



Meat Chickens

A code of practice issued under the Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 2011

Code of Practice 2012



Department of
**Agriculture and
Rural Development**

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 What is the purpose of this Code of Practice?

In controlled environment meat chicken production systems and to a large extent with free range meat chicken production systems the chickens are totally reliant on human management for all their daily requirements and their welfare. If it is to be done well, the rearing of meat chickens requires both experience and the observance of high standards of management of the chickens, their environment and hygiene. Unless that work is done well, the welfare of the birds cannot be adequately protected.

This code sets out the welfare legislative requirements that owners of meat chickens and conventionally reared meat chickens and persons who are in charge of them must meet. This Code also includes information and good practice to equip all those responsible for meat chickens to adopt a standard of husbandry, care and handling to satisfy the legislative requirements.

1.2 Who does this code apply to?

This code applies to owners of meat chickens and persons who are in charge of them. Under the Welfare of Farmed Animals Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 a person responsible for a farmed animal is responsible for meeting the legal obligations for animal welfare. Responsibility for meeting minimum standards relating to the provision, design and maintenance of the facilities and equipment, the allocation of operational responsibilities and the competence and supervision of performance of employees, lies with every person in charge of the meat chickens.

Legislative Requirement

Welfare of Farmed Animals Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 states at:

Regulation 5 (1) - A person responsible for a farmed animal -

- (a) shall not attend to the animal unless that person is acquainted with any relevant code of practice and has access to the code while attending to the animal;
 - (b) shall take all reasonable steps to ensure that a person employed or engaged by that person does not attend to the animal unless that other person -
 - (i) is acquainted with any relevant codes of practice;
 - (ii) has access to all such codes while attending to the animal; and
 - (iii) has received instruction and guidance on those codes.
- (2) In this section, a “relevant code of practice” means a code of practice issued or revised under section 16 of the Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 relating to the particular species of farmed animal to which a person is attending.

1.3 What animals does this code apply to?

This code applies to **meat chickens** and **conventionally reared meat chickens**.

In this code the word “**meat chicken**” means an animal of the species *Gallus gallus* that is kept for meat production.

In this code the word “**conventionally reared meat chicken**” means an animal of the species *Gallus gallus* that is kept for meat production, other than one -

- (a) that is on a holding with fewer than 500 such animals or with only breeding stocks of such animals;
- (b) that is on a hatchery;
- (c) in relation to which the term - “Extensive indoor (barn reared)”, “Free Range”, “Traditional free range” or “Free range - total freedom” can be used within the meaning of point (b), (c), (d) or (e) of Annex V to Commission Regulation (EC) No 543/2008 laying down detailed rules for the application of Council Regulation (EC) No 1234/2007 as regards the marketing standards;
- (d) that is organically reared in accordance with Council Regulation (EC) No 1234/07 as regards the marketing standards for poultry meat.

Legal requirements for meat chickens and conventionally reared meat chickens are included throughout the Code under the title legislative requirements.

1.4 What happens if I do not follow the minimum standards in this code?

Failure to meet a minimum standard in this code may be used as evidence to support a prosecution for an offence under the Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 and/or the Welfare of Farmed Animals Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012. A person who is charged with an offence under this legislation can defend himself or herself by showing that he or she has equalled or exceeded the minimum standards in this code.

You should be aware that any of the legal requirements quoted in the code could change - you should check that these are an accurate statement of the law as it currently stands.

2.0 Flock Management

The importance of good stockmanship cannot be over-emphasised. Good stockmanship requires competence, experience and the observance of high standards of animal husbandry. Appropriate knowledge and skills are important if the animals' health and welfare requirements are to be met.

2.1 Stockmanship

The knowledge, experience, skills, abilities and attitude of the flock-keeper are integral to the standard of welfare experienced by the chickens.

Regardless of the production system employed, there will be inherent problems and particular welfare risks which the flock-keeper must manage for the benefit of the animals. Familiarity with the risks that are characteristic of the production system in which they work is an important aspect of stockmanship. Flock-keepers need to employ strategies to improve the management of the birds where indicators suggest that the system is not meeting their welfare needs. Good stockmanship is particularly important to ensure the welfare of meat chickens in larger groups, group housing or in outdoor conditions because it is more difficult to observe birds individually in those systems.

All flock-keepers should demonstrate a full understanding of the welfare needs and basic biology of the birds and have shown that they are capable of safeguarding them under all foreseeable conditions before taking responsibility for a flock. A good flock-keeper will have a compassionate and humane attitude, will be able to anticipate and avoid many potential welfare problems, and have the ability to identify those that do occur and respond to them promptly.

Flock-keepers should establish a methodical routine in completing the range of tasks involved in keeping chickens. As part of this, they should be particularly vigilant in checking that systems are operating properly and birds are behaving normally. This will enable them to detect problems in their earliest stages and acquire a good understanding of the action to be taken if a problem is noticed. If the cause is not obvious, or if the flock-keeper's action is not effective, immediate veterinary or technical advice should be obtained.

The strain of bird selected must be suitable for the production system. Care must be taken to use suitable strains and feeding regimes in the production of birds within extended growing periods (e.g. organic, free range). The competence of the person responsible for them and the time available to carry out their duties.

It is essential to ensure that enough time is available within the flock-keeper's daily work routine for the birds to be properly inspected and for any remedial action to be taken. Large flocks can be managed successfully but in general the larger the size of unit, the greater the degree of skill and dedication needed to safeguard the welfare of the birds.

Legislative Requirement

This section applies to meat chickens and conventionally reared meat chickens -

Welfare of Farmed Animals Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 states that:

Schedule 1, paragraph 1 - Animals shall be cared for by a sufficient number of staff who possess the appropriate ability, knowledge and professional competence.

Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 states at:

Section 9 (1) - A person commits an offence if that person does not take such steps as are reasonable in all the circumstances to ensure that the needs of an animal for which that person is responsible are met to the extent required by good practice.

Section 9 (2) - For the purposes of this Act, an animal's needs shall be taken to include -

- (a) its need for a suitable environment,
- (b) its need for a suitable diet,
- (c) its need to be able to exhibit normal behaviour patterns,
- (d) any need it has to be housed with, or apart from, other animals, and
- (e) its need to be protected from pain, suffering, injury and disease.

Section 9 (3) The circumstances to which it is relevant to have regard when applying subsection (1) include, in particular -

- (a) any lawful purpose for which the animal is kept, and
- (b) any lawful activity undertaken in relation to the animal.

Section 9 (4) - This section does not apply to the destruction of an animal in an appropriate and humane manner.

2.2 Staffing and Training

Those responsible for the care of meat chickens need to be competent and well trained. Appropriate training for staff on the care and maintenance of meat chickens, and effective implementation of this training, can significantly influence the welfare of meat chickens. Knowledge of the normal appearance and behaviour of the chickens is essential for monitoring their health and welfare. It is important that those in charge of meat chickens are able to recognise early signs of distress, disease or aberrant behaviours so that prompt action is taken or advice sought.



Owners, managers or persons in charge are required to ensure that their staff has either the relevant knowledge and training, or appropriate supervision and support, to ensure that the health and welfare needs of the birds in their care are met. Training can be provided either formally, by the completion of specific courses focusing on the care and management of meat chickens, or on the job, by experienced supervisors. It is important to ensure that all staff, including contract or temporary staff, are trained and competent in their relevant tasks. From 11 April 2011 anyone responsible for conventionally reared meat chickens must hold a certificate for their care and management which is recognised by the Department or be in possession of a letter, issued by the Department, stating that they are qualified to do so.

A training plan should be implemented to ensure that those working with meat chickens recognise signs, not only of normal behaviour and good health but also of illness or disease or impending health problems. If specialised tasks are to be performed, for example vaccination or humane culling, then specific training should be given. Alternatively, the services of a competent contractor using trained staff should be obtained.

Legislative Requirement

This section applies to conventionally reared meat chickens only -

Welfare of Farmed Animals Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 states that:

Schedule 5, paragraph 2 (1) - The owner or other person responsible for the chickens shall hold a certificate recognised by the Department for the purposes of Article 4(3) or (4) of Council Directive 2007/43/EC (certificates of completion of training courses or equivalent experience).

Schedule 5, paragraph 2 (2) - The Department shall publish from time to time, in such a way as it considers appropriate, a list of certificates recognised by it for the purposes of sub-paragraph (1).

2.3 Inspection

In order to reduce the risk of welfare problems developing in conventionally reared meat chicken units, a systematic inspection of all flocks should be undertaken at least twice each day at appropriate intervals. Young birds, in the first few days of life, should be inspected more frequently.

For systems without conventionally reared meat chickens the person responsible for the chickens shall ensure that all chickens kept on the holding are inspected at least once a day.

These health and welfare inspections may be linked with other visits to the poultry houses but each inspection should be undertaken as a separate, specific procedure.

Flock-keepers should establish, in advance, the best course of action to take should problems be identified and ensure that veterinary or other expert advice is available when required.

Light levels during inspection should be sufficiently high to ensure that all birds in all parts of the house are clearly visible.

While it may not be possible to examine each bird individually during routine inspection a good indication of flock health should be gained on each occasion. Where birds are not being fed on a freely available feed diet, inspection is particularly effective at feeding time when any birds which are unfit will be slow to feed and can be identified.

In order to ensure a thorough inspection, the flock-keeper should walk as close as is practical to every bird and encourage it to move, taking care not to frighten them with sudden, unaccustomed movement, noise or changes in light levels. The aim should be to pass close enough to the birds to see them clearly and for them to be disturbed and move away. This should enable the identification of any individual that is sick, injured or weak. Any such birds should be removed immediately and treated or humanely killed. Birds with considerable difficulty in walking, severe ascites, malformations, severe wounds or seizures should be humanely killed immediately unless they can be treated and are likely to recover without unnecessary suffering. Dead birds must be removed without delay.

In the event of signs of serious respiratory disease the use of personal protection equipment must be considered (e.g. in suspected cases of Avian Influenza and Newcastle Disease). When respiratory signs together with mortality are observed professional help must be sought.

Legislative Requirement

This section applies to meat chickens and conventionally reared meat chickens-

Welfare of Farmed Animals Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 states that:

Schedule 1, paragraph 2 (1) - Animals kept in husbandry systems in which their welfare depends on frequent human attention shall be thoroughly inspected at least once a day to check that they are in a state of well-being.

Schedule 1, paragraph 3 - Where animals are kept in a building, adequate lighting (whether fixed or portable) shall be available to enable them to be thoroughly inspected at any time.



Schedule 1, paragraph 5 - Any animals which appear to be ill or injured shall be cared for appropriately without delay, and where they do not respond to such care, veterinary advice shall be obtained as soon as possible.

Schedule 1, paragraph 6 - Where necessary, sick or injured animals shall be isolated in suitable accommodation with, where appropriate, dry comfortable bedding.

This section applies to conventionally reared meat chickens only -

Welfare of Farmed Animals Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 states that:

Schedule 5, paragraph 8 (1) - The owner or other person responsible for the chickens shall ensure that all chickens kept on the holding are inspected at least twice a day.

Schedule 5, paragraph 8 (2) - Special attention shall be paid to signs indicating a reduced level of animal health and welfare.

Schedule 5, paragraph 8 (3) - Chickens that are seriously injured or show evident signs of health disorder (including those having difficulties in walking, severe ascites or severe malformations), and are likely to suffer, shall receive appropriate treatment or be culled immediately. A veterinarian shall be contacted whenever necessary.

3.0 Feed and Water

Feed and water are essential for maintaining good standards of meat chicken welfare. Nutrient composition, feed availability, quantity of feed, absence of contaminants within the feed and water, and access to the feeders and drinkers are all important parameters. Monitoring of feed and water consumption will provide an early warning of sudden changes in the performance, health and condition of the meat chickens.

Birds must be fed a wholesome diet which is appropriate to their age and species and which is fed to them in sufficient quantity to maintain them in good health, to satisfy their nutritional needs and to promote good health.

Birds must be provided with food and liquid in a manner which ensures that such food or liquid does not contain any substance which may cause them unnecessary suffering or injury.

When introducing birds to a new environment, the flock-keeper must ensure that the birds can find feed and water. Sudden changes in the type, quantity and make-up of feed should be avoided. Any changes in diet should be introduced gradually.

To prevent birds having access to stale or contaminated feed or water, these must be replaced on a regular basis.

In intensively housed systems, the maximum distance which any bird should have to move to reach feed and water should not be more than 4 metres. In some other situations, such as outdoor production systems, the birds may have to move more than 4 metres. All birds must be adequately cared for in terms of stocking density, feeding and drinking space to allow for such movements.

Compounded feeds which have been prepared for other species should be avoided, as certain substances can be toxic to birds.

Feed must not be withheld for more than 12 hours before the conventionally reared meat chickens are slaughtered or delivered to a new farm. The 12 hour period must include the catching, loading, transport, lairaging and unloading time prior to slaughter. Prior to transport, water should be provided up to the start of the loading procedure.

A water meter should be fitted to each house to enable daily monitoring of water usage. Daily records of water consumption provide an early warning of potential problems.

Daily access to water throughout the period of lighting and a sufficient number of drinkers, well distributed and correctly adjusted, must be provided.

Feeding and watering equipment must be designed, constructed, placed and maintained so that contamination of food and water and the harmful effects of competition between birds are minimised.

Legislative Requirements

This section applies to meat chickens and conventionally reared meat chickens -

Welfare of Farmed Animals Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 states that:

Schedule 1, paragraph 22 - Animals shall be fed a wholesome diet which is appropriate to their age and species and which is fed to them in sufficient quantity to maintain them in good health, to satisfy their nutritional needs and promote a positive state of well-being.

Schedule 1, paragraph 23 - Animals shall not -

- (a) be provided with food or liquid in a manner which may cause unnecessary suffering or injury; or
- (b) be provided food or liquid containing any substance which may cause unnecessary suffering or injury.

Schedule 1, paragraph 24 - All animals shall have access to feed at intervals appropriate to their physiological needs (and, in case, at least once a day), except where a veterinary surgeon acting in the exercise of his profession otherwise directs.



Schedule 1, paragraph 25 - All animals shall have access to a suitable water supply and be provided with an adequate supply of fresh drinking water each day to be able to satisfy their fluid intake needs by other means.

Schedule 1, paragraph 26 - Feeding and watering equipment shall be designed, constructed, placed and maintained so that contamination of food and water and the harmful effects of competition between animals are minimised.

Schedule 1, paragraph 27 (1) - No other substance, with the exception of those given for therapeutic or prophylactic purposes or for the purpose of zootechnical treatment shall be administered to animals unless it has been demonstrated by scientific studies of animal welfare or established experience that the effect of that substance is not detrimental to the health or welfare of the animals.

Schedule 1, paragraph 27 (2) - “zootechnical treatment” has a meaning given in Article 1(2)(C) OF Council Directive 96/22/EEC(a) concerning the prohibition on the use in stockfarming of certain substances having a hormonal or thyrostatic action and beta-agonists.

Additional requirements that apply to conventionally reared meat chickens only -

Schedule 5, paragraph 3 (1) - Drinkers shall be positioned and maintained in such a way that spillage is minimised.

Schedule 5, paragraph 3 (2) - Feed shall be either continuously available or meal fed.

Schedule 5, paragraph 3 (3) - Feed shall not be withdrawn from the chickens more than 12 hours before the expected slaughter time.

4.0 Buildings and Accommodation

4.1 General

Advice on welfare should be sought from qualified advisers before any new buildings are constructed or existing buildings modified. The incorporation of facilities for raising drinkers and feeders to aid access for handling equipment should be considered.

4.2 Location

When a new poultry house is being constructed, ideally it should be located as far away as possible from other commercial poultry premises, other livestock enterprises and other potential sources of contamination such as abattoirs, sewage treatment plants, landfill sites etc. When a poultry house is close to such sites a higher level of protection against

the introduction of disease is required, including wildlife control and ensuring that no drainage or waste from the nearby property enters the farm.

4.3 Poultry Site

Good biosecurity¹ is extremely important to prevent the introduction of a wide range of microorganisms into poultry farms. Site design and management practices should be planned to facilitate this.

The perimeter of the site should be clearly identified and if possible, fenced. Access should be via specific entry points where there should be a bell or other means of attracting attention along with a notice asking visitors to wait to be admitted by farm staff. Whilst there will be a need for people to enter the unit (managers, workmen, veterinary practitioners, auditors etc.) visits should be carefully controlled. Access to poultry houses should be restricted to those with essential duties.

There should be a hard standing for parking, which should be kept clean and disinfected so as to ensure that it is maintained in a hygienically acceptable condition. Ideally on-farm roadways should have a hard surface, which can be cleaned effectively. Roadways should be kept clear of faecal soiling to prevent contamination of vehicles. A disinfectant footbath and a brush should be placed at the entrance to the site and /or near the vehicle parking area. Endeavours should be made to provide a separate gatehouse where visitors can change into overalls and boots and sign a visitors' book. Spray disinfection of the wheels of vehicles at the point of entry to the site is also advisable.

The site should be kept clean and tidy to discourage wild birds, rodents and flies. Further information on bio-security can be found at the DARD website <http://www.dardni.gov.uk/index/publications/pubs-dard-animal-health/pubs-ahw-poultry-biosecurity-code-booklet.htm>

4.4 Poultry Houses – Structural

Ideally, there should be a hard surface/gravel around the perimeter of houses which is designed to avoid puddling.

Buildings should be of sound construction and well maintained to prevent access by wild birds and to deter rodents. Insulation cladding should be maintained in good repair as damage allows easy refuge for rodents. Avoid storing materials such as feedbags, litter and moveable equipment within the house for the same reason.

Where possible surfaces should be smooth, hard and impervious to enable effective cleaning and disinfection. Ancillary buildings such as storage rooms, rest rooms, toilets etc. should be of a similar standard. Materials used for the construction of accommodation, and in particular, for the construction of pens, stalls and equipment with

¹*Biosecurity is a term that includes all those measures that may be taken to prevent the introduction of unwanted organisms into the flock.*

which the birds may come into contact, should not be harmful to them and should be capable of being thoroughly cleaned and disinfected.

Accommodation and fittings for securing birds should be constructed and maintained so that there are no sharp edges or protrusions likely to cause injury to them.

Legislative Requirements

This section applies to meat chickens and conventionally reared meat chickens -

Welfare of Farmed Animals Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 states at:

Schedule 1, paragraph 11 - Materials used for the construction of accommodation, and in particular for the construction of pens, cages, stalls and equipment with which the animals may come into contact, shall not be harmful to them and shall be capable of being thoroughly cleaned and disinfected.

Schedule 1, paragraph 12 - Accommodation and fittings for securing animals shall be constructed and maintained so that there are no sharp edges or protrusions likely to cause injury to them.

Schedule 1, paragraph 13 - Air circulation, dust levels, temperature, relative air humidity and gas concentrations shall be kept within limits which are not harmful to the animals.

Schedule 1, paragraph 14 - Animals kept in buildings shall not be kept in permanent darkness.

Schedule 1, paragraph 15 - Where the natural light available in a building is insufficient to meet the physiological and ethological needs of any animals being kept in it, then appropriate artificial lighting shall be provided.

Schedule 1, paragraph 16 - Animals kept in buildings shall not be kept without an appropriate period of rest from artificial lighting.

4.5 Poultry Houses – Operational

Drinkers must be positioned and maintained in such a way that spillage is minimised.

The noise level must be minimised. Ventilation fans, feeding machinery or other equipment must be constructed, placed, operated and maintained in such a way that they cause the least possible amount of noise.

Intensive housing systems will require a preventative maintenance program. Automatic systems must have alarms and emergency back-up systems and procedures.

Flock-keepers should take measures to protect birds from predators, rodents and other animals.

Those parts of buildings, equipment or utensils which are in contact with the birds must be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected after final depopulation is carried out or before a new flock is introduced into the house. After the final depopulation of a house, all litter must be removed and clean litter must be provided.

Meat chickens may spend their lives in contact with litter and their health and welfare are linked to its quality. Conditions such as pododermatitis, hock burn, foot-pad lesions² and breast blisters are consequences of poor litter quality. Well-designed equipment and high standards of management are important if good litter quality is to be maintained. The ventilation capacity should be sufficient to avoid overheating and to remove excess moisture. The feed composition should be well balanced to avoid problems with wet or sticky droppings.

All conventionally reared meat chickens must have permanent access to litter which is dry and friable on the surface. For all meat chickens, measures should be taken to minimise the risk of mould and mite infestation in the litter. The litter should be inspected frequently for signs of deterioration and appropriate action should be taken to rectify any problems. Mouldy litter should not be used. Litter should also be inspected to ensure it does not become excessively wet or dry. A water system, which minimises water spillage, should be used, such as water nipples with drip cups positioned at an appropriate height for all birds. Nipple drinkers without cups may be used if they are well managed and the water pressure is checked frequently. Flock-keepers should ensure that litter is kept carcass free.

Legislative Requirements

This section applies to conventionally reared meat chickens only -

Welfare of Farmed Animals Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 states at:

Schedule 5, paragraph 3 (1) - Drinkers shall be positioned and maintained in such a way that spillage is minimised.

Schedule 5, paragraph 4 - All chickens shall have permanent access to litter that is dry and friable on the surface.

Schedule 5, paragraph 6 - In all houses -

- (a) the sound level shall be minimized; and
- (b) ventilation fans, feeding machinery or other equipment shall be constructed, placed, operated and maintained in such a way that they cause the least possible amount of noise.

²*See Appendix B for a photo guide to Foot-pad dermatitis in meat chickens

Schedule 5, paragraph 9 - After the final depopulation of a house and before a new flock is introduced -

- (a) any part of a house, and any equipment or utensil, which has been in contact with chickens shall be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected; and
- (b) all litter shall be removed and clean litter provided.

4.6 Ventilation and Temperature

The flock-keeper must ensure that for conventionally reared meat chickens each house of a holding is equipped with ventilation and, if necessary, heating and cooling systems designed, constructed and operated in such a way that:

- The concentration of ammonia (NH₃) does not exceed 20 ppm and the concentration of carbon dioxide (CO₂) does not exceed 3000 ppm measured at the level of the chickens' heads;
- The inside temperature, when the outside temperature measured in the shade exceeds 30°C, does not exceed this outside temperature by more than 3°C; and
- The average relative humidity measured inside the house during 48 hours does not exceed 70% when the outside temperature is below 10°C.

For all other meat chickens the flock-keeper must ensure that the air circulation, dust levels, temperature, relative air humidity and gas concentrations are kept within limits which are not harmful to the animals.

Legislative Requirements

This section applies to meat chickens and conventionally reared meat chickens -

Welfare of Farmed Animals Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 states at:

Schedule 1, paragraph 13 - Air circulation, dust levels, temperature, relative air humidity and gas concentrations shall be kept within limits which are not harmful to the animals.

Schedule 1, paragraph 20 - Where the health and well-being of the animals is dependent on an artificial ventilation system -

- (a) Provision shall be made for an appropriate back-up system to guarantee sufficient air renewal to preserve the health and well-being of the animals in the event of failure of the system; and
- (b) An alarm system (which will operate if the principal electricity supply to it has failed) shall be provided to give warning of any failure of the system.

Schedule 1, paragraph 21 - The back-up system referred to in paragraph 20 (a) shall be thoroughly inspected and the alarm system referred to in paragraph 20 (b) tested at least

once every seven days in order to check that there is no defect in the system, and, if any defect is found at any time, it shall be rectified immediately.

Additional requirements that apply to conventionally reared meat chickens only -

Schedule 5, paragraph 5 - Ventilation shall be sufficient to avoid overheating and, where necessary in combination with heating systems, to remove excessive moisture.

Additional requirements that apply to conventionally reared meat chickens for stocking densities above 33kg/m² up to 42kg/m².

Schedule 5, paragraph 13 - The requirements of this paragraph are that the owner or other person responsible for the chickens shall-

- (a) maintain and keep available in the house compiled documentation giving a detailed description of the production systems, including information on technical details of the house and its equipment, such as-
 - (i) ventilation and any relevant cooling and heating system (including their location), and a ventilation plan, detailing target air quality parameters (such as airflow, airspeed and temperature);
- (b) keep the documentation referred to in sub-paragraph (a) updated, including recording technical inspections of the ventilation and alarm systems;
- (c) ensure that each house of a holding is equipped with ventilation and, if necessary, heating and cooling systems designed, constructed and operated in such a way that -
 - (i) the concentration of ammonia does not exceed 20 parts per million and the concentration of carbon dioxide does not exceed 3000 parts per million, when measured at the level of the chickens' heads;
 - (ii) when the outside temperature measured in the shade exceeds 30°C, the inside temperature does not exceed the outside temperature by more than 3°C; and
 - (iii) when the outside temperature is below 10°C, the average relative humidity measured inside the house during a continuous period of 48 hours does not exceed 70%.

4.7 Automatic or Mechanical Equipment

All automated or mechanical equipment essential for the health and well-being of the birds must be inspected at least once a day to check that there is no defect in it.

Provision should be made for an appropriate back-up system to guarantee sufficient air renewal to preserve the health and well-being of the birds in the event of failure of the system.



An alarm system (which will operate even if the principal electricity supply to it has failed) must be provided to give warning of any failure of the system.

All equipment and services, including feed hoppers, feed chain and delivery systems, drinkers, ventilating fans, heating and lighting units, fire extinguishers and alarm systems, should be cleaned and inspected regularly and kept in good working order.

Ventilation, heating, lighting, feeding, watering and all other equipment or electrical installation should be designed, sited and installed so as to avoid risk of injuring the birds.

All automated equipment upon which the birds' welfare is dependent, must incorporate a fail-safe and/or standby device and an alarm system to warn the flock-keeper of failure. Defects should be rectified immediately or other measures taken to safeguard the health and welfare of the birds. Alternative ways of feeding and of maintaining a satisfactory environment should therefore be ready for use. A secondary or alternative water supply should also be put in place.

Legislative Requirements

This section applies to meat chickens and conventionally reared meat chickens. -

Welfare of Farmed Animals Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 states at:

Schedule 1, paragraph 18 - All automated or mechanical equipment essential for the health and well being of the animals shall be inspected at least once a day to check that there is no defect in it and no parts of the equipment have become seriously worn.

Schedule 1, paragraph 19 - Where defects or worn parts in automated or mechanical equipment of the type specified in paragraph 18 are discovered, these shall be rectified immediately, or if this is impossible, appropriate steps shall be taken to safeguard the health and well being of the animals pending the rectification of such defects including the use of alternative methods of feeding and watering and methods of providing and maintaining a satisfactory environment.

4.8 Lighting

All chickens kept in buildings must not be kept in permanent darkness.

Where the natural light available in a building is insufficient to meet the physiological and ethological needs of any birds being kept in it, then appropriate artificial lighting must be provided.

All chickens kept in buildings must not be kept without an appropriate period of rest from artificial lighting. Birds should be housed at light levels which allow them to see clearly and which stimulate activity. This should be provided by lighting systems designed, maintained and operated to give adequate light level.

For conventionally reared meat chickens illumination of the house to at least 20 lux³ which illuminates at least 80% of the usable area will encourage activity. Houses should have a uniform level of light. A temporary reduction in the lighting level may be allowed when necessary following veterinary advice.

Within seven days from the time when the birds are placed in the building and until three days before the foreseen time of slaughter, the lighting must follow a 24-hour rhythm and include periods of darkness lasting at least six hours in total, with at least one uninterrupted period of darkness of at least four hours, excluding dimming periods.

Legislative Requirements

This section applies to meat chickens and conventionally reared meat chickens -

Welfare of Farmed Animals Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 states at:

Schedule 1, paragraph 3 - Where animals are kept in a building, adequate lighting (whether fixed or portable) shall be available to enable them to be thoroughly inspected at any time.

Schedule 1, paragraph 14 - Animals kept in buildings shall not be kept in permanent darkness.

Schedule 1, paragraph 15 - Where the natural light available in a building is insufficient to meet the physiological and ethological needs of any animals being kept in it, then appropriate artificial lighting shall be provided.

Schedule 1, paragraph 16 - Animals kept in buildings shall not be kept without an appropriate period of rest from artificial lighting.

Additional requirements that apply to conventionally reared meat chickens -

Welfare of Farmed Animals Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 states at:

Schedule 5, paragraph 7 (1) - All houses shall have lighting with an intensity of at least 20 lux during the lighting periods, measured at bird level and which illuminates at least 80% of the useable area.

Schedule 5, paragraph 7 (2) - A temporary reduction from that lighting level is permitted where necessary following veterinary advice.

Schedule 5, paragraph 7 (3) - Within 7 days from the time when the chickens are placed in the house and until 3 days before the foreseen time of slaughter, the lighting shall follow a 24-hour rhythm and include periods of darkness lasting at least 6 hours in total, with at least one uninterrupted period of darkness of at least 4 hours, excluding dimming periods.

4.9 Emergency Procedures

Flock-keepers should make advance plans for dealing with emergencies such as fire, flood, power or equipment failure, or disruption of supplies, and should ensure that all staff are familiar with the appropriate emergency action. This must include an independent alarm system that is tested and serviced at regular intervals. At least one responsible member of the staff should always be available to take the necessary steps. Fire precautions should be a major priority for all flock-keepers. More information is available in the Northern Ireland Fire safety booklet, “fire safety risk assessment, animal premises” <https://www.nifrs.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/Animal-Premises.pdf> and the Defra booklet, “Farm Fires: protecting farm animal welfare” https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/69362/pb9326-farm-fires.pdf Where buildings need to be locked, arrangements must be made to allow rapid entry in case of emergency.

Expert advice on all fire precautions can be obtained from local fire officers in Fire Brigade Area Command Headquarters.

Contingency arrangements should be made to ensure that adequate supplies of water and suitable feed can be made available in emergencies. Efforts should be made to minimise the risk of drinking water freezing.

5.0 Stocking Densities

5.1 Introduction

There is a close relationship between stockmanship, environmental control and stocking density. Birds will be maintained in good condition only if the balance of these is right and the onus is on the flock-keeper to demonstrate that welfare is not compromised whatever the stocking density. The physical condition and the behaviour (especially activity, and feeding and drinking behaviour, and lack of competition around feeders and drinkers) of the birds is the ultimate reflection of appropriate stocking density.

Stocking density should be reduced and specialist advice taken if problems occur, in particular excessive heat or humidity due to inadequate ventilation and poor litter quality. If disease or environmental problems arise in a particular building or system, reducing the stocking density in subsequent flocks may lessen the likelihood of recurrence.

Irrespective of the type of system, all birds should have sufficient freedom of movement to be able, without difficulty, to stand normally, turn around and stretch their wings. They should also have sufficient space to be able to sit without interference from other birds.

Deliberately placing a high number of birds and routinely “thinning” should be avoided as this causes unnecessary distress to the birds and may result in stocking densities that are too high.

Legislative Requirements

This section applies to all meat chickens and conventionally reared meat chickens -

Welfare of Farmed Animals Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 states at:

Schedule 1, paragraph 9 - The freedom of movement of animals, having regard to their species and in accordance with good practice and scientific knowledge, shall not be restricted in such a way as to cause them unnecessary suffering or injury.

Schedule 1, paragraph 10 - Where animals are continuously or regularly tethered or confined, they shall be given the space appropriate to their physiological and ethological needs in accordance with good practice and scientific knowledge.

5.2 Stocking Density up to 33kg/m²

The maximum stocking density for conventionally reared meat chickens is 33kg/m²⁽⁴⁾ which should not be exceeded at any time during the growing period. Flock-owners who wish to avail of higher stocking densities should follow the procedures outlined at, sections 5.3-5.6.

5.3 Notification requirements of Stocking Density from 33kg/m² up to 39kg/m²

In order to acquire more birds above a stocking density from 33kg/m² up to 39kg/m² the Department must be notified at least 15 days in advance prior to acquiring the birds. In addition to notifying the Department the requirements at Section 5.5 also need to be compiled with.

Legislative Requirements

This section applies to conventionally reared meat chickens -

Welfare of Farmed Animals Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 states at:

Schedule 5, paragraph 11 (1) - The owner or other person responsible for the chickens shall ensure that the Department is notified of the intended stocking density of each house where it is intended to keep chickens at a stocking density greater than 33 kilograms per m², and of any subsequent change to that notified stocking density.

Schedule 5, paragraph 11 (2) - Notification shall be made in such manner and form as the Department may require.

Schedule 5, paragraph 11 (3) - Subject to sub-paragraph (5), in the case of any stocking density in excess of 33 kilograms per m² of usable area, notification (including notification of any change) shall be given at least 15 working days before stocking at that density or changed density takes place.

Schedule 5, paragraph 11 (4) - If requested by the Department, the notification referred to in sub-paragraph (1) shall be accompanied by a document summarising the information contained in the documentation required under paragraph 13. (See Section 5.5)

Schedule 5, paragraph 12 (2) - A stocking density in excess of 33 kilograms and up to 39 kilograms per m² of usable area may be used if the requirements of paragraph 13 are complied with. (See Section 5.6)

5.4 Notification requirements of Stocking Density from 39kg/m² up to 42kg/m²

In order to acquire more birds above a stocking density from 39kg/m² up to 42kg/m² the Department must give approval prior to acquiring the birds. In addition the requirements at section 5.5 and 5.6 also need to be complied with.

Legislative Requirements

This section applies to conventionally reared meat chickens -

Welfare of Farmed Animals Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 states at:

Schedule 5, paragraph 12 (3) - A stocking density in excess of 39 kilograms and up to 42 kilograms per m² of usable area may be used if -

- (a) the requirements of paragraph 13 are complied with; (See Section 5.5) and
- (b) the Department has approved stocking at that density in accordance with paragraph 14. (See Section 5.6)

5.5 Requirements to complete for stocking densities above 33kg/m² up to 42kg/m²

This section outlines the legislative requirements for paragraph 13 in the legislation. These requirements are required if you want to apply for higher stocking densities for conventionally reared meat chickens above 33 kg/m² and up to 42 kg/m².

Legislative Requirements

This section applies to conventionally reared meat chickens -

Welfare of Farmed Animals Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 states at:

Schedule 5, paragraph 13 - The requirements of this paragraph are that the owner or other person responsible for the chickens shall -

- (a) maintain and keep available in the house compiled documentation giving a detailed description of the production systems, including information on technical details of the house and its equipment, such as -
 - (i) a plan of the house including the dimensions of the surfaces occupied by the chickens;
 - (ii) ventilation and any relevant cooling and heating system (including their location), and a ventilation plan, detailing target air quality parameters (such as airflow, airspeed and temperature);
 - (iii) feeding and watering systems (including their location);
 - (iv) alarm and backup systems in the event of a failure of any equipment essential for the health and well-being of the chickens; and
 - (v) floor type and litter normally used;
- (b) keep the documentation referred to in sub-paragraph (a) updated, including recording technical inspections of the ventilation and alarm systems;
- (c) ensure that each house of a holding is equipped with ventilation and, if necessary, heating and cooling systems designed, constructed and operated in such a way that -
 - (i) the concentration of ammonia does not exceed 20 parts per million and the concentration of carbon dioxide does not exceed 3000 parts per million, when measured at the level of the chickens' heads;
 - (ii) when the outside temperature measured in the shade exceeds 30°C, the inside temperature does not exceed the outside temperature by more than 3°C; and
 - (iii) when the outside temperature is below 10°C, the average relative humidity measured inside the house during a continuous period of 48 hours does not exceed 70%.

5.6 Additional Requirements for higher stocking densities above 39kg/m²

This section outlines the legislative requirements for paragraph 14 in the legislation. These requirements are required if you want to apply for higher stocking densities for conventionally reared meat chickens above 39 kg/m² and up to 42 kg/m². The Department must give approval prior to acquiring the birds and the Department may withdraw approval if it is no longer satisfied that the requirements are being met. It is illegal to keep birds at a stocking density above 42 kg/m².

Legislative Requirements

This section applies to conventionally reared meat chickens -

Welfare of Farmed Animals Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 states at:

Schedule 5, paragraph 14 (1) - The owner or other person responsible for the chickens may apply to the Department for approval to use a stocking density in excess of 39 kilograms and up to 42 kilograms per m² of usable area.

Schedule 5, paragraph 14 (2) - Applications shall be made in such manner and form as required by the Department.

6.0 Health

6.1 Introduction

A documented health and welfare programme should be implemented for each unit which sets out the health and husbandry activities covering the whole production cycle. It should also establish management procedures and control measures to reduce the risk of infections and injury. This will normally include an effective vaccination protocol (which should be carefully monitored to ensure effectiveness) to reduce the risk of disease outbreaks. The health and welfare programme should be developed in consultation with an experienced poultry veterinarian, reviewed against performance and updated accordingly.

Important indications of good health are clear bright eyes, alertness, good posture, vigorous movements if unduly disturbed, active feeding and drinking, singing and vocalisation, and clean and healthy skin, shanks and feet. Any departure from the norm may indicate a problem which should be given immediate attention.

6.2 Disease Control

A disease problem may first be noticed by a change in water consumption, a reluctance to eat, changes in litter quality or in the general behaviour of the flock. It is good management practice to keep daily records of water consumption and where possible, feed intake. Veterinary attention should be sought at an early stage in any outbreak of disease so that the cause can be determined and appropriate action taken. Measures to control diseases caused by external parasites should be taken by using the appropriate parasiticides.

Birds that are seriously injured or show evident signs of health disorder, such as those having difficulties in walking, severe ascites or severe malformations, and are likely to suffer, must receive appropriate treatment or be humanely killed immediately. A veterinarian must be contacted whenever necessary.

All those in contact with birds should practice strict hygiene and disinfection procedures. Where possible the site should be managed so that all houses are empty simultaneously to facilitate effective cleaning and disinfestation. An “all in - all out” approach with periods when there are no birds on site will also act to provide a disease break.

When houses are emptied and cleaned, old litter should be removed from the site before re-stocking so as to reduce the risk of the carryover of disease.

6.3 Leg Health

There are many causes of leg disorders but most are linked to nutrition, genetics, and microbial infection. The flock-keeper should seek prompt professional help from professional experts including processors, nutritionists and veterinary practitioners when required. Flock-keepers must monitor all birds for signs of lameness, leg weakness or abnormal gait at each inspection. Any bird which is unable to move about freely and to find feed and water must be humanely killed, using a permitted method, as soon as it is detected unless it can be treated and is likely to recover without unnecessary suffering. If a lameness problem develops, management and husbandry practices must be immediately assessed. Any changes should be instigated as soon as practically possible and where appropriate following veterinary and/or technical advice of the breed supplier.

Certain management practices can limit or reduce the level of lameness in the flock, and should be taken having regard to previous experience on the farm and recognised best practice. Increasing the activity of the meat chicken in the day and encouraging proper rest at night, for example through manipulation of the lighting patterns (increasing light intensity during light periods combined with a longer uninterrupted dark period) can reduce lameness. Increased activity can also be achieved by enriching the environment and reducing stocking density.



Birds can suffer from lameness due to infections acquired in the parent flock or hatchery. High standards of biosecurity and hygiene in the parent flock, in the handling of the eggs at the hatchery and in subsequent handling and transport of the chicks should be maintained. Husbandry measures should be designed to minimise floor eggs and heavily soiled eggs should not be set as hatching eggs.

6.4 Heat Stress

Every flock-keeper should have a documented emergency heat stress plan posted on site. This should be agreed with their poultry veterinarian.

Birds should not be exposed to strong, direct sunlight or hot, humid conditions long enough to cause heat stress as indicated by prolonged panting. Housing affects the birds' ability to maintain their normal body temperature but under any management system ambient temperatures high enough to cause prolonged panting may occur, particularly when humidity is relatively high. All accommodation should therefore be designed so that its ventilation is adequate to protect the birds from overheating under any weather conditions that can reasonably be foreseen. Attention should be paid to air throughput and distribution, especially at bird level.

Flock-keepers should plan ahead to avoid heat stress. During the summer months consideration should be given to reducing stocking density at the time of ordering or placing day-old chicks. If suffering or mortality occurs, the onus will be on the flock-keeper to demonstrate that the measures taken were appropriate for the design of the building, its locality and the predicted maximum temperature/humidity at the time.

During hot and humid conditions, the birds should be checked frequently, but not disturbed unduly.

Steps should be taken to minimise the potential for heat stress by increasing ventilation and air speed at bird level. Back-up fans should be available. The air temperature within a building may be reduced by improved insulation, hosing the roof and the correct use of evaporative cooling of incoming air. The heat output of the birds may be reduced by lowering stocking density or changing the feeding patterns.

7.0 Permitted and Prohibited Procedures

The Welfare of Animals (Permitted Procedures by Lay Persons) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 sets out the procedures that are permitted to be carried out on animals by a lay person. The definition of lay person is defined in the Regulations as a person who has received instruction or who is otherwise experienced in the performance of that procedure.

A prohibited procedure is one which involves interference with the sensitive tissues (e.g. skin) or the bone structure of the animal, other than when carried out by a veterinary surgeon, for the diagnosis of disease, for the purpose of its medical treatment or is specified in regulations made by the Department.

Legislative Requirement

This section applies to meat chickens and conventionally reared meat chickens -

Welfare of Animals (Permitted Procedures by Lay Persons) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 states at:

Regulation 4 (1) - A prohibited procedure may be carried out in an emergency for the purpose of saving the life or relieving the pain of the protected animal.

Regulation 4 (3) - A record must be kept for 3 years detailing the circumstances and the reason for carrying out the emergency procedure.

Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 states at:

Prohibited procedures

Section 5 (1) - A person commits an offence if -

- (a) that person carries out a prohibited procedure on a protected animal;
- (b) that person causes such a procedure to be carried out on such an animal.

Section 5 (2) - A person commits an offence if -

- (a) that person is responsible for an animal,
- (b) another person carries out a prohibited procedure on the animal, and
- (c) the first-mentioned person permitted that to happen or failed to take such steps (whether by way of supervising the other person or otherwise) as were reasonable in all the circumstances to prevent that happening.

Section 5 (3) - A person commits an offence if that person takes a protected animal, or causes a protected animal to be taken, from a place in Northern Ireland for the purpose of having a prohibited procedure carried out on the animal at a place outside Northern Ireland.



Section 5 (4) - In this section references to the carrying out of a prohibited procedure on an animal are to the carrying out of a procedure which involves interference with the sensitive tissues or bone structure of the animal.

Section 5 (5) - This section does not apply -

- (a) in relation to -
- (i) any procedure carried out by a veterinary surgeon;
 - (ii) any procedure carried out for the diagnosis of disease;
 - (iii) any procedure carried out for the purposes of medical treatment of an animal;
 - (iv) any other procedure which is specified in regulations made by the Department;

Permitted Procedures for Meat Chickens and Conventionally Reared Meat Chickens are outlined in the table below.

Procedure	Meat Chickens (excludes conventionally reared meat chickens)	Conventionally Reared Meat Chickens	Additional conditions required
Microchipping.	✓	X	No
Web tagging.	✓	X	Yes
Wing tagging.	✓	X	Yes
Beak trimming of poultry.	✓	✓	Yes
De-toeing of domestic fowls and turkeys.	✓	X	Yes
Dubbing.	✓	X	Yes
Removal of the dependent portion of its wattles.	✓	X	Yes
Other methods of identification involving a prohibited procedure required by law and not restricted to being undertaken by a veterinary surgeon.	✓	X	No

For some of the permitted procedures certain conditions apply, the legislative requirements are included below:

Legislative Requirements

This section applies to meat chickens and conventionally reared meat chickens -

Welfare of Animals (Permitted Procedures by Lay Persons) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 states at:

Regulation 3 - Requirements when carrying out a permitted procedure -

Section 5(1) and (2) of the Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 does not apply to a procedure listed in Schedules 1 to 11 carried out by a lay person, providing it is carried out -

- (a) in accordance with any relevant requirement in those Schedules;
- (b) in such a way as to minimise the pain and suffering it causes to the protected animal;
- (c) in hygienic conditions; and
- (d) in accordance with best practice.

Regulation 4 - Performance of prohibited procedures in an emergency -

Section 5(1) and (2) of the Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 does not apply where a prohibited procedure is carried out in an emergency for the purpose of saving the life or relieving the pain of the protected animal.

- (2) Any procedure carried out under paragraph (1) shall be carried out in accordance with regulation 3, in so far as this is practicable in all of the circumstances.
- (3) A record shall be kept for 3 years detailing the circumstances and the reason for carrying out the emergency procedure.

This section applies to meat chickens and excludes conventionally reared meat chickens-

Welfare of Animals (Permitted Procedures by Lay Persons) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 states for:

Web tagging

Schedule 7 - Paragraph 7 (1) - The procedure shall only be carried out on farmed birds for the purposes of breed improvement programmes or testing for the presence of disease.

Schedule 7 - Paragraph 7 (2) - The procedure shall only be carried out on birds other than farmed birds for conservation purposes (including education and captive breeding programmes) or for research.



Wing tagging

Schedule 7 - Paragraph 8 (1) - The procedure shall only be carried out on farmed birds for the purposes of breed improvement programmes or testing for the presence of disease.

Schedule 7 - Paragraph 8 (2) - The procedure shall only be carried out on birds other than farmed birds for conservation purposes (including education and captive breeding programmes) or for research.

De-toeing of domestic fowl and turkeys

Schedule 7 - Paragraph 13 - This procedure may not be carried out on a bird that is aged 72 hours or over.

Dubbing

Schedule 7 - Paragraph 14 (1) - Dubbing shall be performed using a suitable instrument.

Schedule 7 - Paragraph 14 (2) - This procedure may not be carried out on a bird that is aged 72 hours or over.

Removal of the dependent portion of its wattles

Schedule 7 - Paragraph 15 (1) - The removal of the dependent portion of its wattles shall be performed using a suitable instrument.

Schedule 7 - Paragraph 15 (2) - The procedure may not be carried out a bird that is aged 72 hours or over.

This section applies to meat chickens and conventionally reared meat chickens.

Welfare of Animals (Permitted Procedures by Lay Persons) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 states for:

Beak trimming of poultry

Schedule 7 – Paragraph 11 (1) - For all poultry the beak trimming procedure shall be performed using a suitable instrument.

Schedule 7 – Paragraph 11 (2) - For all poultry any subsequent haemorrhage from the beak shall be arrested by cauterisation.

Schedule 7 – Paragraph 11 (3) - For all poultry the procedure shall be performed on -

- (a) both the lower and upper beaks, with not more than one third of each removed;
- (b) the upper beak only, with not more than one third removed.

This section applies to conventionally reared meat chickens.

Welfare of Animals (Permitted Procedures by Lay Persons) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 states for:

Beak trimming of poultry

Schedule 7 - Paragraph 11 (6) - For conventionally reared meat chickens the procedure -

- (a) shall only be performed in order to prevent feather pecking and cannibalism;
- (b) shall not be performed on birds which are aged 10 days or over;
- (c) shall be carried out by person who has been provided with suitable and sufficient training so that they are qualified to perform the procedure; and
- (d) shall only be carried out following a consultation and on the advice of a veterinarian.

8.0 Record Keeping

Well-developed record keeping should be sufficient to meet quality assurance, regulatory and management requirements. The requirements for record keeping under the Welfare of Farmed Animals Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 are detailed below. As well as these record keeping requirements, a number of other legislative provisions exist for record keeping on farm (see section 12).

Legislative Requirements

This section applies to meat chickens and conventionally reared meat chickens-

Schedule 1, paragraph 7 - A record shall be maintained of -

- (a) any medicinal treatment given to animals; and
- (b) the number of mortalities found on each inspection of animals carried out in accordance with any of the following provisions.

Schedule 1, paragraph 8 - The record referred to shall be retained for a period of at least three years from the date on which the medicinal treatment was given, or the date of the inspection, as the case may be, and shall be available to an inspector upon request.

Legislative Requirements

This section applies to conventionally reared meat chickens:

Schedule 5, paragraph 10 (1) - The owner or other person responsible for the chickens shall maintain, for each house in which chickens are kept, a record of -

- (a) the number of chickens introduced;
- (b) the useable area;
- (c) the hybrid or breed of the chickens (if known);

- (d) the number of chickens found dead, with an indication of the causes (if known), as well as the number of chickens culled with cause, on each inspection; and
- (e) the number of chickens remaining in the flock following the removal of chickens for sale or slaughter.

(2) The record shall be retained for at least 3 years and shall be made available to the Department when carrying out an inspection or when otherwise requested.

Conventionally reared meat chickens from a flock with a stocking density in excess of 33kg/m² are also required to produce the following information to a food business operator operating a slaughterhouse; this information is treated as relevant food safety information.

Legislative Requirements

This section applies to conventionally reared meat chickens-

Welfare of Farmed Animals Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 states at:

Schedule 5, paragraph 15 (2) - A food business operator operating a slaughterhouse shall - (c) request the owner or other person responsible for the chickens to supply the following information as part of the food chain information -

- (i) the daily mortality rate;
- (ii) the cumulative mortality rate; and
- (iii) the hybrid or breed of chickens.

Records are an essential aid to management and those kept should also include:

- Where possible, feed consumed (daily and cumulative);
- Body weight in relation to expected growth rates;
- Daily water consumption (water meters should be fitted in each house);
- Testing and maintenance of automatic equipment, including alarms, fail safes, fire extinguishers and stand-by generators;
- Daily maximum and minimum temperature;
- The lighting regime - intensity and duration;
- Dates of cleaning/disinfection and bacterial counts between placements;
- Veterinary consultation, date and outcome; and
- Medicine and vaccine administration records.

9.0 Catching, Handling and Transport

No person must transport any bird in a way which causes or is likely to cause injury or unnecessary suffering to that bird.

The main welfare issues to be considered during the catching and loading process are the risks of injury and distress to birds. These risks can be minimised by planning and preparing adequately for the catching process, and by ensuring that all operators are suitable trained. It is important that disturbance of the birds during the catching process is minimised and the specific processes used to catch birds will need to take that into account. Reducing the lighting levels can help minimise stress during the catching process.

To minimise the incidence of injury and distress, it is important that the crates of meat chickens are moved in a manner so that the birds remain in an upright position. This can be achieved by ensuring that crates are never thrown or dropped and are moved smoothly at all times during loading, transport and unloading. If a conveyor is used for loading crates of live meat chickens, the conveyor needs to be set at an angle that is not excessive and so does not cause the meat chickens to pile up.

No person shall transport any bird unless:

- it is fit for its intended journey, and
- suitable provision has been made for its care during the journey and on arrival at the place of destination.

For these purposes a bird should not normally be considered fit for its intended journey if it is ill, injured, or fatigued.

Any person transporting birds must ensure that the birds are transported without delay to their place of destination.

The means of transport and containers and crates must be constructed, maintained, operated and positioned to:

- provide adequate ventilation and air space;
- allow for appropriate inspection and care of the birds;
- protect the birds from injury or unnecessary suffering during transport;
- prevent any protrusion of the heads, legs or wings from them;
- allow the birds to be conveyed and taken out without injury;
- protect the birds from rain and road spray; and
- allow them to be easily put inside.

The catching and handling of birds without causing them injury or stress requires skill. It should only be undertaken by competent persons who have been appropriately trained to

the task. Responsibility for the management of the operation should be clearly allocated. High standards must be applied irrespective of the potential economic value of the birds.

Panic among the birds and subsequent injuries should be avoided. Catching should take place in low or blue light to minimise fear responses. Catching and handling should be carried out quietly and confidently exercising care to avoid unnecessary struggling which could bruise or otherwise injure the birds.

Unless they are caught and carried around the body (using both hands to hold the wings against the body), birds should be caught and carried by both legs. No catcher should carry, by the legs, more than three chickens (or two adult breeding birds) in each hand. Birds must not be carried by the wings, neck or by one leg.

One possible way of avoiding the potential for damage to the birds is to collect the birds mechanically; only devices which are proven not to cause injury or unnecessary suffering should be considered for use in gathering birds.

The distance birds have to be carried should be minimised by taking the crates and containers into the house. Density in the crates should be adjusted according to weather conditions and size of bird. It is important to ensure that once birds are loaded in the container they are not exposed to extremes of temperature. Open sided lorries should not be used in cold weather.

Journeys should be carefully planned so that birds are not left on the vehicle for long periods either at the start of the journey or at their destination.

Measures should be taken to ensure efficient removal of excess heat and water vapour. It is important to make use of the natural airflow patterns around a moving vehicle to optimise conditions for the birds during transport. However, when a vehicle is stationary for any length of time, mechanical ventilation may be necessary to maintain acceptable levels of temperature and humidity. When this is the case it is more effective to extract air from the vehicle than to blow air into it.

10.0 Additional Requirements for Free Range Birds

Birds not permanently kept in buildings should, where necessary and possible, be given protection from adverse weather conditions, predators and risks to their health and should, at all times, have access to a well drained lying area. This must include secure housing when required for bird welfare and health reasons.

Land on which free range birds are kept for prolonged periods may become 'fowl sick', i.e. contaminated with organisms which cause or carry disease to an extent which could seriously prejudice the health of the birds on the land. Land should be frequently monitored for worm burden. The time taken for land to become fowl sick depends on the type of land

and stocking density. Appropriate measures should be taken to prevent fowl sickness or to provide a new ranging area by moving the housing (in the case of portable units) or to rotating the ranging area outside fixed buildings.

Sufficient housing should be available to the birds at all times and it may be necessary to exclude birds from the range in bad weather if there is a clear danger that their welfare will be compromised.

Birds should be encouraged to use the outdoor area by provision of adequate suitable, properly managed vegetation, overhead cover and a fresh supply of water all sufficiently far from the house to encourage the birds to range.

Factors such as soil type, drainage and size of colony and frequency of flock rotation are very important in deciding the number of birds that a particular area can carry. Heavy, poorly drained soil can carry fewer birds than land which is light and well drained.

Legislative Requirements

This section applies to meat chickens-

Welfare of Farmed Animals Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 states at:

Schedule 1, paragraph 17 - Animals not kept in buildings shall, where necessary and possible, be given protection from adverse weather conditions, predators and risks to their health and shall, at all times, have access to a well drained lying area.

11.0 Additional Recommendations for Breeding Chickens

Breeding birds for meat chickens have been selected for many traits including hatchability, and egg production. Meat chicken selection includes feed conversion efficiency and fast growth among many other characteristics. The key to managing the parent breeder birds is balancing these potentially conflicting selection traits. Consequently, their husbandry requirements are complex and demand committed and competent stockmanship and a high standard of housing and equipment. Control of the environment is essential.

11.1 Feed and water

As in many aspects of husbandry, to promote optimum welfare the amount of feed offered to breeding chickens is a fine balance between offering too much feed (because birds fed to demand would become obese with increased mortality and reduction in numbers of hatching eggs) and causing suffering due to hunger and starvation. The weight of present evidence is that the overall welfare of the current genotype of breeding bird is better if feed is restricted. However it is particularly important that the effects on the individual bird are carefully monitored by skilled staff.



Whilst most breeding flocks will have their growth rate reduced using quantitative food restriction (the birds are fed a much lower amount of their standard growing or maintenance diet once or twice per day), consideration should be given to exploring alternative methods of restricting feed through qualitative feed restriction.

The effects of quantitative feed restriction on breeding birds shows increased drinking, and displacement behaviour such as environmental pecking (e.g. pecking at the empty feeder and the wall or “spot” pecking). Higher water intakes can impact negatively on litter quality. Increasing the fibre content of the feed increases the time taken for birds to consume their food and reduces their water intake thereby improving litter condition.

A combination of additional fibre and increasing levels of appetite suppressants may allow a feeding regime to more closely reflect adlib feeding leading to a much lower feed motivation compared with traditionally quantitatively fed birds as well as reducing environmental pecking, reduced water intake and improved litter condition. This has no negative impact on subsequent egg production, weight or quality by the breeding birds.

Feeding equipment should be capable of delivering small quantities rapidly, accurately and evenly to all birds in the house and the amount of trough space allocated should allow access to feed for all birds intended to be fed. If feed is scattered, it should be distributed over sufficient area to allow access for all birds to be fed.

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

Birds should not be fed on the day of transportation as they travel more comfortably with an empty crop. Increased feed should be given to breeding birds on the day before travel and water should be made available up to the time of catching.

For breeding birds, it may be necessary to manage the supply of water in relation to the feeding system and programme to reduce excessive drinking and to maintain litter quality. When access to water is time limited it is vital that there is generous provision of drinkers with adequate flow to enable all birds to drink without undue competition when the water supply is turned back on.

11.2 Aggression & Environmental enrichment

Provision of unopened bales of shavings or good quality straw as a form of enrichment may reduce aggression and injurious pecking in the rearing period.

Scatter feeding reduces displacement behaviours and increases foraging whilst twice daily feeding increases walking which should improve leg health in breeding birds.

Littered nests are preferred by breeding females and may reduce the numbers of floor eggs if litter substrate is placed in a nest whatever the base type (metal, wood, rubber mat).

11.3 Parent breeding chickens

During the first six weeks of life feed levels should be adequate to ensure good skeletal development. The level of feed intake throughout rearing should be managed to achieve a steady growth ,[breed profile not a straight line] and the desired weight and condition at point-of-lay. Particular attention should be paid to ensure that all birds get an even share of the feed.

Feed should be offered to the birds at least daily throughout the production cycle with the exception of the day before depopulation, when a more generous allocation should be fed in anticipation of fasting the birds before slaughter.

In addition to routine daily checks, the body weight and condition of the birds should be systematically monitored on a weekly basis. Prompt, appropriate adjustments should be made to feed allocation according to what is found.

As the amount of feed offered to the birds is less than their ad-libitum intake, its nutritional quality must be carefully monitored and controlled. The flock-keeper must be particularly vigilant after changes in feed batches.

During lay, cockerels and hens have different nutritional requirements and may be fed differently within the same house. The equipment used to prevent cockerels taking feed intended for hens should be carefully adjusted to ensure that access for hens is maintained and cockerels are not injured. However, some systems and stages in the flock cycle require both males and females to be fed similar amounts of feed together and so it may be desirable to remove cockerel excluders from female feeding systems.

11.4 Elite (pedigree) birds

Primary breeding companies should identify the best means of minimising the number of elite birds subject to detailed selection performance testing and the age and weight to which they grow on an ad libitum feed regimen. Once the selection procedures are complete, weekly weight gain should be used to check that the birds follow the correct body weight profile to ensure good health and production.

Because of the constraints to which they are subjected, the management of elite birds during the period of feed restriction (from six weeks to point of-lay) must avoid any other welfare challenge and provide even feed distribution, effective environmental control and avoid disease challenge.

11.5 Beak trimming

It is unnecessary to beak trim female breeding chicks routinely and only the tip of the beak should be removed from male breeding chicks. This is best done before 10 days of age, preferably at day-old using the infra-red treatment method. Beak trimming of older birds should only be carried out when advised by a veterinary surgeon.

11.6 Buildings and accommodation

Breeding birds should be reared in houses in which temperature, humidity, ventilation rates, light levels and photoperiods are carefully regulated. A well designed house will incorporate insulation and heaters, ventilation fans and vents, effective lightproofing, and a lighting system providing controllable light levels with uniform distribution.

To enrich the environment, insoluble grit should be offered (either spread on the litter or supplied in separate containers, in a measured amount) from about six weeks of age. This will also help the gizzard to break down any litter or feathers which may have been consumed, and will encourage scratching. Foraging behaviour has the added advantage of improving litter quality. Suitable perches in the rearing house may provide a form of enrichment encouraging natural behaviour. Perches will also aid the birds' adaptation from litter to raised, perforated floors when they move to the laying phase.

Recommended minimum light intensities and photoperiods for breeding birds are:

- up to 10 days - minimum of 60 lux at day old, reducing to 10 lux and an uninterrupted day length minimum of eight hours by 10 days of age.
- up to point of lay - minimum of 10 lux. Uninterrupted day length minimum of eight hours.
- laying - minimum of 20 lux. Uninterrupted day length increasing from eight hours to a maximum of 18 hours.

All the above should be measured at bird eye height. If aggression occurs, the lights should be dimmed for a few days. After the first few days of life, there should be a set period of at least six continuous hours of darkness in any one 24-hour period.

Careful attention should be paid to the hen to cockerel ratio to ensure hens do not suffer physical injury from the presence of too many cockerels in the breeder house.

11.7 Stocking density, freedom of movement

Stocking density for breeding birds should not exceed 25 kg/m² calculated by dividing the total weight of all the birds (males and females) in the house by total area available to the birds. The calculation of stocking density should be on the basis of all stock within the house, including males.

11.8 Litter

Good litter condition can be difficult to maintain in breeder houses. This can lead to leg problems, foot pad lesions⁵, respiratory and environmental problems. Particular attention must be paid to maintaining ventilation levels and to air movement patterns to avoid draughts at litter level. Fresh litter should be added as required.

In winter it can be difficult to maintain the correct temperature in breeder houses. As a result, air and litter quality can deteriorate resulting in respiratory, leg and foot pad problems. In these circumstances, supplementary heating should be available.

11.9 Catching, handling and transport

When breeding birds are unloaded, care should be taken when lifting them out of a crate or when tipping them out of an open-topped container. Breeding birds should have immediate access to water on arrival, especially where transport containers are fitted with slats.

11.10 Breeding Procedures

Legislative Requirement

Welfare of Farmed Animals Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 states at:

Schedule 1, paragraph 28 (1) - Natural or artificial breeding or breeding procedures which cause, or are likely to cause, suffering or injury to any of the animals concerned shall not be practised.

Schedule 1, paragraph 28 (2) - Sub-paragraph (1) shall not preclude the use of natural or artificial breeding procedures that are likely to cause minimal or momentary suffering or injury or that might necessitate interventions which would not cause lasting injury.

Schedule 1, paragraph 29 - Animals shall not be kept for farming purposes unless it can reasonably be expected, on the basis of their genotype or phenotype that they can be kept without detrimental effect on their health or welfare.

11.11 Genotype selection

Producers should consider genotype carefully with regard to welfare and productivity of both the parent stock and broiler progeny. This particularly applies to integrated producer operations where both generations are managed.

⁵See Appendix B for a photo guide to Foot-pad dermatitis in meat chickens.

12.0 Other Legislation Affecting Meat Chickens

Record keeping

The main requirements are summarised below. This does not represent an exhaustive list.

Diseases of Poultry (Northern Ireland) Order 1995 as amended - requires all flocks of at least 250 birds to keep records including the species of bird and when a notifiable disease is suspected in a flock, mortality records must be maintained as well as numbers of birds showing clinician sign of disease as well.

Avian Influenza (Preventive Measures) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2007 - those keeping poultry must provide details of species of bird, husbandry system in which they are kept, the number of species usually kept, number with access to open air, details on seasonal stocking variations and nearby open water. Any changes in stocking rate by an increase or decrease of 20% or more requires notification. <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/nisr/2007/70/contents/made>

Control of Salmonella in Poultry Scheme Order (Northern Ireland) 2008 - requires breeding flocks of over 250 birds to notify the Department of the identity of the flock and species, the status in the pyramid (parent, grandparent etc.), the number of poultry, dates of samples taken. <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/nisr/2008/263/contents/made>

The Control of Salmonella in Broiler Flocks Scheme Order (Northern Ireland) 2009 – requires sampling for Salmonella and record keeping. <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/nisr/2009/205/contents/made>

The Veterinary Medicines Regulations 2011 – require records to be kept on medicine usage, administration and disposal of unused medicines. Records must be kept for at least 5 years. <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2011/2159/contents/made>

Note: Welfare of Farmed Animals (Northern Ireland) Regulations 2012 relates to recording what medicine is administered and when (for welfare purposes) and applies to all farm animals. The Veterinary Medicines Regulations 2011 recording requirements are much greater in terms of what must be recorded and how long the records must be kept and must be recorded at the point of acquisition rather than administration. Records need only be kept in relation to medicines for food producing animals (i.e. to protect the food chain).

The Animals and Animal Products (Examination for Residues and Maximum Residue Limits) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1998 (as amended) - requires various records to be kept. <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/nisr/1998/237/contents/made>

Animal By-Products Regulation (EC) 1774 /2002 - Sets out the rules on collection, transport and disposal of animal by-products including fallen stock.
<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=CELEX:32002R1774:EN:HTML>

Transport

See Council Regulation (EC) No 1/2005 (the protection of animals during transport and related operations), the Welfare of Animals (Transport) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2006 (as amended) and associated guidance for information on transporting meat chickens which are summarised in a DEFRA leaflet at <http://www.defra.gov.uk/publications/2011/04/18/pb12544e-poultry/>

Slaughter

It is a general offence under the Welfare of Animals (Slaughter or Killing) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1996 (as amended) (S.R.1996 No. 558) to cause or permit any avoidable excitement, pain or suffering to any animal (bird) during the slaughter or killing process (Regulation 4(1)) which includes movement, lairaging and stunning. This offence also extends to slaughter or killing outside a slaughterhouse.

Any person involved in slaughter or killing must have a licence (Regulation 4(3) and Schedule 1) unless killing takes place in the field using a free bullet or where an animal (bird) is slaughtered or killed by the owner for his/her private consumption.

When an animal (bird) is routinely slaughtered or killed on farm, this must be done using a permitted method.

The preferred method of killing is by percussion killer but other permitted methods of killing poultry include decapitation and neck dislocation.

Free range systems

You should refer to EU Marketing Standards for Poultrymeat, Commission Regulation (EEC) No 543/2008 regarding stocking densities, feed requirements, access to the range and minimum age at slaughter.



13.0 Useful links

Council Directive 2007/43/EC - laying down minimum rules for the protection of chickens kept for meat production

<http://eurlex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2007:182:0019:0028:EN:PDF>

For information on Avian Influenza:

<http://www.dardni.gov.uk/index/animal-health/animal-diseases/avian-influenza.htm>

For information on Salmonella:

<http://www.dardni.gov.uk/index/animal-health/animal-diseases/salmonella.htm>

For general information visit:

<http://www.dardni.gov.uk/>

Or email: animal.welfare@dardni.gov.uk

For further DARD Animal Health and Welfare publications please visit the DARD website at: <http://www.dardni.gov.uk/index/publications/pubs-dard-animal-health.htm>

Appendix A

Contact details for Codes of Practice at Dard Direct Offices

ARMAGH

A:tek Building
Edenaveys Industrial Estate
Newry Road
Armagh
BT60 1NF
Tel: 0300 200 7840

BALLYMENA

Academy House
121a Broughshane Street
Town Parks
Ballymena
BT43 6HY
Tel: 0300 200 7840

COLERAINE

Crown Buildings
Artillery Road
Millburn
Coleraine
BT52 2AJ
Tel: 0300 200 7840

DOWNPATRICK

Rathkeltair House
Market Street
Demesne of Down Acre
Downpatrick
BT30 6LZ
Tel: 0300 200 7840

DUNGANNON

Crown Buildings
36 Thomas Street
Drumcoo
Dungannon
BT70 1HR
Tel: 0300 200 7840

ENNISKILLEN

Inishkeen House
Killyhevlin Industrial Estate
Killyhevlin
Enniskillen
BT74 4EJ
Tel: 0300 200 7840

LONDONDERRY

Crown Buildings
Asylum Road
Edenballymore
Londonderry
BT48 7EA

Tel: 0300 200 7840

MAGHERAFELT

Unit 36-38
Meadowlane Shopping Centre
Moneymore Road
Magherafelt
BT45 6PR

Tel: 0300 200 7840

MALLUSK

Castleton House
15 Trench Road
Grange of Mallusk
Mallusk
BT36 4TY

Tel: 0300 200 7840

NEWRY

Glenree House
Unit 2 Springhill Road
Carnbane Industrial Estate
Carnbane
Newry
BT35 6EF
Tel: 0300 200 7840

NEWTOWNARDS

Sketrick House
Jubilee Road
Corporation South
Newtownards
BT23 4YH
Tel: 0300 200 7840

OMAGH

Sperrin House
Sedan Avenue
Lisnamallard
Omagh
BT79 7AQ
Tel: 0300 200 7840



Appendix B

Foot-pad dermatitis in meat chickens – a photo guide to meat chickens foot health



No Lesions



Mild Lesions



Lesions on the central foot pad



Severe Lesions



No lesions: No lesions or very small and superficial lesions, slight discolouration on a limited area, mild hyperkeratosis, old scars.

Mild lesions: Substantial discolouration of the foot pad, superficial lesion, dark papillae.

Severe lesions: Ulcers or scabs of significant size, signs of haemorrhages or severely swollen foot pad.

Generally, the foot as a whole shall be classified. However, the lesions on the central foot pad are of major importance, not lesions on the toes.



Meat Chickens Updated 2015

ISBN: 978-1-84807-578-8



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**Agriculture and
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