

Your laying hen update

from RSPCA Assured



Welcome

We will now be sending out monthly emails to keep you updated on all things RSPCA Assured. As this is our first email, we would love to hear any feedback you may have - please [contact us](#). We hope you enjoy reading...

A message from Joe Bailey - Head of Farming



Joe began her career with the RSPCA as an Inspector back in 1994. Since then, she has worked as a Trading Standards Animal Health and Welfare Inspector, Livestock Technical Manager for NSF and Farm Community Network Ambassador. She is also a Nuffield Farming Scholar.

Joe attends and speaks at events, conferences, industry and government meetings and is a well-regarded figure in the industry. In 2017, Joe was awarded the CharityComms inspiring communicator award.

Welcome to the very first Laying Hen letter. Hopefully, you will find it not only interesting but also useful. I would love to hear your good news stories, awards you have been nominated for, personal and business achievements. This is your opportunity, as well as ours, to share information, photos, thoughts, and ideas, as well as standards updates and pertinent industry news.

It is RSPCA Assured's 25th anniversary this year and coincidentally, it is my 25th anniversary in the world of welfare! In the last few years, I have become interested in the correlation between animal welfare and human well-being. Increasingly we are all beginning to understand the connection between animal health, welfare, and productivity to human health and well-being. Farming has its fair share of triumphs and traumas. The latter of which can be completely out of our control - weather, Brexit and disease to some extent, all of which can induce stress.

I am proud to be a Farming Community Network (FCN), Ambassador. FCN does an

incredible job to support the farming community at times of need. I have also recently undertaken a 2-day Mental Health First Aid course which I would highly recommend. Our mental health and that of our colleagues and staff are just as important as our physical health. There are many ways in which we can reduce stress, personally, I love walking and running in the fresh air. The endorphins flow and I feel great! I highly recommend these stress-busting activities. I thought I was a good runner until I got chatting with one of our members recently. Please see her story below. It might just inspire you to don a pair of trainers.

I hope you enjoy this newsletter. Please send in your thoughts and contributions for the next edition in December. Have a lovely summer. Please feel free to contact me at any time.

Tel: 07717 722045

Olivia Potter - Marathon runner extraordinaire!

RSPCA Assured would like to highlight the achievements of Olivia Potter, the Farms Director at Potters Poultry, who has just completed her 136th marathon in her bid to raise awareness and money for Cancer Research.

Olivia began her marathon mission in 2013. Her original theme being “4 marathons in 4 months in 4 countries”. Her first marathon took place in Brighton in April 2013. Her passion for running led her to complete her 100th marathon in July 2018 despite not being able to run for 18 months due to a broken leg! By February 2019 Olivia completed 52 marathons in 52 weeks and in March she ran 100 miles finishing in 20 hours 15 minutes and was the 1st lady! To celebrate the 75th anniversary of the D-Day landings she ran her 135th marathon with hopes to have completed 150 marathons by the end of the year!

Her determination and help in raising awareness and money for Cancer Research is highly commendable and inspirational! We wish her all the best in her mission.



The Lakes Free Range Egg Company welcome visitors from EAST

RSPCA Assured were delighted to receive a request from EAST (The Environment & Animal Society of Taiwan) wishing to visit us and our farms in May this year. Sally Li and Treya Peng are researchers from EAST and are keen to learn how we care for our animals and hope to implement their findings in Taiwan. The Lakes Free Range Egg Company kindly welcomed our guests onto two of their farms, one using a Multi-Tier system and the other using the Flat Deck system. This is what Sally and Treya thought...

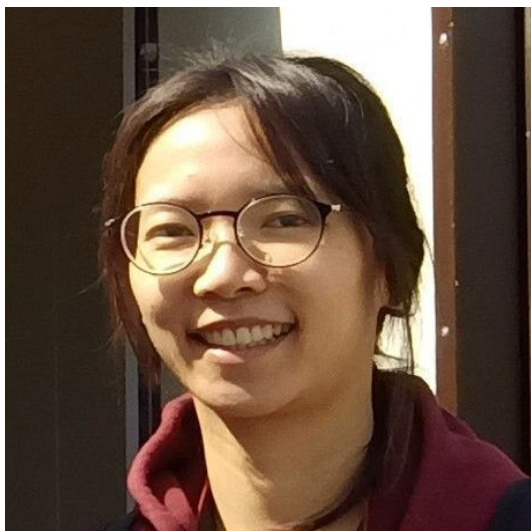
"We are an animal protection organisation-EAST (The Environment & Animal Society of Taiwan) and this year (2019) we established the Cage-Free Alliance like RSPCA Assured. It was our pleasure to visit two RSPCA Assured free-range laying hen farms- Askew Rigg and Broxty House in May this year.

It was really great to meet the farmers who very much understand all the bird's needs and are also very willing to improve the bird's welfare. The most impressive thing to us was the birds all have very good feather coverage, were very energetic and very easy to get close to.

The farmers are very open and friendly about our questions and very willing to share their special tips to enhance the bird's welfare and reduce the workload in the meantime. For example, the Askew Rigg farm set some light on the back of the nest boxes to train the pullet to use the nest and the Broxty House farm added some upside-down plastic tubs and the birds had a lot of fun pecking them.

After visiting the two farms we think it will not be that difficult to go cage-free as long as people understand how much worth it has."

Sally Li (EAST Researcher)



Askew Rigg



Broxty House



Julie Taylor Senior Assessor

Julie is our species lead in laying hens, overseeing all of Ireland, Scotland and the north of England. She also provides IT technical support for the wider assessment team. Julie joined RSPCA Assured in 2015 and became a senior assessor in 2016. Based on Tyneside, Julie initially started her working life in IT, however, a passion for sustainable food and farming lead her to the world of agriculture and a new career in 2002.

The Range Management Plan

By Julie Taylor, Senior Assessor

Standard R1.0 states:-

A Range Management Plan, incorporating the standards in the range section, must be developed, implemented and annually updated.

What is a range management plan?

The range management plan or RMP is a written document that describes the range, what it provides and how it is managed. It is intended to help establish a focus on range quality and management as well as helping to show how the range standards are being

met. It must be reviewed once a year to make sure it's up to date, as the additional natural cover is planted, shelters are replaced or moved, etc.

What should the range management plan contain?

Recommendations for what to include in your RMP can be found in the information box under the standard, here are some key areas to consider:-

- * General details about the range

- * The range area, in hectares

- * The number of birds that have access to the range, and the stocking density (number of hens per hectare)

- * A map of the range is a very useful item to include. You can use a copy of your Rural Land Register field maps as a starting point. For each range, the map should identify:-

- a) The range area - showing the fields that are allocated to the hens and the boundary of the range. Any land that is further than 350m from the nearest pophole cannot be included in the range area. Range areas need to be divided into separate areas per flock by some form of effective fencing or barrier.

- b) The location of natural cover (canopy-forming plants) - a minimum of 5% of the range area is required, most often provided by trees and hedges but may include semi-permanent vegetation such as artichoke and kale.

- c) Shade and shelter (overhead protection from inclement weather and aerial predators) - shelter should keep birds dry when it rains and provide shade when it is sunny, which is best achieved by a solid overhead structure. This can be natural cover such as hedges provided they offer protection all year round, or maybe artificial items such as home-made shelters, farm trailers, etc..

A minimum of 8m² per 1,000 birds is required, and some must be available within 20m of the popholes. Hens can use sheltered areas as secure stepping stones to access the range, so consider their size, location and spread across the ranging area range enrichment (perching, dustbathing and foraging areas). Enrichment can include natural areas (sandy banks for dust bathing, fallen trees for perching) or items you have provided (tractor tyres filled with dust bathing material, wooden pallets for perching)

Description of management

- * How do you manage worn and poached areas? Reseeding, resting, rotating the range area

- * How do you prevent the build-up of parasites and disease on the range? Grass should be kept short as worm eggs are sensitive to sunlight. Long grass can lead to crop impaction and also provide an attractive place for wild birds and rodents. Do you top the grass, or graze it with other livestock? Hens can create depressions in the range from dustbathing which later fill up with rain and turn into muddy puddles. These puddles can attract wild birds and can be a source of contamination detrimental to the birds' health,

as well as contributing to wet litter and soiled eggs.

* How do you manage the area outside of the popholes? This area receives the greatest wear and tear from bird traffic and so needs management during the flock and at turnaround to keep it in good condition. What material do you have immediately outside of the popholes - concrete, stones, bark chippings, mesh ramps? This area should be kept clean and well-draining, potentially providing a place for hens to “clean their feet” before they come back into the house from the range. Concrete may require regular cleaning during the flock, stones may be harrowed, topped up or replaced at turnaround.

* What management happens at turnaround, in preparation for the next flock? Filling in holes, spreading lime, etc.

* How are your hens protected from wild animals? Identify what harmful wild animals do your hens encounter on the range e.g. foxes, buzzards, badgers. The first line of defense is exclusion - what kind of fencing is in place (stock netting, electric fencing, stock-proof hedging, etc.).

Reviewing the RMP

When reviewing your plan each year, think about how the flock has used the range, what areas they seem to favour and what areas they seem to avoid, and what you can do to further make the range a safe and inviting location for your hens. You can demonstrate that your plan is reviewed once a year by signing and dating the bottom of the document when the review takes place.

[Click here to see our laying hens standards](#)



Neil Scott Head of Certification

Prior to joining RSPCA Assured as Operations Manager, Neil's background was in retail.

As Head of Certification, Neil's responsibilities include working closely with our certifying body to ensure our scheme is industry-leading and translating our strategy into operational procedures and practices that will protect the integrity of our scheme. He also line manages the Operations and Field Assessment Teams.

Certification update - adding value & increasing trust in our logo

By Neil Scott, Head of Certification

We're currently working really hard behind the scenes on a number of exciting projects which have been created to increase the value of our logo to our Membership and build more trust with your consumers. Here are some of the initiatives we are currently working on:

* A completely new I.T. platform to improve the Member experience, whether that be in applying to join, renewing membership or the assessment process itself

* Unannounced visits - after receiving feedback from your supply chains, and witnessing the negative PR directed at some assurance schemes recently, we are looking at increasing the number of unannounced visits we currently carry out. A new format for these visits is currently being developed that will allow us to further increase consumer trust in our logo whilst minimising the impact on producers

* We are about to pilot a new member checker which will enable us to improve the way in which your certificates are issued, as well as making it much simpler for you and your permitted partners to access basic certificate information. We will test this thoroughly before making it available to you.

We will keep you updated on the progress of these initiatives as they develop.



Dorian Cross Field Assessment Manager

Dorian joined Freedom Food in 2005 as the Field Assessment Manager, following 12 years at Senior Manager level with the UK's largest fully integrated turkey production. As a member of the Senior Management Team, Dorian continues to manage the field assessment team and support the membership services team throughout our certification processes; ensuring all activities conform to internationally recognised service standard ISO17065.

Flock Depopulation - Ensuring a smooth operation

By Dorian Cross, Field Assessment Manager

When asked if I would like to contribute to our newsletter to our laying hen membership regarding an important subject, my response was very much a yes, and my chosen subject, that of end of lay flock depopulation.

We appreciated that removing hens in big numbers from their familiar living environment can be challenging. Every depopulation needs careful and considerate planning - not just flock considerate, but people considerate too. The RSPCA welfare standards for laying hens well recognise the impact and welfare of laying hens at the time of depletion. 24 standards are specifically dedicated to this subject, and when followed, should make

all go well.

Preparation and comprehensive completion of the flock depopulation plan are key to ensure the process runs as smoothly as possible. The plan also provides an easy way to document how well, or not, each depopulation was carried out. As such it provides an important record of learning that can support amendment and improvement for future planning if necessary.

The RSPCA welfare standards clearly define that the ultimate responsibility for the welfare of the hens during depopulation rests with the producer/farm manager. This responsibility is essential to making laying hen depopulation a smooth operation on all sites.

For further information or advice on these standards please contact me: 07901 677809

Plastic

By Judy Proctor, National Plastics Strategy Lead, Environment Agency

Everyone's talking about plastics - brought to our attention dramatically through the disturbing images on Blue Planet II and other campaigns. Although we all need to work together to reduce plastics entering the oceans we also need to increasingly turn our attention to plastics in the freshwater and soil environments.

The sheer amount of plastic used globally as well as low recycling rates and the propensity to litter plastics like food wrappings means that plastics have entered the environment in large quantities.

There is increasing concern about the potential impacts of microplastics in soils, the water environment, on the food chain, human health and animals and plants.

As the Environment Agency, we're keen to play our part in protecting and enhancing soil health. Increasingly we're seeing farmers concerned by plastics contaminating their soils. We see farmers concerned by the sheer amount of plastics they're receiving at their site in various forms of packaging, which they then need to handle and dispose of responsibly, as well as highlighting concern over the plastic content of some of the products, such as composts and digestates spread on their land.



5 Steps You Can Take

- * Check the quality of composts, digestates, and other materials before they're spread to your land and be aware of cheap or free bedding 'products' which contain plastics, treated or painted wood. These materials are not permitted for use as animal bedding or exercise surfaces because of the risks to animals and the human food supply chain.
- * Collect plastic wrappings and containers immediately after use to reduce potential contamination and to prevent them from being windblown.
- * Research alternatives to plastic enrichment toys for livestock and take steps to prevent them from getting into animal wastes and spread to soils.
- * Request bulk delivery and investigate other means to reduce the amount of plastic you receive on the farm, which you then need to pay to dispose of.
- * Investigate alternative plastic mulches for crops.

Cage to Barn

By Joe Bailey, Head of Farming

RSPCA Assured understand that many of our members are concerned about the transition from cage to barn. We are working with the RSPCA to form our position and will be able to update you on this by the next edition. Please see below guidance from the RSPCA.

The RSPCA firmly believes that barn systems for laying hens can support and enhance good bird welfare, provided they are well designed and well managed.

As some of the industry begins its transition away from caged systems, and in order to help producers plan for the future, the RSPCA wishes to provide clarity on its current position in relation to barn systems.

The RSPCA's welfare standards for laying hens already include a number of important requirements to help safeguard the welfare of birds in barn systems. The current set of standards (August 2017) will continue to be used by RSPCA Assured for approving any new members using such systems.

However, as part of our ongoing review of our welfare standards, there are a number of key issues relating to barn systems that we are seeking to examine in the near future, these include:

- The provision of natural light
- Enhanced environmental enrichment
- Space availability
- The use of multiple-deck housing for colony conversions

Should our review of these issues result in any potential standards changes then we will, as usual, consult with producers, industry bodies, welfare academics and poultry veterinarians following our established procedures prior to implementation.

For clarity, the RSPCA welfare standards will continue to prohibit the use of 'combi-systems'. We would encourage producers looking to build new systems or convert old ones, to contact the RSPCA Farm Animals Department to discuss their plans with us, and we will be able to share our current thinking with them at that stage.



Xenia Kingsley **Marketing Manager**

Xenia is responsible for consumer marketing. This includes planning television advertising; event catering partnerships; Google Adwords; campaign implementation and supplier management. Xenia also oversees our Marketing Executive, Emily.

Prior to joining RSPCA Assured in early 2018, Xenia's career background was in PR and marketing, where she worked agency-side for a number of years. She holds a degree in Marketing Food and Drink.

Our investment in promoting RSPCA Assured labelled eggs

By Xenia Kingsley, Marketing Manager

Every year, we devote a huge chunk of our marketing budget to advertising in order to raise awareness of the scheme. It's crucial to us that our investment yields results for our members, so to make sure our campaigns are as effective as possible, we focus on one product or species at a time.

The start of this year has had a really strong laying hen focus. So far, we've put £125k into TV advertising, social promotions and an influencer campaign on Instagram, specifically promoting higher welfare, RSPCA Assured labelled eggs.

This activity has centered around the new year, and healthy eating, as well as pancake day and the boost in egg buying around that period. We were also able to secure some

prime time ad spots during an episode of Friday Night Feast with Jamie & Jimmy on Channel 4, which explored laying hen welfare and “hidden eggs”.

And although our species focus is switching to chicken for the summer season, we have more laying hen activity in the pipeline to tie in with Great British Bake Off later this year. We have another £125k dedicated to promoting RSPCA Assured eggs and are really excited to develop a new TV ad specifically for this burst.



Anti-farming Activist advice

By Joe Bailey, Head of Farming

We are aware of increasing reports of anti-farming activity and understand some of our members may have concerns.

The NFU has issued some advice which can be viewed via your NFU membership number on this link:

<https://www.nfuonline.com/sectors/poultry/poultry-news/dealing-with-animal-rights-activists-and-extremists/>

If you are not a member of the NFU our advice is:

- * Always check the ID of visitors and, and if you think their ID may be fake, call the company they claim to work for.
- * Adhere to the RSPCA Standards - which are mandatory - at all times
- * If you are concerned about your safety, or that of your staff, livestock or property, call

the police.

* Please call us asap

* Keep calm, keep vigilant and keep safe

Need to contact us?

We are here to help! Please contact the relevant department below:

[Commercial](#) [Farming/Mental Wellbeing](#) [Finance](#) [Marketing](#) [Membership](#)

Best wishes,

RSPCA Assured

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