed
 - e) tested at least annually by a qualified or competent person
 - f) in good working order (for example, any faults identified during testing to be rectified).
- i** **By law electrical installations have to be tested every 3 years as part of the Periodic Inspection Report. However, at least once a year, the 'trip switch' should be tested to ensure it is in correct working order.**
- E 3.6** Housing and equipment must be designed so that all the pullets can be clearly seen during inspection.
- E 3.7** If a droppings pit is provided, birds must not have access to it.
- E 3.8** The structure and inside of the droppings pit (where present) must be checked:
- a) at least once daily, and
 - b) a record made of this check, and
 - c) a record made of any birds found, removed, and action taken to prevent further access to this area.
- E 3.9** The service area must be kept clean and tidy.
- E 3.10** 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, if present, kept short.

Brooder management

- E 4.1** Where whole house brooding is used:
- a) the target brooding temperature at bird level must be reached before chicks are placed
 - b) the temperature of the house taken in at least three areas of the house at chick head height must be recorded throughout the brooding period.
- E 4.2** Where spot brooding is used:
- a) brooders must be lit for a sufficient period of time prior to the placement of chicks which ensures they will not be chilled
 - b) 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
 - c) there must be temperature zones within the brooder surround, accessible to chicks
 - d) the number of chicks per brooder must be based on the brooder manufacturer's recommendations.
- E 4.3** Brooding temperature must be closely monitored and adjusted accordingly, throughout the brooding period.
- E 4.4** The layout of the equipment in the brooding area must be such that chicks can find feeders and drinkers at all times.
- E 4.5** Regular brooder servicing and maintenance must be carried out to ensure that brooders are working effectively.

Floor and litter

E 5.1 Pullet house flooring must allow effective cleansing and disinfection, preventing significant build up of parasites and other pathogens.

E 5.2 All pullets must have access to litter at all times.

E 5.3 All houses must have at least one half of the floor area covered by litter.

i Where possible, the house floor should be concrete that is well maintained.

E 5.4 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 of a sufficient depth for dilution of faeces
- d) allow birds to dust bathe
- e) be topped up daily, if necessary, with fresh litter
- f) be managed hygienically
- g) be stored in dry, hygienic, rodent-proof premises.

i Small-particle materials, such as peat and sand, are best able to satisfy a pullet's need to dust bathe. Large-particle materials such as long straw and large-sized woodchip are not able to satisfy this need until they are broken down and friable. Before such a point is reached, additional or alternative friable, small-particle materials are required to be included in the litter provision to satisfy standard E 5.4 a).

i Well-maintained litter promotes birds' physical and behavioural well being and has been shown to help minimise the risk of injurious feather pecking. Consideration of factors to help manage litter condition include drinker design and management, stocking density, nutrition, flock health, air change rate and house environment, litter material and depth.

Super absorbent litter, such as pelleted bedding material, can be very effective and is strongly recommended for use in areas of the house that are particularly difficult to manage.

i Encouraging foraging behaviours from an early age is important in helping prevent the development of injurious pecking behaviour at a later age. Regularly enriching the litter with suitable foraging materials such as wheat, oats or alfalfa (at least every other day) can help to encourage foraging behaviours, both reducing the risk of injurious pecking and helping maintain the friability of the litter.

The inclusion of foraging materials within the litter should be discussed with a nutritionist prior to implementation. Liaise with your customer(s) so you can try to match as closely as possible the foraging materials provided at rear with those provided at lay.

- E 5.5** If slatted areas or mesh floors are provided they must provide:
- adequate support for inspections to be carried out
 - sufficient depth for the build up of droppings underneath.
- E 5.6** Where birds have access to litter through internal popholes, including to a veranda, the following applies:
- the popholes must be provided according to the minimum specification required for birds having access to the range (see standards E 11.4 to E 11.6)
 - where the area within the veranda is included in the calculation of usable area, access must be provided between the house and the veranda at all times, as defined in a).

i A pophole is defined as an opening of more than 45cm in height and 50cm wide and is intended for the use of birds to access the range or litter.

i The RSPCA is considering an appropriate maximum distance birds should have to travel to reach the litter from any fixed slatted area present. Litter is very important for pullet behaviours such as scratching and dustbathing, in both barn and free-range systems. Houses should allow the birds to easily move around and use all areas fully. As a guide, to minimise the distance to litter by preventing the house from being too long and narrow, a line of access from the slats to the litter should provide at least 1m per 1200 birds.

- E 5.7** Where a veranda is present the following must be ensured:
- where the calculated floor area for stocking density incorporates litter on a veranda, the sides of the veranda must consist only of solid material from the ground to at least the top of the height of the pophole
 - adequate provisions must be made to prevent the area surrounding the veranda from flooding during wet weather
 - the roof must be entirely waterproof.
- E 5.8** Siting of the house must be considered in order to best be able to maintain and manage litter quality.

Lighting

i Lighting requirements apply to all indoor usable areas, which may include verandas.

* **i** Light stimulates and encourages positive species specific behaviour, such as dust-bathing, feeding and ground pecking. Development of normal pecking behaviours in rear can help protect against the development of abnormal injurious (feather) pecking behaviour.

E 6.1 Daytime lighting levels must allow birds to be easily and clearly inspected without needing to increase the light levels.

E 6.2 The lighting system in the pullet house must:

- a) be designed and maintained in order to give a minimum illumination of 10 lux at pullet head height in the open areas of the house, e.g. over feeders and litter
- b) only be reduced temporarily, as a last resort, where
 - i) there are signs of an outbreak of injurious pecking or cannibalism, and
 - ii) other solutions to injurious pecking have been employed.

i The RSPCA believes that birds should be given sufficient light to encourage normal behaviours. Scientific research clearly shows that young chicks have a preference for brighter lit conditions compared with older birds, while older birds prefer different levels of light depending on the activity being performed. When kept under very low levels of light for a prolonged period of time, there is a risk of abnormal development of the eye which can lead to both temporary and permanent blindness.

* **i** Light intensity (lux) measurements should be taken at bird head height at various locations along the feeder lines and across the scratch area. Measurements should be taken in the darker areas, e.g. between lights, to ensure the minimum illumination is achieved in all areas.

Where LED lights are used, an LED-specific light meter should be used.

* **i** There is growing scientific research relating to the lighting needs of pullets. The RSPCA will continue to review any new research and consider updating the standards as required.

E 6.3 Where spot brooding, during the first few days of rearing sufficient light must be provided to attract chicks to the sources of heat, feeders and drinkers.

i The lighting pattern during the rearing period should ideally be matched to that at the start of the laying period. If necessary rearers and producers should seek advice on rearing and lighting patterns from an advisory body such as ADAS.

E 6.4 Where pullets are reared in a multi-tier environment or any system incorporating raised tiers, artificial light must be switched off in a stepped or gradual process.

i Dimmer switches may be used to achieve this gradual reduction of light. Work on broiler chickens has led to a recommendation that dimming be carried out over a 30 min period.

Turning off sequential rows of lights has been reported, in some cases, to increase the risk of smothering.

i Where there are signs of stress in birds, producers should consider avoiding exposure to prolonged periods of light (i.e. in excess of 15 hours), to reduce the risk of health and behavioural problems developing.

E 6.5 Lighting patterns in all houses must be recorded.

i Where possible the lighting pattern should be set automatically.

i Where injurious feather pecking or cannibalism is a problem, or to minimise the risk of a problem, ongoing management techniques (such as increasing environmental enrichment) should be put in place. Lighting levels should be maintained to allow and encourage birds to explore their environment. However, as a last resort in an emergency situation, and with the ongoing use of other possible solutions, lighting levels can be reduced or coloured/painted light bulbs can be used (green has been shown to help). This should only be for a short period of time, to help the birds settle. Lighting should then be increased gradually over a few days and returned to normal levels as soon as possible.

More information on injurious pecking can be found at www.featherwel.org, and in the 'Feather Cover Advice Guide' leaflet, which is available from the RSPCA Farm Animals Department.

Advice should be sought from the attending veterinary surgeon in relation to these issues.

E 6.6 Patches of high intensity light (artificial or natural) must be avoided within a house.

i Varied lighting within the environment can help to encourage certain desired behaviours to take place, for example by increasing the levels of light over the litter area birds can be encouraged to dustbathe. Also, reducing the lighting levels over the perching area can enable birds to rest.

E 6.7 In all housing, adequate lighting, whether fixed or portable, must be available to enable them to be thoroughly inspected at any time.

i Rearing conditions can determine to a large extent the level of welfare achieved in the laying phase, including hens' ability to range. Good ranging is important to help prevent injurious pecking and feather loss.

Birds with access to range during the rearing period are more likely to range during the laying period. Further, research suggests that pullets reared with access to natural light show a preference for natural light in the laying period and may therefore range more readily at transition. This may be achieved with provision of windows or, preferably, a veranda or winter garden.

Stocking density

E 7.1 The following applies to the stocking density of pullets:

- a) birds must not be stocked at a density any greater than 20kg/m² at 16 weeks of age
- b) it must not be likely to exceed 20kg/m² at 16 weeks of age.

i An adequate amount of space should be provided for each bird and the number of birds placed should be adjusted according to the age at which the birds will be transferred to the laying hen unit to provide sufficient space for older birds.

As a guide no more than 20% of the pullets should have liveweights in excess of ±10% of the mean weight.

The following guidelines should be used when determining the number of birds/m² to be placed at the rearing site:

Age of pullets (weeks)	No. of pullets/m ²
15	15
16	14
17	13
18	12

E 7.2 Where double brooding/brood and move is practised birds must:

- a) at all times have sufficient freedom of movement to perform their full range of normal active behaviours
- b) have sufficient space to be able to perch or sit quietly without repeated disturbance
- c) be placed at a stocking rate that will not exceed the following stocking densities at the time of split/whole house access:

Age at split/whole house access	Maximum planned stocking density (kg/m ²)
5 weeks	12
6 weeks	13
7 weeks	14

- d) be in accommodation that meets their final liveweight stocking density (based on the 20kg/m² at 16 weeks) by 8 weeks at the latest.

Air quality and thermal environment

E 8.1 Producers must:

- a) assess air quality at bird height on a daily basis
- b) ensure that ventilation systems, natural or forced, maintain air quality to ensure that aerial contaminants do not reach a level, at bird height, at which they are noticeably unpleasant to a human observer.

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

Ammonia	20ppm
Carbon dioxide	3,000ppm
Carbon monoxide	50ppm (averaged over an 8 hour period)
Inhalable dust	10mg/m ³ (averaged over an 8 hour period)

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

Where practically feasible, air quality parameters, i.e. 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.

E 8.2 Producers must be able to demonstrate that a thermally comfortable environment is maintained at all times, including adequate heating during the brooding period.

i Additional heat may be required during cold weather to maintain ventilation rates and air quality.

E 8.3 Stock-keepers must:

- a) have access to a copy of the Defra booklet, *'Heat Stress in Poultry: Solving the Problem'* (PB 10543, 2005) (see Appendix 2)
- b) be familiar with its content
- c) adopt its recommendations, where appropriate.

i A minimum ventilation rate of $1.6 \times 10^{-4} \text{ m}^3/\text{s}$ per $\text{kg}^{0.75}$ liveweight is recommended. The maximum ventilation capacity should be sufficient to limit a maximum temperature lift of 3°C.

Perches

i These standards apply to all perching provided in a system, including any alighting rails present, such as in a multi-tier system.

E 9.1 *

Raised perches must be:

- a) provided at not less than 5cm, and preferably at least 8cm, per pullet from 1st January 2020 at the latest
- b) introduced by 7 days of age at the latest
- c) positioned to facilitate the movement of pullets underneath.

*

i In relation to standard E 9.1 a), it is recommended that pullets are provided with at least 8cm of raised perch space per bird, which is the minimum amount required for hens under the RSPCA welfare standards for laying hens.

*

i Regarding standard E 9.1 c), where perches are positioned at slat edges or over feedtracks, movement underneath the perches is not required.

It is recommended that raised perches are winchable to provide optimal perch height as the birds grow.

E 9.2 *

Prior to 1st January 2020 perches must be provided:

- a) at not less than 1.75cm per bird for all pullets not destined for multi-tier layer systems
- b) at not less than 1cm per bird for all pullets destined for multi-tier layer systems.

*

i Use of raised perches from an early age can help birds to navigate the more complex environments provided in rear, helping to reduce collisions and the subsequent risk of bone fractures in the laying stage.

Research suggests that perches should be positioned at an angle no greater than 45 degrees to one another, to aid navigation. Birds should be able to access perches using small jumps.

*

i It is advised that the level and nature of perch provision in rear is equivalent to that which will be provided to the birds in their laying accommodation.

Research suggests that the body width of a 12 week old pullet is approximately 70% of its fully grown width. It is therefore recommended that a minimum of 70%, but preferably 100%, of the perch length provided per bird in lay is provided in rear.

A minimum of 8cm of raised perching per bird is required under the RSPCA welfare standards for laying hens. However, some producers provide more than this. For example, in Scotland, it is a legal requirement to provide a minimum of 15cm of raised perch per bird. Therefore, where pullets will be provided with an increased level of raised perch provision during lay, they should be provided with the equivalent level of provision in rear.

E 9.3 Perches must be positioned to minimise fouling of any pullets below.

i The inclusion of perches within the pullet rearing unit promotes bird activity, can help to maintain bone strength, can assist with the birds' ability to adapt when they are transferred to the laying hen unit and can assist in the reduction of floor eggs in the laying environment. Evidence shows that pullets are more likely to use the perches if they are included in their environment from a young age.

In order to avoid accumulation of droppings and litter quality problems beneath perches, extra litter management may be required in these areas.

Extra management and attention may be required due to the potential addition of harbourage sites for red mite. Care should be taken to ensure that perches are cleaned effectively between flocks. The RSPCA will review the requirement for the provision of slatted areas for pullets, in light of any further information, for future inclusion within the standards.

i Whilst some evidence from scientific research indicates that in terms of the perch shape hens have no preference, other studies have demonstrated that rectangular perches are used more than circular perches, on which birds are unsteady. Foot damage has also been shown to be less in birds provided with rectangular perches than with circular perches.

In terms of material, birds have been shown to perch most on slightly rough surfaces (e.g. softwood or vinyl-padded), which give more grip for their feet, and the least on smoother, plastic perches. Whilst hygiene is often better on plastic perches, they have been shown to result in increased incidences of bumble foot compared to welded wire and wooden perches.

Aerial perch height should be such that birds are prevented from pecking each other in the vent area and birds are able to move underneath (see standard E 9.1). In order to achieve this, perches should be raised approximately 25cm above the floor and have a top surface of approximately 4cm in width.

E 9.4 There must be at least enough vertical space above the perch to allow birds to stand in a normal posture.

Multi-tier

* **i** These standards are specific to any system incorporating raised tiers.

i The following multi-tier standards should be read in conjunction with the rest of this document.

* **i** Systems whereby birds can be placed and held within tiers during the early period of rearing are referred to within these standards as aviary rearing systems, or aviaries.

E 10.1 All birds must be given access to litter at all times

E 10.2 At least one-half of the floor area must be covered in litter and equal to a minimum of one-third of the usable area.

E 10.3 * Where chicks are confined during the initial 2 week brooding period:

- a) birds must have access to litter (see information box below)
- b) litter must remain in a friable condition
- c) birds must not be stocked at a rate any greater than 65 birds/m², and
- d) birds must not be stocked at a density any greater than 7kg/m².

* **i** In reference to standard E 10.3 a), litter should cover the entire floor area. However, it is acknowledged that this may not always be possible due to system design.

The RSPCA will review each system on a case-by-case basis (see standard E 10.22), and will advise on appropriate level of litter to be provided for each system.

* **i** In relation to standard E 10.3 c), this calculation should be based on the area of floor (e.g. brood section) to which the birds are confined. Additional useable areas within the brood section, such as raised platforms, may not be used to calculate the stocking rate.

i A lip can be useful at the edge of the slatted area in order to keep the litter in.

E 10.4 If birds are restricted to part of the system for an initial brooding period, food and water facilities must remain available on this level.

E 10.5 * Pullets must be given access to both raised tiers and the littered floor, at no later than 15 days of age.

i A tier is defined as a raised slatted area that may provide perches, food and/or water for the birds and provides access for birds underneath.

Tiers, in addition to floor area, can be counted as usable area.

Young pullets may have difficulty in utilising tiers and, therefore, consideration should be given to providing assistance to allow them to use the tiers.

E 10.6 Once chicks are given access to the whole area, care must be taken to ensure that they can find food and water and, if necessary, additional inspections must take place to facilitate this process.

E 10.7 If pullets are destined for a multi-tier laying unit, tiers must be provided at different heights, with not more than 60% of the tiers being at any one level.

i Tiers at different heights enable birds to become accustomed to moving around the system and to enable roosting on raised tiers.

E 10.8 All tiers must be positioned to facilitate the movement of birds between the different tiers and between the floor and the tiers.

i Research has shown that the provision of ramps and platforms resulted in more planned movements, fewer falls and fewer collisions than in houses where these provisions were not provided.

Birds provided with ramps also had a lower incidence of keel bone damage.

E 10.9 The vertical distance between tiers with adjustable height (including litter to the first tier) must:

- a) once raised, allow access for birds to move underneath with sufficient headroom
- b) be no more than 1m when measured from the litter or upper side of the tier below to the underside of the tier above.

E 10.10 The height of the highest tier, measured from the solid floor with litter to the underside of the highest tier (or manure belt if present), must not exceed 2m.

E 10.11 The vertical distance between static/fixed tiers (including the litter to the first tier) must, when measured from the litter or upper side of the tier below to the underside of the tier above (or manure belt if present):

- a) be at least 0.5m high
- b) be no more than 1m.

E 10.12 * The maximum number of raised tiers directly above each other must not exceed 3.

E 10.13 Where no food is provided on a tier (or floor level), food must be provided on the tier directly above or below.

E 10.14 Where no water is provided on a tier (or floor level), water must be provided on the tier directly above or below.

- E 10.15** All pullets must be:
- accustomed to moving up and down between different tiers
 - familiar with gaining access to perches, and sources of food and water at the different tiers.

i The height of the highest tier should be at least 60cm, for the first 10 weeks of life.

The highest tier should be at least 1m high from 11 weeks of age.

In order to ensure birds have access to sufficient raised tiers, producers should aim to provide approximately 50% of tiers which are at least 60cm high.

- E 10.16** For all pullets destined for multi-tier laying systems, a minimum of 124cm² of slatted (tier) area must be provided per bird.

- E 10.17** The maximum stocking density must not exceed 20kg/m² of usable area at 16 weeks of age. When calculated at floor level this must not exceed 33kg/m².

- E 10.18 *** Aviary rearing systems must have a manure belt removal system, which must be run at frequent intervals and, after the initial two week brooding period, at least once a week.

- E 10.19 *** In aviary rearing systems with temporary partitions between brood sections, partitions must:

- be removed by the time the birds are 15 days of age at the latest
- once removed, allow birds free access along the full length of the tier.

i The RSPCA welfare standards for laying hens require birds have *full access along the length of the tier*. It is recognised that this is not possible in aviaries with permanent partitions. Therefore, we strongly encourage the use of temporary partitions, which allow full movement along tiers.

The RSPCA is considering a minimum brood section area in systems where permanent partitions are in place.

- E 10.20 *** Where required, producers that are members of a farm assurance scheme must notify the scheme of the date of placement of chicks in aviary rearing systems at least one month, and not more than two months, in advance of flock placement for each flock placed.

i RSPCA Assured scheme members are required to notify RSPCA Assured of the date of placement of chicks in aviary rearing systems at least one month, and not more than two months, in advance of flock placement for each flock placed.

i Providing a scheme with advanced notice of bird placement within aviaries will enable timely assessment of these systems at critical times, e.g. to check the birds have been provided with full access to the system at 15 days of age.

- E 10.21 *** Ramps must be provided:
- a) to facilitate movement between tiers and between the floor and first tier, and
 - b) in sufficient numbers to prevent crowding and displacements on tiers.

* **i** The RSPCA is considering the appropriate design and level of ramp provision in multi-tier systems and will review any scientific and practical evidence as it becomes available.

Currently it is recommended that ramps are of wire mesh construction and placed at an angle of not more than 45 degrees.

In aviary systems, where food and water is available only within tiers, ramps running alongside tiers, rather than away from tiers, may better aid navigation back into the system, particularly in the early rearing period.

- E 10.22 *** Any aviary rearing system used must be accepted for use by the RSPCA.

* **i** To find out whether an aviary rearing system is accepted for use by the RSPCA, please contact the Farm Animals Department or visit <http://science.rspca.org.uk/sciencegroup/farmanimals/standards/pullets>

Producers or system manufacturers that would like to have a system accepted should contact the RSPCA Farm Animals Department.

Free-range

i The RSPCA welfare standards for pullets do not insist on pullets having access to range, but where range is provided, the following standards apply.

Range provision for pullets is not common. Therefore, the RSPCA Farm Animals Department will continue to review these standards in light of any further scientific and practical information, and will amend the welfare standards accordingly.

i Consideration should be given to the potential disease risk posed by wild birds, for example, when choosing where to site a new unit.

Winter gardens/verandas, which allow access to natural light and fresh air, can be beneficial particularly in the eventuality that access to the range is restricted on veterinary or legal advice.

- E 11.1** Where pullets are to be kept in free-range conditions, they must be given access to the range by 12 weeks of age at the latest.

- E 11.2** Where buildings are converted from barn to free-range when birds are older than 12 weeks of age, access to the range must be delayed until the next flock is placed.

- E 11.3** Once provided and unless bad weather or veterinary advice dictates otherwise, access to the range must be available:
- a) daily until transfer to the laying unit
 - b) for a minimum of 8 hours, or shorter if natural daylight is shorter
 - c) no later than midday.

- E 11.4** Popholes must be:
- a) at least 50cm wide and 45cm high
 - b) evenly distributed along the line of access to the range.

E 11.5 There must be at least 1 pophole per 600 birds.

E 11.6 Birds must be able to gain easy access to the popholes.

(i) For example, where the pophole height is above ground level, ramps and/or platforms should be provided in order to aid birds entering and leaving the house. Where provided, ramps/platforms should span the entire length of the available popholes.

E 11.7 No wire, electric or otherwise, is permitted under the popholes.

E 11.8 The range area must provide at least 1m² per pullet at all times.

(i) Should areas of the range be rested for disease control/vegetation quality reasons, sufficient additional range should be available in order to allow for these areas to be fenced off and still maintain 1m² of range per pullet.

(i) The RSPCA recognises that there may be exceptional circumstances, such as when a pullet delivery is cancelled, where birds may not be able to be placed into a free-range laying house. However, this should not be planned or routine.

- E 11.9** Shade/shelter must be provided:
- a) at a minimum of 6m² per 1000 pullets
 - b) to protect pullets from inclement weather
 - c) to reduce regular fear reactions to overhead predators
 - d) in a way that encourages birds out onto the range
 - e) to encourage full use of the range area.

(i) Young birds may benefit from shade/shelters being provided near to the house, to encourage them onto the range.

E 11.10 All artificial shades/shelters must be of sound construction and secure.

- E 11.11** Where access to different areas inside the rearing unit is via popholes they must:
- a) be of the same size and number as stated in standards E 11.4 and E 11.5
 - b) allow constant access to where the areas are included in the internal stocking density calculations.

- E 11.12** The outdoor area in free-range systems must:
- a) be designed and managed in ways which ensure that the land around the house does not become poached
 - b) consist of well-managed vegetation comprising pasture/cover crop/trees or a combination of these elements
 - c) be actively managed in order to attract birds onto the range.

i **Examples of active range management include:**

- **the positioning of shade and shelter at varying distances from the house**
- **the rotation of any artificial shelters**
- **restricting access to certain areas of the range as and when necessary in order to prevent poaching of the land.**

- E 11.13** The maximum distance travelled by pullets to reach the nearest pophole onto the range must not exceed 20m.

- E 11.14** 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.

i **The benefits of encouraging ranging behaviour in free-range flocks includes a reduced risk of feather pecking later in life. However, birds may be fearful of ranging out into exposed areas of land and prefer to seek areas of cover. Producers should make every effort to provide suitable provisions of overhead shade and shelter on the range that encourages ranging behaviour and, in addition, should explore ways of providing other forms of enrichment.**

- E 11.15** All pullets sourced from a free-range rearing unit must be transferred to a free-range laying unit.

Environmental enrichment

- E 12.1** For every 1,000 birds there must be at least 2 items of environmental enrichment which must be:
- a) in the form of pecking and/or foraging objects
 - b) permanently available within the house
 - * c) provided no later than 15 days of age.
- E 12.2 *** Prior to 15 days of age, if any feather pecking is seen, including gentle manipulation of the feathers of another bird, pecking enrichments must be provided as per standard E 12.1 immediately to prevent escalation of the behaviour.

i Provision of good quality friable litter is a critical factor in helping reduce the risk of injurious pecking. Forms of environmental enrichment which encourage birds to work the litter are therefore strongly recommended. Examples include the provision of whole small bales of straw or plastic wrapped bales of wood shavings.

Other acceptable forms of enrichment include hanging objects, such as bottles and wellington boots and pecking blocks. Experience suggests marking small dots on the items using a black marker pen can further encourage directed pecking behaviour.

It should be demonstrated that the items provided are valued by the birds. Effective environmental enrichment will be used well by the birds and any items which are not well used should be replaced with alternatives. This may vary from flock to flock.

It is strongly recommended that rearers liaise closely with their customers to ensure similar enrichment items are provided in the rearing and laying periods.

Climate change and animal welfare

i The issues relating to climate change have the potential to significantly affect the welfare of farm animals. The RSPCA believes that it is now appropriate to react to, think ahead, and consider what can reasonably be done to mitigate, any negative effects that adverse weather conditions may have/be having on the welfare of farm animals now, and in the future.

Examples of important considerations include:

- The need to ensure that the farm buildings can withstand more severe weather conditions will become more necessary.
- Ensuring that ventilation systems are working efficiently will be even more important, particularly as poultry are vulnerable to adverse temperature changes.
- There may be reduced water availability for drinking, so ensuring that drinking water systems are working efficiently will be even more important.

Management

A high degree of caring and responsible management and stockmanship is vital to ensure good animal welfare. Managers and stock-keepers need to 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.

- M 1.0** All records and other documentation that the '*RSPCA welfare standards for pullets (laying hens)*' require the producer to keep and maintain, must be made available to the RSPCA Assured Assessor and RSPCA Farm Livestock Officer.

Managers

- M 1.1** Managers must ensure that all stock-keepers:
- have access to a copy of the current version of the '*RSPCA welfare standards for pullets (laying hens)*'
 - are familiar with its content
 - understand and apply its content in their specific areas of responsibility.
- M 1.2** Managers must ensure that:
- the names of all staff employed who are responsible for the welfare of the birds are identified
 - all stock-keepers have completed relevant and adequate training (including any in-house training) prior to being given responsibility for the welfare of birds and can satisfy the RSPCA Assured Assessor and RSPCA Farm Livestock Officer of their competence in practical circumstances.
- M 1.3** Stock-keepers must:
- undergo a period of training which includes relevant, practical experience
 - be competent in the rearing and handling of chicks and pullets.
- M 1.4** Trainee stock-keepers must be able to demonstrate that they have gained the necessary skills and competence to ensure that a high level of husbandry is maintained.

i Where possible, stock-keeper training should be validated.

- M 1.5** Managers must:
- develop and implement plans and precautions to prevent/cope with emergencies such as fire, flood, storm damage, breakdown of environmental control systems, or interruption of supplies, e.g. food, water, electricity.
 - provide an emergency action board sited in a prominent position that is visible to all farm staff and the emergency services, which must include:
 - the procedures to be followed by those discovering such an emergency
 - the location of water sources for use by the fire brigade
 - an 8 digit map grid reference, GPS co-ordinates and postcode for the location of the unit
 - develop and implement a biosecurity plan to minimise the risk of introducing disease onto a site.

- M 1.6** Managers must maintain records of production data, which include documentation on:
- incoming and outgoing stock, including number of birds placed in each house
 - the number of ill, injured or dead birds identified after each inspection (causes of illness and injury and, where identified, the cause of death, must be stated)
 - the number culled (including reason for culling)
 - feed consumption
 - water consumption
 - maximum and minimum temperatures
 - ventilation (including settings and any necessary changes).

i If possible, water meters should be fitted in each house.

- M 1.7** Records relating to inspection (standard M 1.6 b) and c)) must be dated and signed, with the time of inspection noted.

Stock-keepers

- M 2.1** Stock-keepers must:
- be able to recognise signs of good health and welfare, including normal behaviour
 - be able to recognise a potential welfare problem in its earliest stages
 - be able to recognise the early stages of common diseases
 - know the appropriate actions for treatment of common diseases/ill health
 - be able to cull birds when necessary.
- M 2.2** When an outbreak of abnormal behaviour occurs, it must be tackled immediately by appropriate changes in the system of management.
- M 2.3** Stock-keepers must:
- be aware of the welfare problems associated with poor litter management
 - understand the factors which affect litter condition, i.e. moisture, nitrogen content and greasy capped litter.

i Good quality friable litter of the right type is thought to be one of the most important factors in preventing injurious pecking behaviour.

Areas of capping can be managed with frequent raking or forking over of the litter, replenishing litter and, in problem areas, using highly absorbent litter such as pelleted bedding material. Placement of enrichment items in problem areas may also encourage birds to 'work' the litter. Straw bales may be particularly effective.

- M 2.4** Stock-keepers must:
- carry out daily inspections of the litter
 - take remedial action on any individual areas of poor litter greater than 1m².

Chick sourcing

- M 3.1** Chicks must be sourced from a RSPCA Assured approved hatchery.

Inspection

- M 4.1** All pullets must be inspected at least 3 times a day in order to identify any birds which are sick, injured or behaving abnormally.

i Inspections should be appropriately spaced throughout the day, i.e. morning, midday and afternoon/evening.

- M 4.2** The records of inspection (see standard M 4.1) must be dated, signed and the time of inspection noted.

- M 4.3** Any welfare problems seen during an inspection by the producer must be dealt with appropriately and without delay.

i Welfare problems of sufficient severity that should have been noticed on previous inspections and dealt with, shall be taken by the RSPCA Assured Assessor or RSPCA Farm Livestock Officer as evidence of negligence of duties by the stock-keeper.

- M 4.4** Work routines and practices must be designed to ensure that birds do not become fearful and are not frightened in avoidable ways.

i Frequent flock inspections and varying the routine, people, numbers of people and clothing, as well as increased inspection immediately after post-chick housing, has been shown to help to reduce fearfulness in hens, which in turn can help to minimise the risk of injurious pecking.

- M 4.5** All movement throughout the unit must be slow and deliberate, both to alleviate fear and reduce possible injury to birds.

- M 4.6** Birds must at all times be handled in a careful, positive and compassionate manner.

- M 4.7** Stock-keepers must monitor and record bird liveweights, culls and mortality.

i This should be done at a frequency and in a manner which will cause minimum distress to the birds. Detailed records of bird performance and any treatments administered should be completed as part of the VHWP (see standards H 1.1 and H 1.2).

- M 4.8** Levels of mortality above 2% in the first 14 days and/or above 1% for the remainder of the rearing period must be:

- a) the subject of investigations, and
- b) recorded.

Equipment

- M 5.1** Stock-keepers must inspect the equipment, including the automatic equipment, upon which birds depend at least once daily to check that there are no defects.
- M 5.2** Where a defect relating to standard M 5.1 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 maintained until the defect is rectified.
- M 5.3** Where the automatic equipment includes a ventilation system, the system must contain:
- a) an alarm which will give adequate warning of the failure of that system to function properly (the alarm must operate even if the principal electricity supply to it has failed)
 - b) additional equipment or means of ventilation (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 5.4** For existing or new equipment which is used in management, e.g. 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 malfunction.

Protection from other animals

M 6.1 * A written wild animal control plan (WACP) must:

- a) be in place, and
- b) implemented on farm.

M 6.2 * Levels of potentially harmful wild animals (e.g. rodents and birds) must be managed humanely to avoid:

- a) the risk of disease spread to livestock
- b) damage to livestock buildings and the services on which livestock depend
- c) contamination and spoilage of feed.

*



In England and Wales, the following legislation applies to the management of wildlife:

- **Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981**
- **Animal Welfare Act 2006**
- **The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010**
- **Protection of Badgers Act 1992**
- **Pests Act 1954**
- **The Spring Traps Approval (England) Order 2012**
- **The Spring Traps Approval (Wales) Order 2012**
- **The Small Ground Vermin Traps Order 1958**
- **Food and Environment Protection Act 1985**
- **The Control of Pesticides Regulations 1986**
- **Animals (Cruel Poisons) Act 1962**

Equivalent legislation applies in Scotland and Northern Ireland.

- M 6.3 *** The primary means of protecting livestock from wild animals, as documented in the WACP, must be by:
- a) physical exclusion methods
 - b) the removal of elements in the vicinity that might encourage the presence of wild animals
 - c) maintaining units in a clean and tidy condition to minimise the risk of wild animals gaining access to the unit.

* **i** **Physical exclusion measures are the most humane and effective methods of providing protection from wild animals.**

Measures should only be applied after the area has been checked and cleared of elements that could encourage the presence of wild animals, as applying some measures can interfere with rodent behaviour and encourage them to spread to other areas. Humane methods of protecting livestock from other animals include:

- **construction/maintenance of fencing appropriate for excluding the wild animals in question**
- **removal of shelter/cover (e.g. weeds, heaps of rubble, broken equipment etc.) in the area surrounding the livestock buildings**
- **removal/protection of obvious food sources**
- **maintenance of drains**
- **maintenance/proofing of buildings against wild animals**
- **storing bedding away from livestock.**

In free range systems it is appreciated that elements, such as natural cover, are provided in order to encourage birds onto the range. Some of the methods listed above are intended to remove unnecessary and unintended harbourage sites, as opposed to elements specifically provided for other purposes.

* **i** **Rodents are less likely to inhabit an area if there is no cover or food supply. Reduced food availability will also increase the likelihood of rodents consuming bait, where applied. When stores or livestock buildings are empty, the opportunity should be taken to clean spaces and introduce any necessary controls before restocking.**

- M 6.4 *** Where any method of lethal control is being considered, a site survey of the unit must be carried out before applying the control, i.e. bait or traps, identifying:
- a) the type, level and extent of the problem species
 - b) any non-target animals likely to be present (including pets and children)
 - c) any maintenance and proofing issues.
- M 6.5 *** Where any lethal method of control is used, its use must have taken into account the results of the site survey (see standard M 6.4).
- M 6.6 *** The WACP must include provisions that specifically exclude the following methods of control:
- a) snaring
 - b) gassing
 - c) vertebrate glue traps.

M 6.7 * Long-term baiting must not be used as a routine rodent control measure.

* **i** In relation to standard M 6.7, site plans should therefore highlight potential high risk areas for wild animal activity (rather than permanent baiting locations).

Long-term baiting should not be necessary if bait traps are applied effectively. Long-term baiting can contribute to bait resistance in rodents.

However, where bait traps are applied effectively and the requirements of standard M 6.3 have been implemented, and there continues to be problems with protecting livestock from wild animals, it is appreciated that continued baiting may be necessary. However, this should be part of a continued review of the need to bait following the requirements of standard M 6.4.

* **i** The RSPCA is opposed to the use of poisons that cause animal suffering and it is important not to rely solely on the use of rodenticide. The RSPCA is concerned about the welfare of all animals that have the capacity to suffer, and therefore all alternative forms of deterrent and humane control should be exhausted before resorting to the use of poisons for rodents.

* **i** Any baiting programme should be considered carefully and justified in risk assessments for each location where used. Consideration should be given to using non-toxic baits in order to ascertain the presence of rodents, which may necessitate the use of rodenticide.

M 6.8 * When bait and/or traps are used, records of their use must be kept and:

- a) state the location of the bait/traps
- b) state what bait/traps were used
- c) state the volume/number of bait/traps placed
- d) state the name of the person who placed the bait/trap
- e) be retained for at least two years.

M 6.9 * Bait and traps must:

- a) be placed in suitable positions, and
- b) be sufficiently protected to avoid harming non-target animals.

M 6.10 * Bait must be used according to the manufacturer's instructions for:

- a) storage
- b) usage, including areas of use and replenishment
- c) disposal.

M 6.11 * Traps must be:

- a) used according to the manufacturer's instructions
- b) maintained in good order
- c) disposed of appropriately if no longer fit for purpose, e.g. have broken
- d) stored safely and securely.

- M 6.12 *** Bait points must:
- a) be monitored regularly, and
 - b) records of monitoring must be kept, including:
 - i) levels of any activity at each bait point
 - ii) any missing or disturbed bait
 - iii) the name of the person responsible for monitoring the bait points.

- M 6.13 *** Trap points must:
- a) be monitored at least twice a day, ideally at dawn and dusk, and
 - b) records of monitoring must be kept, including:
 - i) level of activity at each trap
 - ii) any missing or disturbed traps
 - iii) the name of the person responsible for monitoring the traps.

- M 6.14 *** Any injured, sick or dying wild animals found – that have been targeted for control – must be humanely dispatched immediately to prevent further suffering.

* **i** **Regular replenishment of bait will help to prevent sub-lethal doses, which can result in a build-up of resistance to the active ingredient.**

- M 6.15 *** Where bait is used, dead animals must be disposed of safely, in line with the manufacturer's product label.

* **i** **Safe disposal of wild animals that have died as a result of poisoning reduces the risk of secondary poisoning in non-target species, such as domestic and other wild animals (including birds), that may consume the carcasses.**

- M 6.16 *** Once treatment is complete, all traps and traces of bait must be:
- a) removed
 - b) disposed of/stored according to the manufacturer's instructions.

- M 6.17 *** Managers must ensure that all stock-keepers:
- a) have access to a copy of the Campaign for Responsible Rodenticide Use '*UK Code of Best Practice: Best Practice and Guidance for Rodent Control and the Safe Use of Rodenticides*'
 - b) are familiar with its content
 - c) understand and apply its content.

* **i** **Producers are strongly encouraged to complete the free, self-study training course on rodent control available at: <http://rodentcontrolonfarms.co.uk/login/index.php>. The content of the course is based on a LANTRA course and is approved by the Campaign for Responsible Rodenticide Use. Further information is available in the AHDB document '*Rodent Control on Farms: A practical guide to effective and responsible use of bait rodenticides*'.**

- M 6.18 *** Farm dogs and cats must not be permitted in the pullet house.

The environment in which livestock are housed needs to be conducive to good health.

Veterinary Health and Welfare Plan (VHWP)

- H 1.1** Managers must develop a written Veterinary Health and Welfare Plan (VHWP), which must:
- be implemented, reviewed and updated at least annually in conjunction with the attending veterinary surgeon
 - be signed and dated by the attending veterinary surgeon
 - set targets for health and welfare aspects, including injurious pecking behaviour and red mite infestation
 - record whether targets have been met each year and at each assessment made by the veterinary surgeon
 - include tolerance limits for flock performance
 - contain a salmonella control programme.

i The VHWP (see standard H 1.1) should be aimed at reducing the risk of disease challenges and maximising the health and welfare of each flock. Accurate and up to date records, agreed tolerance levels for areas of health and production, and appropriate action plans included in the VHWP should enable any potential problems to be detected and managed at the earliest opportunity.

Reviewing records annually allows the effectiveness of any action taken to be assessed and the VHWP to be updated where relevant to help safeguard the health and welfare of the next flock. Key performance indicators related to chick performance should also be recorded. Such parameters should include mortality in the first two weeks (including culls), evenness and weight.

Where significant deviations from the expected/norm are experienced, this should be fed back to the hatchery.

RSPCA guidance notes, which can be used as a basis for a Veterinary Health and Welfare Plan for laying hen pullets, are available at www.rspca.org.uk/welfarestandards.

- H 1.2** Records relating to standard H 1.1 must be kept.
- H 1.3** If any flock performance parameters fall below the tolerance limits identified in the VHWP (see standard H 1.1):
- the veterinary surgeon must be informed
 - the VHWP must be revised to include a programme of action which will remedy the problem.
- H 1.4** As part of the Veterinary Health and Welfare Plan (VHWP) (see standard H 1.1) a vaccination programme must be developed which takes into account:
- potential disease challenges in laying hens
 - any specific disease challenges which have been identified at the laying unit in previous flocks.

H 1.5 Ailing pullets, and any pullet suffering from injury such as open wounds or fractures, must be:

- a) segregated, if necessary
- b) treated without delay
- c) humanely killed, if necessary.

H 1.6 Where chicks are beak trimmed:

- a) they must be no older than 24 hours
- b) the procedure must be carried out using infrared equipment (see '*RSPCA welfare standards for hatcheries*')
- c) the pullet unit manager must carry out and make a record of specific inspections to check the welfare of the birds and beak condition for at least the first month.

i **Beak trimming is against the principles of the RSPCA welfare standards. However, it is acknowledged that, at the current time, prohibiting beak trimming could result in a negative impact on welfare in some flocks.**

The RSPCA will continue to work towards a phase-out of beak trimming and will work closely with the industry to help achieve this goal; including giving due consideration to all relevant research and practical aspects of laying hen and pullet rearing, nutrition and breeding that may impact on this issue.

In the meantime, where it is deemed necessary to minimise the risk of injurious pecking and cannibalism, infrared trimming of chicks is the only legally permitted method (except in emergency situations for older birds). Infrared technology has been shown to offer higher standards of welfare compared with conventional methods by improving the accuracy and reducing the risk of pain associated with the process.

Producers should adopt appropriate management, husbandry and enrichment techniques with a view to minimising the risk of injurious pecking and removing the need to beak trim. In addition, rearing conditions should be made as similar to the laying unit to minimise any stress during transfer and consideration should be given to the suitability of breed types.

H 1.7 Managers must:

- a) have access to a copy of '*A guide to the practical management of feather pecking and cannibalism in free-range laying hens*' (Defra, PB 10596, 2005) (see Appendix 2)
- b) be familiar with its content
- c) implement the recommendations as appropriate.

H 1.8 Any concerns about the trimmed beaks of birds (for example, the amount of beak trimmed) where it has been carried out at the hatchery, must be discussed with the relevant hatchery and evidence of this recorded.

H 1.9 If, in emergency circumstances as permitted by law, and as a last resort (having tried alternative approaches such as changes in management, environment etc.) and only on veterinary advice, beak trimming of birds older than 24 hours is deemed necessary for welfare reasons, then the producer must:

- a) obtain a signed letter from the vet stating the reasons for advising that beak trimming be undertaken, and details of other approaches tried prior to beak trimming
- b) inform the RSPCA Farm Animals Department in writing with a copy of the letter referred to in a).

- H 1.10** The beak trimming procedure, in relation to standard H 1.9, must include the following:
- appropriate equipment installed in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions
 - trained and competent operators
 - removal of only the minimum amount of beak and never more than one third
 - initial checks of the accuracy and uniformity of beak trimming based on observations of at least 100 birds per operator
 - on-going hourly checks of bird welfare and beak condition throughout the procedure
 - careful examination and, if necessary, humane culling of any bird found to have been beak trimmed incorrectly
 - cauterisation of the beak to minimise the risk of haemorrhage when using hot-blade equipment
 - records of the names of all personnel carrying out beak trimming
 - signature of the nominated person in charge of the procedure.
- H 1.11** Producers and those responsible for carrying out the beak trimming procedure in relation to standard H 1.9 must:
- have access to a copy of the '*BEIC Code of Best Practice for beak trimming*' (March 2004) (see Appendix 2)
 - be familiar with its content
 - implement the recommendations as appropriate.
- H 1.12** For at least one month following beak trimming, in relation to standard H 1.9, the farm manager must carry out and record specific inspections to check the welfare of the birds and beak condition.
- H 1.13** Managers must:
- have access to copies of (see Appendix 2):
 - '*A Guide to the National Control Programme for Salmonella in laying flocks*' (Defra, 2009, PB 13204)
 - '*Code of Practice for the Control of Salmonella during the Production, Storage and Transport of Compound Feeds, Premixtures, Feed Materials and Feed Additive*' (Defra, 2009, PB 13303)
 - be familiar with their content
 - implement the recommendations as appropriate.
- H 1.14** 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 1.15** If recurring injuries are found, a programme of preventative action must be specified in the VHWP (see standard H 1.1).
- i** **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.**
- H 1.16** Artificial devices (e.g. blinkers attached to the beak or nostrils, and contact lenses) must not be used.
- H 1.17** 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 1.18** Procedures relating to standard H 1.17 must be in strict accordance with the relevant waste disposal regulations.

- H 1.19** Medicines must be:
- a) used only under the direction of a veterinary surgeon
 - b) clearly labelled and stored in accordance with the label instructions
 - c) kept in a secure, lockable store which is:
 - i) safe from animals, children and birds
 - ii) separate from food producing areas or food source areas
 - d) legal for use in the UK
 - e) administered in accordance with UK and EU legislation.

- H 1.20** A nominated person must:
- a) be responsible for the management of the medicine store
 - b) keep appropriate records for stock control purposes.

i It is recommended that producers obtain, read and where appropriate, apply the advice contained within the latest version of (see Appendix 2):

- **'Guidelines on Responsible Use of Antimicrobials in Poultry Production'**, issued by the Responsible Use of Medicines in Agriculture (RUMA) Alliance (RUMA, Acorn House, 25 Mardley Hill, Welwyn, Hertfordshire, AL6 0TT; www.ruma.org.uk)
- **'Code of practice on the responsible use of animal medicines on the farm'**, issued by the Veterinary Medicine Directorate
- **'Veterinary Medicines: safe use by farmers and other handlers'**, issued by the Health and Safety Executive.

- H 1.21** All personnel involved in the administration of animal medicines, including vaccinations, must be competent to do so.

- H 1.22** Records of training in relation to standard H 1.21 must be made available to RSPCA Assured Assessors and RSPCA Farm Livestock Officers.

Biosecurity

i An effective biosecurity policy should aim to prevent the introduction of disease and parasites on to the farm and subsequently to prevent spread within the farm. Disease agents can be introduced by birds, people, equipment and vehicles.

Disease and other health challenges can cause significant stress to birds, which in turn can also lead to an increased risk of injurious pecking. To help address this, best practice in biosecurity procedures is essential (see standards H 2.1 to H 2.6).

- H 2.1** A record of all visitors to the farm must be maintained.
- H 2.2** The record (see standard H 2.1) must include the following details of the visitor:
- a) name
 - b) organisation
 - c) date and time of arrival
 - d) recent visits to poultry sites
 - e) verification that they are not suffering with any enteric illness.
- H 2.3** Protective clothing and footwear that has not had contact with other poultry and has been washed/disinfected must be worn by all visitors.
- H 2.4** If not employing the barrier system, on each occasion on entering/leaving a poultry house all farm personnel must dip footwear and ensure any visitors do likewise.
- H 2.5** Foot dip must:
- a) consist of Defra approved disinfectants
 - b) use of disinfectants in accordance with the manufacturer's instruction
 - c) be replaced with fresh solution regularly.

i Producers should contact Defra for information on Defra approved disinfectants. Contact details can be found on the Defra website: www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-environment-food-rural-affairs

- H 2.6** The house must operate a period free of all livestock between flock cycles.

i More information on best practice for preparing the unit and cleaning regimes between flocks can be found in the *RSPCA Veterinary Health and Welfare Plan Guidance Notes for Laying Hens and Pullets*: <http://www.rspca.org.uk/sciencegroup/farmanimals/standards/layinghens>

Casualty killing/slaughter

H 3.1 Each farm must have provisions for the humane killing/slaughter – without delay – of casualty birds.

H 3.2 Casualty killing/slaughter must be carried out by either:

- a) a named, trained, competent member of staff, or
- b) a licensed slaughterman, or
- c) a veterinary surgeon.

i 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.

i The Humane Slaughter Association (HSA) has produced a booklet entitled '*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 (see Appendix 2).

H 3.3 Only those methods of on-farm slaughter/killing recommended by the HSA are permitted:

- a) hand-held electrical stunning, immediately followed by neck cutting
- b) neck dislocation
- c) captive-bolt.

i In accordance with Council Regulation (EC) No 1099/2009, no person shall kill by manual cervical dislocation or percussive blow to the head more than 70 animals per day.

H 3.4 Equipment that crushes the neck, including killing pliers, must not be used.

i Equipment that crushes the neck is neither quick nor humane.

H 3.5 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 3.6 If a bird is in severe pain that is uncontrollable, then the bird must be promptly, humanely slaughtered/killed.

H 3.7 All carcasses must be disposed of strictly according to current legislation.

H 3.8 A record must be kept of how and where all such carcasses are disposed of.

Transport

The unloading and depopulation process, and transport systems need to be designed and managed to ensure livestock are not caused unnecessary distress or discomfort. The transport and handling of livestock needs to be kept to an absolute minimum. Personnel involved in the following processes need to be thoroughly trained and competent to carry out the tasks required of them.

Unloading into the pullet house

i Producers should consider the construction of buildings and bear in mind the access to and from the area where birds are placed. Particular attention should be paid to the width of doors and access to mobile units.

All new buildings should have access for transport crates so that birds can be unloaded inside the building, or a concrete area with shelter outside the unit should be provided. It is appreciated that this may be more difficult in some smaller and/or mobile units, but every effort should be made to ensure the welfare of the birds at the time of unloading from the transport crates.

- T 1.1** If those carrying out the placement of birds have concerns regarding the placement process and the welfare of the birds, they must raise these concerns with the pullet rearer and/or hatchery as appropriate.
- T 1.2** If the producer, or named supervisor, has concerns regarding the welfare of the birds during the placement process, they must raise these with the farm staff.
- T 1.3** The producer must:
- take responsibility to ensure the welfare of the birds throughout the placement process
 - ensure that all farm staff are aware of their duties
 - take responsibility for supervising, monitoring and maintaining RSPCA welfare standards throughout the placement of birds into the house.
- T 1.4** All personnel involved in the placement of birds must be:
- properly trained
 - competent to carry out their duties.

i Where possible training relating to standard T 1.4 should be validated.

- T 1.5** Less experienced farm staff must be closely supervised by the producer during the placement process.
- T 1.6** On unloading, if any birds are trapped or injured a report must be made to the person in charge of supervising the catching and unloading, in order to identify and rectify further problems.
- T 1.7** Water must be available to the birds as soon as the first birds begin to be unloaded in the house from the transport crates/modules.
- T 1.8** The pullet producer must liaise with the haulier and hatchery to ensure that the timing of the placement process does not deprive any bird of food for more than 12 hours.

- T 1.9** Placement teams must never put speed of operation before bird welfare.
- T 1.10** Birds which are visibly unfit (including those that are lame, fatigued, injured or ill) upon arrival at the pullet site must be humanely killed, immediately, as soon as observed.
- T 1.11** Either the pullet producer or person appointed by them must be responsible for the killing of such casualty birds (see standard T 1.10).
- T 1.12** The nominated person (see standard T 1.11) must be trained and competent in carrying out humane killing.
- T 1.13** Pullet producers must have in place, and be able to demonstrate, procedures to protect birds from wetting and chilling during the placement process.

i The use of curtains and shelter facilities, and minimising the carrying distance from the vehicle to the building can help to protect birds from wetting and chilling.

Depopulation of the pullet house

i For clarification, throughout this section the responsibilities of key staff involved in depopulation are defined as follows:

Producer/farm manager (or named supervisor) – ultimately responsible for the welfare of the birds, until they are loaded into the transport modules/crates.

Catching team leader – responsible for supervising the catching process, making sure all catching team members are aware of their duties and are competent to carry them out.

Senior catching team members – experienced senior members of the catching team, appointed by the catching team leader, to help supervise the other members of the catching team.

Haulier (driver) – responsible for making sure all birds are fit to travel and for the welfare of birds from the time they are placed into the transport modules/crates until they are unloaded from the modules/crates at the laying unit.

- T 2.1** The producer/farm manager must ensure that only RSPCA Assured approved catching teams are used for pullets at depopulation.

i The producer/farm manager may be RSPCA Assured approved themselves if organising their own team for depopulation.

- T 2.2** A depopulation action plan (DAP) must:
- a) be drawn up by the producer/farm manager on a site-specific basis prior to depopulation
 - b) be reviewed and signed annually by both the producer/farm manager or named supervisor, and the catching team leader.

T 2.3 The DAP (see standard T 2.2) must include:

- a) building design
- b) catching plan
- c) transport arrangements
- d) post-depopulation records.

(For more detailed information, see Appendix 3 for pro forma.)

i **Producers/farm managers should consider the construction of buildings and bear in mind the access to and from the area where birds are placed and removed.**

All new buildings should have access for transport crates so that birds can be loaded inside the building, or a concrete area with shelter outside the unit should be provided.

T 2.4 The timing of arrival of the catching team must be planned to minimise any unforeseen interruptions to the depopulation process.

T 2.5 If the catching team has concerns regarding the depopulation process and the welfare of the birds the catching team leader must raise these concerns with the producer/farm manager.

T 2.6 If the producer/farm manager has concerns regarding the welfare of birds during the catching process he/she must raise these concerns with the catching team leader.

T 2.7 The DAP (see standard T 2.2) must:

- a) include any bird welfare issues raised by the catching team (see standard T 2.5)
- b) include any bird welfare issues raised by the producer/farm manager (see standard T 2.6)
- c) include any action to be taken to address the issues raised in a) and b) prior to the next depopulation on the site.

T 2.8 The producer/farm manager must:

- a) provide full written instructions of the catching plan to the catching team leader and senior catching team members (see standard T 2.9 d)
- b) take responsibility to ensure the welfare of the birds throughout the catching process
- c) be recorded by name in the DAP (see standard T 2.2).

T 2.9 The catching team leader must:

- a) be recorded by name in the DAP (see standard T 2.2)
- b) ensure that all catching staff are aware of their duties
- c) take responsibility for supervising, monitoring and maintaining RSPCA welfare standards throughout the depopulation of the house and loading of birds into the transport modules/crates
- d) appoint a minimum of one senior member of the catching team for teams of up to eight members, and two senior members for teams of nine or more members.

T 2.10 The catching team leader and senior members of the catching team must:

- a) have access to a copy of the current version of the *RSPCA welfare standards for pullets (laying hens)*
- b) be familiar with the contents of the section on depopulation
- c) understand and apply the contents of the section on depopulation.

T 2.11 All personnel involved in the catching and transportation of birds must be:

- a) properly trained
- b) competent to carry out their duties.

i Where possible training relating to standard T 2.11 should be validated.

T 2.12 Less experienced members of the catching team must be closely supervised by a senior member of the catching team or the catching team leader.

T 2.13 Pullets must have access to water up to the time that the catching team begins to catch the first birds.

T 2.14 Producers/farm managers must liaise with the haulier and laying hen producer to ensure that the timing of the depopulation process does not deprive any bird from food for more than 14 hours.

T 2.15 Catching must take place in low or blue lighting when birds are roosting naturally to minimise fear reactions.

T 2.16 Catching teams must never put speed of operation before bird welfare.

T 2.17 Adequate draught-free ventilation at bird height must be provided for uncaught birds up to the time of loading.

T 2.18 The catching and loading routine must involve at least two people, one catching the birds and the other opening and closing the drawers of the transport containers or loading onto dollies.

T 2.19 Birds must be caught individually by grasping both legs, just above the feet.

T 2.20 Birds must not be caught or carried by a single leg.

T 2.21 No more than 3 birds must be carried in one hand.

T 2.22 Carrying distances must be kept to the minimum possible.

T 2.23 Where crowding occurs, the house lights must be raised, the birds spread out calmly and quietly, then allowed to settle before catching is resumed.

i Penning the birds into smaller groups for catching may help to minimise smothering, which can sometimes be caused by crowding.

T 2.24 Birds must be:

- a) handled with care at all times
- b) placed carefully into the transport compartments
- c) not dropped or thrown.

T 2.25 Facilities must be provided for catchers which ensure that they are able to load birds onto the vehicle from a position which gives them easy access to all transport compartments.

T 2.26 Catchers must not lift birds above head height.

T 2.27 Prior to depopulation, the catching team leader and senior members must have a detailed procedure that they will employ to deal with loose birds in the house and/or outside in order to ensure the welfare of such birds.

- T 2.28** Birds which are visibly unfit (including those that are lame, fatigued, injured or ill) before loading must:
- not be transported
 - be humanely killed immediately, as soon as observed.
- T 2.29** The catching team leader or a senior member of the catching team must be nominated to be responsible for humane killing of birds that are deemed unfit for travel (casualty birds).
- T 2.30** The nominated person (see standard T 2.29) must be:
- trained and competent in carrying out humane killing
 - named in the DAP (see standard T 2.2).
- T 2.31** Producers/farm managers must have in place, and be able to demonstrate, procedures to protect birds from wetting and chilling during the depopulation process.

i The use of curtains, shelter facilities during catching and loading and minimising the carrying distance from the building to the vehicle can help to protect birds from wetting and chilling.

Transport

i Legislation requires all drivers to hold a certificate of competence demonstrating that they have undertaken appropriate training and can implement the skills and knowledge attained in relation to ensuring good welfare during the transport of livestock.

- T 3.1** Personnel in charge of pullet transporters must:
- have completed an approved training course
 - be able to demonstrate their competence in handling pullets when loading and unloading them and while in transit
 - maintain a record of training that has been undertaken.
- T 3.2** The driver must:
- have access to a copy of the current version of the *RSPCA welfare standards for pullets (laying hens)*
 - be familiar with the contents of the section related to transport
 - understand and apply the contents of the section related to transport where applicable.
- T 3.3** The haulier must ensure that the:
- pullets are fit to travel
 - welfare of pullets is safeguarded from the time they are placed into the transport modules/crates until they are unloaded from the modules/crates at the laying unit.
- T 3.4** The transport vehicles must be parked as near as possible to the house being depopulated or populated.
- T 3.5** All transporters must have a livestock capacity document on board at all times.

i The livestock capacity document will give data on the size of the transporter and the calculated carrying capacity for different livestock species under different climatic conditions.

- T 3.6** Pullets which are wet prior to loading must not be loaded close to inlets on the vehicle.

- T 3.7** All hauliers must have a written standard operating and emergency procedure to implement during transportation (see Appendix 1).
- T 3.8** All transport systems must:
- a) permit adequate ventilation and protect birds from adverse climatic conditions
 - b) be thoroughly cleansed before carrying any birds to a new site
 - c) be well maintained
 - d) have no sharp edges or protrusions on the crates or vehicle which could cause injury to the birds.
- T 3.9** The cleanliness of the vehicle must be checked by the appointed supervisor before any birds are loaded onto the vehicle.
- T 3.10** If transport mortality (dead on arrivals, in pullets from any single source) exceeds 0.1% on any individual journey:
- a) the level of mortality must be recorded and reported to:
 - i) the haulier (driver)
 - ii) the haulier company
 - iii) the pullet rearer
 - iv) the pullet rearing company
 - b) there must be an investigation to establish the cause/s of death, the outcome of which must be recorded
 - c) effective preventative measures must be put in place without delay to remedy the problem.
- T 3.11** A record must be maintained at the pullet rearing company head office of all incidents relating to standard T 3.10 that occur during transit.
- T 3.12** The time between the loading of the last pullet to the time of arrival at the laying unit must be less than 8 hours.

i The RSPCA is aware that some producers prefer to transport pullets at night, after feeding. There are potential benefits associated with this practice, particularly in relation to maintaining exposure to the appropriate lighting regime. However, the RSPCA remains concerned by certain aspects of this process, notably keeping birds on the lorry until daylight the following morning.

- T 3.13** The timing of delivery of pullets must be such that birds are not held stationary on vehicles for long periods of time (and within the maximum journey time specified in the '*RSPCA welfare standards for pullets (laying hens)*').
- T 3.14** Noise levels, from all sources, must be minimised during loading, transport and unloading.
- T 3.15** In periods of hot weather, pullets must be transported at night or in the coolest part of the day or the stocking density must be reduced accordingly.
- T 3.16** Hauliers must have in place, and be able to demonstrate, procedures to protect pullets from extremes of weather (including wetting and chilling) at all times whilst pullets are in modules, both prior to loading on to the vehicle and during transport.

i Parking the vehicle in an appropriate position can help to minimise any potential distress to the birds that could be caused by prevailing weather conditions.

- T 3.17** Every effort must be made to ensure:
- a) journeys are completed without unnecessary delays
 - b) that drivers are aware of any potential traffic problems and plan their journey accordingly.
- T 3.18** The pullet producer/farm manager supervising the catching and loading of pullets must liaise closely with the laying hen producer/farm manager in order to:
- a) minimise the time between loading of the pullets and unloading at the laying hen unit
 - b) minimise the time pullets spend waiting on the vehicle in the event of an unexpected delay during depopulation of the pullet house.

i It is the pullet rearer's responsibility to ensure that the birds are loaded and transported with care and to ensure that the time of loading corresponds to the estimated time of arrival to the egg producer. It is the egg producer's responsibility to ensure there are sufficient numbers of personnel present when unloading the birds.

- T 3.19** The haulier must liaise directly with the laying hen producer/farm manager to minimise the time pullets spend waiting on the vehicle in the event of an unexpected delay during transport.
- T 3.20** 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.

i In hot weather (in excess of 21°C) one of the most effective ways of achieving adequate ventilation is to keep the vehicle moving.

- T 3.21** There must be adequate ventilation for all pullets when in transport crates and on the vehicle.

i Where possible vehicles should be fitted with controlled ventilation.

- T 3.22** All vehicles must carry a fire extinguisher.
- T 3.23** Vehicles must carry a mobile telephone or other means of communication in case of an emergency where assistance is required.
- T 3.24** All birds must be transported by an RSPCA Assured approved haulier.
- T 3.25** Side loading fixed crates are not permitted.
- T 3.26** For birds weighing less than 1.6kg, 180 to 200cm²/kg must be provided in each transport container.

Modular systems

- T 4.1** Modular transport systems must have completely open tops with a height of not less than 220mm.
- T 4.2** The top drawer of the module must be loaded first.
- T 4.3** As each drawer is filled, it must be closed carefully to ensure that the birds' heads, wings and legs are not trapped in any way.

Appendix 1

Transport – standard operating and emergency procedure

Items to be included

1. Out of hours telephone numbers and emergency procedure.
2. Accident procedure.
3. Certificate of motor insurance.
4. Tyres – punctures – codes 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 laying hens and pullets.
8. Procedure for loading/unloading of poultry transporters.
9. Procedure for delivery of poultry to customer sites.
10. FTA – the current version (2017 at the time of printing) of *'The Drivers' Handbook'*, including tachograph regulations.
11. Fire extinguishers.
12. Operating procedures for roadside checks.
13. Defra leaflet *'Guide to Alleviation of Thermal Stress in Poultry in Lairage'* (Defra PB 3724, 1998).
14. Daily journey sheet.
15. Torch.

Appendix 2

Documents required on-farm

The following list details those codes of practices and guides required by producers to have access to on-farm:

- *RSPCA welfare standards for pullets (laying hens)*
- Defra '*Heat Stress in Poultry: Solving the Problem*' (PB 10543, 2005)
- Campaign for Responsible Rodenticide Use '*UK Code of Best Practice: Best Practice and Guidance for Rodent Control and the Safe Use of Rodenticides*'
- Defra '*A guide to the practical management of feather pecking and cannibalism in free-range laying hens*' (PB 10596, 2005)
- Defra '*Guide to the National Control Programme for Salmonella in laying flocks*' (PB 13204, 2009)
- Defra '*Code of Practice for the Control of Salmonella during the Production, Storage and Transport of Compound Feeds, Premixtures, Feed Materials and Feed Additive*' (PB 13303, 2009)
- BEIC '*Code of Best Practice for beak trimming*' (2004)

It is also recommended that producers obtain, read and where appropriate, apply the advice contained within the latest version of:

- '*Guidelines on Responsible Use of Antimicrobials in Poultry Production*', issued by the Responsible Use of Medicines in Agriculture (RUMA) Alliance (RUMA, Acorn House, 25 Mardley Hill, Welwyn, Hertfordshire, AL6 0TT; www.ruma.org.uk)
- '*Code of practice on the responsible use of animal medicines on the farm*', issued by the Veterinary Medicine Directorate
- '*Veterinary Medicines: safe use by farmers and other handlers*', issued by the Health and Safety Executive
- The Humane Slaughter Association (HSA) booklet '*Practical Slaughter of Poultry: A Guide for the Small Producer*'.

Appendix 3

Depopulation Action Plan (DAP)

The following pages provide an example of a DAP template (see Transport - Depopulation section). The DAP template should be further developed to meet any specific requirements relating to a particular unit.

Responsibilities during depopulation:

- **Producer/farm manager (or named supervisor)**
Ultimately responsible for the welfare of the birds, until they are loaded into the transport modules/crates.
- **Catching team leader**
Responsible for supervising the catching process, making sure all catching team members are aware of their duties and are competent to carry them out.
- **Senior members of the catching team**
Experienced senior members of the catching team, appointed by the catching team leader, to help supervise the other members of the catching team.
- **Haulier (driver)**
Responsible for making sure all birds are fit to travel and for the welfare of birds from the time they are placed into the transport modules/crates until they are unloaded from the modules/crates at the laying unit.

Depopulation Action Plan (DAP) – prior to depopulation

To be completed by the producer/farm manager or appointed representative

Action	Carried out? (include date)
Complete up to one month prior to depopulation	
Liaise with the laying hen producer as to the depopulation date. Report: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) the production system b) number of birds c) breed d) approximate weight e) feather condition f) health status of the flock g) any access problems 	
Ensure the roadways are in good condition for access to the unit	
Ensure the ground where the loading of birds will take place is in good condition	
Liaise with the haulier and catching team leader regarding the arrival time	
Liaise with the catching team leader regarding catching frames, to establish whether or not the catching team will bring their own (Modules can be used for making a pen for the birds and are easily moved in the event that smothering begins)	
Prepare the catching plan (a copy to be kept with the DAP) Include: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) the catching route <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - minimise the number of steps up, down or over required to reach the vehicle - minimise any problems of uneven or otherwise hazardous flooring - consider the width of the doorways in order to allow easy and safe access when carrying birds - how to protect birds from adverse weather conditions once outside of the building, both during loading and whilst on the vehicle b) the handling plan <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - double leg catching - no more than three birds to be carried per hand - consider matching numbers in hands to multiples of the drawer stocking density - use of catching frames - consider penning into small groups to help minimise crowding and smothering - humane killing of unfit birds immediately, rather than being left until the end of the depopulation - how loose birds will be dealt with 	
Prepare contingency plan for the eventuality that the catching team cannot arrive as planned	
Complete the day before depopulation	
Ensure all access roads and the areas around the poultry unit doors are clean, tidy and clear of clutter	

Depopulation Action Plan (DAP) – on the day of depopulation

To be completed by the producer/farm manager or appointed representative

Action	Carried out? (include date)
<i>Prior to arrival of the catching team and haulier</i>	
Ensure all non-permanent fixtures and fittings with the potential to hinder the catching process have been removed from: a) the catching area b) the route used for carrying birds out to the loading area This may include feeders, drinkers, perches and any other farm equipment, particularly where sharp edges and protrusions could cause injury to the birds or catching team.	
Block off any corners etc. where birds could hide.	
<i>Upon arrival of the catching team/haulier</i>	
Give the written catching plan to the catching team leader.	
Instruct the catching team leader as to the lighting available and where the controls are located.	
Show the catching team leader where all necessary facilities are located. In order to safeguard the welfare of the birds during depopulation it is important to create and keep a relaxed atmosphere in order to ensure that the operation proceeds smoothly. Providing facilities for the catching team, such as toilets, tea and coffee will help to achieve this.	

To be completed by the catching team leader

- 1) Procedure for dealing with loose birds:

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Depopulation Action Plan (DAP) – key personnel

Name of producer/farm manager or appointed supervisor:

Name (block capitals) Signature

Name of catching team leader:

Name (block capitals) Signature

Name of catching team

Name of senior (approved) team member(s):

Name (block capitals) Signature

Name (block capitals) Signature

Name of catching team member responsible for the humane destruction of casualty birds:

Name (block capitals) Signature

Name of haulier:

Name (block capitals) Signature

Depopulation Action Plan (DAP) – post depopulation

To be completed by the producer/farm manager or appointed representative

Number of unfit birds killed during catching	
Number of DOAs and injuries upon arrival at the laying unit. (to be received within 48 hours of the depopulation)	
<p>Causes of mortality:</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p>	
<p>Action taken to prevent further deaths and injury:</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p>	

To be completed by the producer/farm manager or appointed representative and the catching team leader

Review of depopulation (include both positive and negative feedback)

a) Producer/farm manager's or appointed representative's comments:

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Signed: Date.....

b) Catching team leaders comments:

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Signed: Date.....

c) Details of any action required and by whom:

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