

Reports and Comments

Animal Welfare welcomes the submission of items for this Reports and Comments section of the journal. These are accepted for publication at the discretion of the Editorial Office and are not peer-reviewed.

Israel bans foie gras production

On 1st April 2005 a ban on the force-feeding of geese and ducks for the production of foie gras in Israel came into effect. The enforcement of this ban, after an extension period of a year and a half, resulted from the Israeli Supreme Court ruling, in August 2003, that the production of foie gras causes unacceptable suffering and was in violation of the Cruelty to Animals Law, and that the regulations allowing it (Cruelty to Animals Regulations [Protection of Animals] [Force-Feeding of Geese] 2001) were invalid. Enforcement was delayed until the end of March 2005 in order to allow producers to prepare and to lessen the impact of hundreds of job losses (approximately 100 family farms are employed in raising geese in Israel) and the end of an industry with an annual turnover of tens of millions of shekels.

The ruling of the Supreme Court on 11th August 2003, by a majority of two to one, was the result of a petition lead by Noah (The Israeli Association of Animal Protection Organisations), an umbrella organisation for animal rights organisations in Israel. A full transcript of the ruling is available (see details below) in which the reasoning behind this landmark decision is clearly explained.

When considering their verdict the judges considered various philosophical and ethical ideas about the relationship between humans and animals, highlighting the different attitudes to animals under different Israeli Laws. The examples and experiences of other countries and organisations are cited, including the constitutions of both India and Germany, as well as a number of European Directives and the European Commission's Scientific Committee on Animal Health and Animal Welfare (SCAHAW) 1998 report, which concluded that "force-feeding, as currently practiced, is detrimental to the welfare of the birds".

The majority opinion, by Justice T Strasberg-Cohen, states that "this interest [of the farmers in maintaining their livelihood as part of an agricultural industry...] cannot automatically override the counter-interest of the protection of animal welfare" and that "... 'agricultural needs' do not take sweeping precedence over the interest of animal protection". She goes on to say that "long accepted agricultural practices do not have immunity from the application of article 2(a) of the law [Animal Protection Act]...", and concludes with the statement that the "regulations deviate significantly from the purpose of the law, and thus they should be annulled". It should be noted that the minority opinion, that the production foie gras should not be banned,

resulted from the conclusion that "it is unjustified to prevent the suffering of...the geese by bringing suffering upon the farmers — which would be the result of their livelihood being wiped out in an instant", and that "the means [force-feeding geese] are proportionate to the ends [producing food], even though foie gras is a delicacy and not a basic food". However, all three judges were unanimous in their consideration that "the force-feeding process does indeed cause suffering to the geese".

This ruling may have important ramifications in other foie gras producing countries and for other agricultural methods used to raise animals for human consumption.

Verdict of the Supreme Court of Israel — Foie Gras August 2003. Available at <http://www.chai-online.org/foiegras.pdf>

Scientific Committee on Animal Health and Animal Welfare (SCAHAW) 1998 Report of the Scientific Committee on Animal Health and Animal Welfare: Welfare Aspects of the Production of Foie Gras in Ducks and Geese. Available at http://europa.eu.int/comm/food/fs/sc/scah/out17_en.pdf

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Guide to the management of feather pecking and cannibalism in free range laying hens

From 1st January 2011, beak trimming of laying hens in all systems of production will be prohibited in the UK under Schedule D of the Welfare of Farmed Animals (England) (Amendment) 2002. In order to smooth the transition, Defra (Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs) initiated an 'Action Plan on Beak Trimming' working group, with the aim of addressing a number of management and welfare issues that will arise as a result of the ban, including the problem of how to deal with the risk of feather pecking and cannibalism. This publication, which is a set of guidance notes and not a statutory or industry code, is the result of a number of workshops set up to discuss the practical management of these issues in free range flocks by those directly concerned with the management of laying hens.

This booklet is not a set of rules on to how to prevent feather pecking and cannibalism, but rather a discussion of the factors which may increase or decrease the risk of their incidence. As the booklet itself acknowledges, there are not always scientific data to corroborate some of the suggestions as they are based on practical field experience. The booklet is also careful to point out that changing a particular husbandry procedure can affect other factors, and that changes should be made cautiously and always under the guidance and advice of a veterinarian or other advisor.

The booklet begins by discussing the key factors associated with a decreased risk of feather pecking, including the need to match housing conditions in the rearing and in the laying environments, to obtain correctly reared,

healthy, well-feathered pullets with a calm yet 'robust' temperament in order to cope with changes in the environment and management, and to maximise the use of the range area (encouraging the birds' natural desire to roam). Minimisation of the stress associated with pullet transfer and transportation from the rearing house to the laying house, good stockmanship and conscientious and knowledgeable management, good housing design and layout of equipment and perches, and good quality litter may also decrease the risk of feather pecking.

The factors that may increase the risk of feather pecking are then discussed. These include changes in the environment when moving pullets from the rearing farm to the laying farm, changes in feed and in the environment (eg sudden or unexpected noises, excessive numbers of visitors, equipment malfunctions and breakdowns, predators etc), underweight and/or uneven flocks with large variations in bird weight (a desirable goal is for 80% of birds to fall within 10% of the mean weight), poor health status (pullets with a lower overall health status are seen as being less able to cope with the many challenges they receive during lay), disease and pest challenges (especially red mite and vermin, for which a list of requirements for control programmes is included), variations in light intensity and lighting patterns, sub-optimal nutritional intake, and birds coming into lay too early.

Included at the end is a list of all the relevant legislation relating to the guide, details of where further advice and information on animal welfare can be obtained, and a list of pertinent Defra publications, including details of where to obtain the 'Beak Trimming Code of Best Practice' in order to ensure that until 2011 the highest possible standards of welfare are maintained during beak trimming.

A guide to the practical management of feather pecking and cannibalism in free range laying hens 2005. Produced and published by Defra (Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs), Nobel House, 17 Smith Square, London SW1P 3JR, UK. 19 pp A4 paperback. Available free of charge from Defra Publications, Admail 6000, London SW1A 2XX, UK; email defra@iforcegroup.com. Also available at <http://www.defra.gov.uk/animalh/welfare/pdf/featherpecking.pdf>

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Heat stress in poultry

Heat stress can be a serious problem in poultry. In addition to causing suffering and potentially death, it may also result in decreased production. This new booklet produced by Defra details the main causes of heat stress along with practical measures that can be implemented to reduce its incidence, as well as methods that can be used to ameliorate its effects once it has occurred. As the booklet acknowledges, the recommendations contained within are based on current advice and husbandry practices; they are not exhaustive and should not replace expert advice, particularly when the farmer has specific concerns about a problem.

The booklet begins by describing how modern farming practices may contribute to the occurrence and prevalence

of heat stress in UK flocks, citing changes to medication, nutrition and genetic characteristics, in addition to more regular occurrences of high (>30°C) temperatures and higher peak summer temperatures (as high as 38°C), as possible causes. The next chapter defines heat stress with the aid of a schematic diagram of the thermoneutral zone, indicating some of the behavioural changes that may occur as temperature increases and where welfare problems are likely to occur. The booklet then goes on to discuss how heat is produced and where external sources of heat (ie within the house) may arise. The methods through which birds lose heat and the behavioural modifications used to bring about heat loss by these methods are discussed, as are the methods by which heat is lost from poultry houses and how birds respond to increasing temperatures (including panting, acclimation to high temperatures and the effect of stocking rate).

Much of the booklet is concerned with measures that can be used to prevent the occurrence of heat stress. These include discussion of whether birds should be thinned prior to the advent of hot weather, the key features of housing that protect birds from hot weather (including the effect of insulation and ventilation systems together with recommended maximum ventilation rates), the effect of reducing feed intake or food removal, adjusting the diet and flock walking, and the importance of staff training and contingency planning.

A useful summary is provided at the end of the document which states particularly important measures which should be taken and points to consider. These are:

- "Provide adequate ventilation for the number of birds housed.
- Provide fast air speed over birds.
- High humidity increases the likelihood of heat stress in hot weather.
- Where possible, reduce stocking densities during hot weather both in the shed and during transport.
- Regularly maintain and test alarms and emergency ventilation equipment.
- Make contingency plans in advance so all know their respective roles and ensure that someone is available with authority to take action."

The booklet ends with details of where further information and advice can be obtained and a list of pertinent publications. A useful timetable of events that occur during heat stress is also presented, including specific actions which should be taken by the stockman and the anticipated response of the flock.

Heat stress in poultry: solving the problem 2005. Published by Defra, Nobel House, 17 Smith Square, London SW1P 3JR, UK. 24 pp A4 paperback. Available from Defra Publications, Admail 6000, London SW1A 2XX, UK. Also available at <http://www.defra.gov.uk/animalh/welfare/pdf/hstress05.pdf>

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