



Your poultry update

From RSPCA Assured

Welcome to the Spring/Summer newsletter



As I write this I am still very much desk and housebound, but things are now progressing so rapidly who knows where I will be as you read this! I have to be honest it is lovely not to be travelling so much or living out of a suitcase, and my dog and cats are delighted, but I am missing getting out and about meeting everyone and had been really looking forward to seeing you all at the Pig and Poultry Fair. Still, I am sure the May 2021 event will be bigger and better than ever.

The farming community is a resilient bunch, and coping with the unexpected is commonplace. Covid-19 following so shortly after Brexit has thrown more challenges personally and professionally than ever before. But we continue to bend, not break, and show determination, resolve, compassion, and above all else, kindness.

We are finally recognising our heroes. Not just the incredible NHS, but the essential workers which of course includes farmers. It's that spirit of 'getting on with it' whilst supporting others and going above and beyond, that our children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren will be told about in their history lessons, and we, of course, will never forget.

In this newsletter, you will hopefully find some interesting articles and inspiring stories that make me, and I hope you, feel so proud to be part of the farming community. Enjoy reading, and please keep safe, keep well and keep going.

Joe Bailey, Head of Farming

Assessments Continue with our Members' Help

By Dorian Cross, Field Assessment Manager

At a time where we are all facing a shared anxiety and disruption to our working environment, it remains extremely important that RSPCA Assured continues to work with, and on behalf of, our members.

Brand security and scheme integrity remain essential to secure the premiums our

members benefit from.

By conducting 'virtual' assessments in a remote and safe environment, we are assuring both retailers and consumers that higher farm animal welfare is being maintained by our members under these difficult circumstances.

Whilst the technology involved in a 'virtual' assessment is new to some and not easy for everyone to use, the results are proving very impressive. We appreciate this achievement has only been made possible with the full cooperation of our members for which RSPCA Assured is truly grateful.

Importantly, our assessment contingency plan that we have put in place provides the same level of measuring compliance with the RSPCA welfare standards for farmed animals, comparable to that of a conventional site visit assessment.

This approach has successfully provided the means to continue to validate certification for our members, gaining the approval of our certification body NSF. However, this approach remains a temporary arrangement, until such time our assessors can return to visiting farms again, as nothing fully replaces talking with members in person and seeing their animals up close.

You will have seen that this week we announced a cautious phased return to on-site assessments. Please click [here](#) for the most up to date information.

Desktop Assessment Tips

By Julie Taylor, Senior Assessor

As we are all getting used to the new temporary virtual assessments, we have put together some tips here to make them run smoothly and successfully.

- The assessor may ask you to conduct a video test to establish whether a good signal can be received, the best method to carry out the assessments, and so you can familiarise yourself with the relevant app that will be used (Google Meet, WhatsApp etc)
- You may find that earphones are useful in noisier livestock areas to help you hear one another
- Prior to your desktop assessment, please make sure the mobile device you'll be using is fully charged and that you have all the documents to hand that the assessor pre-advised you about.
- Photographs and electronic versions of documents may be submitted in advance if you wish, however this is not compulsory as it should be possible to examine documents and records via the live video link at the assessment
- Any files you choose to submit in advance will be stored securely and removed permanently as soon as your assessment is over

Thank you, and if you have any questions, please do not hesitate to [get in touch](#).



Clarification on New Plastics, Soy and Palm Oil Policies

By Rebecca Lenik, PR Manager

We recently introduced new policies for plastics, soy and palm oil.

To clarify, these new policies relate **only** to packaged products and **not** to the use of soy or palm oil in animal feed, as we appreciate the logistics involved.

They are a requirement of the logo use guidelines used by retailers and processor/packers only and not producer members.

As such, they are not included in the RSPCA welfare standards. However, we do make a **recommendation only** that producers consider the use of soy and palm oil in their animal feed as it's becoming increasingly important to consumers.

You can find out more [here](#).

Positive Welfare Consultation

By guest contributor Lizzie Rowe, Bristol University

Assessment of animal welfare mainly focuses on protecting animals from negative experiences, but giving animals a good quality of life means allowing them to enjoy positive experiences too.

We, a team of researchers at the University of Bristol and the Royal Agricultural University, have put together frameworks for assessing the extent to which farm animals have opportunities for positive experiences in their lives. These frameworks are based on scientific research.

We are now eager to collaborate with farmers to further develop the frameworks. As such, **we are seeking farmers who would be willing to have a one-hour (approximately) call with a member of our research team**, to go through the assessment based on their farm, and to answer questions on the contents of the framework.

With your knowledge and expertise, you can help us make sure the frameworks are valid, relevant and practical. We are specifically seeking pig, broiler chicken, and beef cattle farmers. We will send you the framework in advance so that you can gather your thoughts on it before the call.

We are in consultation with Defra about using the frameworks to inform monetary rewards for protecting and improving animal welfare; thus this is an opportunity for you to help develop potential future policy on animal welfare.

If you are interested, please email [me](#). Thank you and we hope to hear from you.

The Poultry Industry

By guest contributor Gary Ford, NFU Chief Poultry Adviser

We are all living through challenging and uncertain times at the moment and most, if not nearly all, of our work over the past ten weeks or so has been on C-19 and its impact on the poultry sector. There has been a tremendous range in that impact from a significant increase in demand for eggs (up 30% on pre-Covid levels) to a collapse in demand in foodservice and wholesale for poultry meat.

We have seen unprecedented demand for British eggs during lockdown with people baking more and using more eggs in meals. As a healthy, nutritious and versatile source of protein, this is fantastic to see. While the supply chain has done a magnificent job diverting eggs destined for restaurants, hotels and takeaways on to supermarket shelves, we are aware that some egg has been imported from the EU to keep up with demand. Our message to the public is to please continue to support British egg producers wherever possible by buying British eggs and to look for the Lion stamp. In some respects, this is a turnaround for a sector that was struggling with some oversupply last year and poor producer returns impacting on confidence to invest.

Post C-19 we need to work with retailers and stakeholders to build more resilient and fair supply chain relationships with longer contracts linked to feed trackers. This will give producers – and lenders – confidence to invest in producing British eggs for British consumers as well as taking out some significant volatility replacing it with a degree of sustainability. We do need to caution against over-expansion and lurching from shortage to glut as demand normalises.

On poultry meat, I am disappointed to hear that sales of the higher welfare chicken are not going well. There will be a myriad of reasons, however, I can't help but feel that it needs some promotion around the 'story' to help consumers differentiate from other ranges. Whilst I remain concerned about the impact of calls for a wholesale switch to higher welfare on a number of fronts, I do support consumer-led demand and what might be

termed 'organic' growth of this range. Certainly, our members who have experienced growing the higher welfare bird enjoy the experience.

I am pleased to note, based on member feedback, that remote or virtual audits have gone very well and show how resilient and resourceful we can be when we have to face new ways of working. Whilst a cautious, careful, phased return to assessing on-farm is welcome, I do feel that there is a place for remote audits going forward.

We too, at the NFU, have had to face into different ways of working and that has not only meant working from home from 16 March but it has also meant many meetings held over Skype, Teams or Zoom. Once we all got the hang of these they have worked remarkably well. However, there has to be a place for face to face meetings where relationships come into their own and often as much value is gained from discussions outside the meeting as at the actual meeting itself. Lobbying is a relationship business best conducted face to face.

Finally, if you haven't heard I am moving on to a new role at the NFU as Regional Director for the East Anglia region. Whilst I will miss focussing all of my time on our wonderful poultry sector I will still be keeping my hand in at least from a regional perspective given the importance of poultry to the East Anglia region. Thank you all for your support in my nearly seven years as Chief Poultry Adviser. I wish you all well in our fantastic forward-looking sector and I look forward to working with East Anglia poultry members as well as continuing to engage with key stakeholders such as the RSPCA.



Doing Our Bit

By guest contributor Clair Bullen, Anglia Free Range Eggs

Here at Anglia Free Range Eggs, we are very conscious of just how fortunate we all are. It is very much business as usual for us, with all our staff still fully employed either in the packing centre or working from home.

Our staff have quite simply been amazing, supporting the necessary social distancing precautions & measures and adapting quickly to their new working environments.

We know that not everyone is as fortunate, so we have been doing our bit to help support some really worthwhile local charities. We started with a donation to *Baking a Difference*, whose volunteers bake & deliver baskets for people who have been nominated by members of the public for their good deeds.

We have also formed a partnership with *NR5 Helping Hands*, a group of volunteers who help prepare and deliver food parcels and support the vulnerable within the local community.

In these difficult times, a little kindness goes a long way & we are delighted to be able to help.



LEAF Online Farm Sunday!

With farm visits on hold and LEAF Open Farm Sunday postponed to September, the organisers, Linking Environment And Farming, have announced they are running their very first [LEAF Online Farm Sunday](#).

On Sunday 7th June, farmers from Aberdeenshire to Jersey, and across all farming sectors, will be taking over the LEAF Open Farm Sunday (LOFS) [Facebook channel](#) and hosting virtual tours showcasing what is involved in producing food, enhancing the environment, and some of the amazing science and technology involved. This virtual format allows for live interaction and questions from the public. Find out more [here](#).

If you and/or your farm would like to get involved, don't forget to use the #rspcaassured hashtag too and show how important higher animal welfare is on your farm!

Nuffield Webinar: Stay Calm through Covid

By guest contributor at Nuffield Farming

There seem to be two clear camps of people I've come across in Lockdown, says Holly Beckett – those who are extremely stressed and distressed and feel a total lack of control over the situation and the other group - like me – is loving lockdown! There is a sense of calm and a more relaxed pace of life and ultimately, real change comes from crisis and the opportunities we have to really change the reality of British agriculture have not been so open for decades – what an exciting time!



Holly, Director of Focussed Farmers set up in 2017 to introduce mindfulness to agriculture, has recently run an online series of workshops entitled *Stay Calm through Covid* which began with an interview with three farmers who have been working with Holly through Focussed Farmers to bring mindfulness, coupled with goal setting techniques, into their daily lives for a number of years.

The title of the interview was *Crisis is a State of Mind* and the farmers, in turn, explained what mindfulness, increased through the mental exercise of meditation had brought to them, their family and their farming business and the stories were a far cry from a crisis.

Rob Bebbington, arable farmer from Shropshire explained how at the time of coming across Focussed Farmers he felt like he was treading water and not as focussed as he could be. He noticed a difference straight away in that he began to be able to ignore the noise, had a much clearer mind through the day that allowed him to focus on what was really important to him to get done.

Dan Burdett, dairy farmer and 2019 Nuffield Scholar was not only facing the trials and tribulations of a global lockdown but has also just been struck by an outbreak of TB. Dan had taken interest in the programme as he felt his mind was cluttered a lot of the time and he was always starting lots of jobs but seemed to not finish them. He has found that nowadays he can notice quickly if the noise in his head is getting too loud or too busy and he knows how effective it is to just stop and take a mindful moment, go for a walk and just focus on one thing. He now focusses only on the things he can change and explained how the tools he gained from Focussed Farmers have been really helpful to keep him on an even keel over the past few months, whatever he is faced with.

Focussed Farmers is a mindfulness-based programme to develop focus, increase productivity and reduce stress, through self-leadership and mental training. The training and knowledge transfer is based heavily on recent research into neuroscience and cognitive psychology and Holly provides the whole of the agricultural community with an opportunity to learn a bit more about this through the workshop series; which you can [view online](#).

Find out more about Focussed Farmers [here](#) or follow [@FocussedFarmers](#) on Twitter.

Helpful Wellbeing Links

If you need help or have queries regarding desktop assessments or anything else related to RSPCA Assured, please do contact us. We have also shared some helpful links on wellbeing during the Covid-19 crisis below:

[That Discomfort You're Feeling is Grief](#)

[Caring for employee mental health: a coronavirus guide](#)

[The Adaptive Challenge of COVID-19](#)

[Ten things I've learned in a month of working from home](#)

[Managing remote teams so BAU still happens as normal](#)

Best wishes,

RSPCA Assured

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