

Reports and Comments

FAWC Opinion on Enriched Cages and on Beak Trimming of Laying Hens

The UK's Farm Animal Welfare Council (FAWC) has issued two Opinions; one covering beak trimming of laying hens and the other, enriched cages for laying hens. Such 'Opinions' are a recent edition to the FAWC's methods for advising the Government about areas of animal welfare concern and their aim is to address specific issues in a shorter format and timeframe than traditional FAWC reports. Each Opinion provides a 'background' to the chosen focus followed by an 'evidence' and then 'critical issue' section. A cost/benefit ethical analysis is also included and finally an opinion, detailing the FAWC's advice and recommendations to the Government.

According to these Opinions there are approximately 28.6 million hens in the UK laying flock, with the split between production systems being: 62.7% conventional cage; 27.2% free range; 5.1% barn; and 5.0% organic.

Beak trimming is currently a permitted mutilation in the UK when carried out to reduce injurious feather pecking or cannibalism. However, the Welfare of Farmed Animals (England) Amendment Regulations 2002 (SI 1646) states that beak trimming may only be practiced up until 31 December 2010. The FAWC's Opinion explores many of the factors surrounding beak trimming and concludes with a number of advisory points and recommendations, the main one being that the proposed ban on beak trimming of laying hens by 31 December 2010 should not be introduced in Great Britain. Although the FAWC judges beak trimming to be "a major insult to the hen's welfare" their view remains that until alternatives become available to reduce the likelihood of injurious pecking, which is unpredictable in onset and a cause of significant pain, distress, suffering and death, beak trimming will remain a necessity.

The forthcoming move from enriched to unenriched cages is another important and imminent event which will affect many laying hen flocks and the egg industry as a whole. In line with Council Directive 99/74/EC conventional cages will be banned throughout the EU from 1 January 2012 and only enriched cages permitted. The FAWC drew on the results of a number of Defra funded projects investigating various laying hen production systems and also considered the findings of the EC funded 'LayWel' project to illustrate how various housing systems differ in terms of hen welfare. The conclusions of the Opinion includes: "all commercial systems of production for laying hens offer some compromise in terms of the hen's welfare. However, well-managed enriched cage systems are able to offer the potential for an acceptable balance between the requirements for the hen's health and welfare, and public health, in combination with economic and environmental considerations". To ensure that best practice is adopted when managing laying hens in enriched cages, the FAWC recommends that the results of recent Government research investigating enriched cages should be disseminated widely throughout the poultry industry. They also believe that the Code of

Recommendations for the Welfare of Laying hens should be revised to ensure that egg producers are provided with the most up-to-date guidance on enriched cages.

FAWC Opinion on Enriched Cages for Laying Hens (November 2007). A4, 15 pages. Copies are available from FAWC Secretariat, Area 701, 1A Page Street, London, SW1P 4PQ, UK. www.fawc.org.uk.

FAWC Opinion on Beak Trimming of Laying Hens (November 2007). A4, 12 pages. Copies are available from FAWC Secretariat, Area 701, 1A Page Street, London, SW1P 4PQ, UK. www.fawc.org.uk.

E Carter

UFAW

Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council on the Various Systems of Rearing Laying Hens in Particular Those Covered by Directive 1999/74/EC

Directive 1999/74/EC recognised three farming methods for rearing laying hens within the European Union (EU): unenriched cages, enriched cages and alternative systems. The Directive came into force in July 1999 with the aim of protecting laying hen welfare by setting out a core set of minimum standards. Article 10 of these regulations required the European Commission (EC) to submit to the Council a report based on scientific opinion and covering the various rearing systems for laying hens, taking into account pathological, zootechnical, physiological and ethological aspects as well as environmental and health impacts. The report was also required to incorporate the socio-economic implications of the various systems and their effects on the European Communities economic partners.

In line with this requirement, the European Commission has published a Communication for the European Parliament and the Council (see details below) taking into account the above factors. The report is based on a number of independent studies, including: a scientific report by the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) which looked into the welfare aspects of various systems of keeping laying hens; an EU funded project, 'LayWel' which considered the welfare implications of changes in production systems for laying hens and EGGDEFENCE, a project that investigated egg safety and quality in relation to different housing systems. A number of other research projects are still underway.

Perhaps the most important requirement of the Directive was that from January 2012 the rearing of laying hens using conventional cages would no longer be permitted. Egg producers using conventional cages have been hesitant to change their method of production due to uncertainty within the industry over whether the ban was actually going to take place in 2012 or later, or even whether the ban would come into force at all. The view within the industry is that the cost of conversion together with increasing production costs would put them at a competitive disadvantage to egg

producers using traditional battery cage systems. However, according to the Commissioner for Health and Consumer Protection, Markos Kyprianou, there is sufficient scientific and economic support for the ban on conventional battery cages to go ahead and he urges operators: “to start phasing out the use of these cages as soon as possible so that there is full compliance with the EU ban by the deadline 2012”.

Using the findings of one study, submitted by Agra CEAS, the EC estimated that changing from unenriched cages to enriched cages might increase the cost of each egg by less than €0.01, when given a current average egg cost of €0.09. The Commission’s view, however, after considering the findings of both the 2005 and 2006 EUROBAROMETER surveys, is that consumers rate animal welfare highly and will be willing to pay more for eggs sourced from more animal welfare-friendly production systems. Included within the actions recommended by the EC is a drive towards promoting high animal welfare standards within the EU as a marketing and competitive advantage. They advise using a number of mechanisms:

- Sensitise both public and private sector to give priority to the support of scientific investments, information and education in this area
- Promotion of information campaigns on rearing systems set out in the framework given by the marketing standards for eggs
- Ensure co-operation between stakeholders across the supply chain
- Examine the possibility of creating a general EU framework to allow animal welfare labelling on the basis of welfare indicators and certification schemes valid at European level

Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council on the Various Systems of Rearing Laying Hens in Particular Those Covered by Directive 1999/74/EC (January 2008). A4, 11 pages. European Commission, Brussels, Belgium. http://ec.europa.eu/food/animal/welfare/farm/laying_hens_en.htm.

E Carter
UFAW

European Union Regulation (EC) No 1523/2007 Covering Use of Cat and Dog Fur in the EU

A regulation banning the production, marketing, import and export of both dog and cat fur throughout the European Union (EU) was approved in December 2007 and will apply from December 2008. Over recent years European consumers have increasingly raised strong objections to both the farming of dogs and cats for their fur and to the possibility that they may unknowingly purchase unlabelled products made from dog or cat fur. Consequently, 15 member states brought legislation into force, at a national level, to address consumer concerns including: prohibiting the rearing of cats and dogs for fur purposes, banning the production and/or import of products containing cat or dog fur and instigating specific labelling requirements. It was thought that variations between national laws would be likely to hamper the free movement

of legitimate fur products within the EU therefore regulations addressing these concerns, and applicable throughout the EU were thought appropriate.

Although these regulations have been introduced largely to prevent disruption to the internal market for other fur trade within the European Union, they also tackle welfare concerns raised in relation to dog and cat fur farming practices. Dog and cat furs are principally produced in non-EU countries and the methods of production and slaughter have been questioned following evidence received by the Commission of widescale mistreatment of cats and dogs being bred for their skin and fur. Markos Kyprianou, Commissioner for Health and Consumer Protection, stated that: “The message that we have received from EU consumers has been loud and clear. They do not find it acceptable to farm cats and dogs for their fur, nor do they want products containing such fur sold on the European market”.

European Union Regulation (EC) No 1523/2007 Covering Use of Cat and Dog Fur in the EU (December 2007). A4, 4 pages. The European Commission, Brussels, Belgium. information and a copy of the Regulation is available at: http://ec.europa.eu/food/animal/welfare/fur_cats_dogs_en.htm.

E Carter
UFAW

Animal Welfare (Leg-hold Traps) Order 2007 in New Zealand

Leg-hold traps are metal devices with sprung jaws designed to catch and hold an animal by a limb when triggered. They can be used legally in New Zealand to trap possums, ferrets, stoats and feral cats. The humaneness of leg-hold traps has been questioned, however, with regard to the degree of injury and distress caused to trapped animals, the possibility of trapped animals escaping in an injured state and the suffering that may be experienced by animals whilst held in traps. There are also concerns that non-target, domestic or endangered animals may be caught and injured.

In view of the above, and following consultation, the New Zealand Government has developed new legislation: Animal Welfare (Leg-hold Traps) Order 2007. These regulations came into effect from January this year and cover the sale and use of all leg-hold traps in New Zealand. A number of restrictions are outlined and will be phased in over a three-year period, including: prohibited use of all leg-hold traps within 150 m of a residence; a ban on all long-spring and double-coil leg-hold traps larger than 10.5 cm (size 1.5) from 2009 and a ban on all non-padded, double-coil, 10.5 cm leg-hold traps from 2011.

There are certain circumstances, however, in which approval may be sought to use or sell restricted traps, including situations in which no viable alternatives exist, or it is in the public interests, such as for biosecurity, conservation, public health or animal health reasons.

Animal Welfare (Leg-hold Traps) Order 2007 in New Zealand (November 2007). A4, 5 pages. Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, New Zealand. <http://www.biosecurity.govt.nz/animal-welfare/req/traps/legholdtraps>.

E Carter
UFAW