

Explanatory note

The current version of the RSPCA welfare standards for pullets (laying hens) that RSPCA Assured scheme members are required to implement is dated August 2016. As part of the on-going process of reviewing the welfare standards, they have now been amended and updated, which includes the addition of a number of new standards and guidance (information boxes).

The review process, which is undertaken in consultation with the farming industry, veterinary profession and welfare research sector, is necessary to ensure that the standards take proper account of the latest scientific research, veterinary knowledge and practical developments, and therefore continue to represent good practice in farm animal care.

These changes will be incorporated into a revised edition of the RSPCA welfare standards for pullets (laying hens), to be issued in December 2018.

All the amendments made to the August 2016 version of the standards are listed below and have been marked with a star (*).

RSPCA Assured scheme members have three months from the date of this letter to fully implement these changes (i.e. by 5th December 2018), unless otherwise stated by the standard.

RSPCA Farm Animals Department
5th September 2018

Please note:

All standards in the August 2016 edition that are not shown below, or are shown but do not have a star (*) next to them, remain unchanged in the new edition. Due to the amendment process, some existing standards have been re-ordered and therefore re-numbered.

Environment

Lighting

* **i** Light stimulates and encourages positive species specific behaviour, such as dust-bathing, feeding and ground pecking. Development of normal pecking behaviours in rear can help protect against the development of abnormal injurious (feather) pecking behaviour.

E 6.2 The lighting system in the pullet house must:

- a) be designed and maintained in order to give a minimum illumination of 10 lux at pullet head height in the open areas of the house, e.g. over feeders and litter
- b) only be reduced temporarily, as a last resort, where
 - i. there are signs of an outbreak of injurious pecking or cannibalism, and
 - ii. other solutions to injurious pecking have been employed.

* **i** Light intensity (lux) measurements should be taken at bird head height at various locations along the feeder lines and across the scratch area. Measurements should be taken in the darker areas, e.g. between lights, to ensure the minimum illumination is achieved in all areas.

Where LED lights are used, an LED-specific light meter should be used.

* **i** There is growing scientific research relating to the lighting needs of pullets. The RSPCA will continue to review any new research and consider updating the standards as required.

Perches

E 9.1 * Raised perches must be:

- a) provided at not less than 5cm, and preferably at least 8cm, per pullet from 1st January 2020 at the latest
- b) introduced by 7 days of age at the latest
- c) positioned to facilitate the movement of pullets underneath.

* **i** In relation to standard E 9.1 a), it is recommended that pullets are provided with at least 8cm of raised perch space per bird, which is the minimum amount required for hens under the RSPCA welfare standards for laying hens.

* **i** Regarding standard E 9.1 c), where perches are positioned at slat edges or over feedtracks, movement underneath the perches is not required.

It is recommended that raised perches are winchable to provide optimal perch height as the birds grow.

E 9.2 * Prior to 1st January 2020, perches must be provided:

- a) at not less than 1.75cm per bird for all pullets not destined for multi-tier layer systems
- b) at not less than 1cm per bird for all pullets destined for multi-tier layer systems.

* **i** Use of raised perches from an early age can help birds to navigate the more complex environments provided in rear, helping to reduce collisions and the subsequent risk of bone fractures in the laying stage.

Research suggests that perches should be positioned at an angle no greater than 45 degrees to one another, to aid navigation. Birds should be able to access perches using small jumps.

* **i** It is advised that the level and nature of perch provision in rear is equivalent to that which will be provided to the birds in their laying accommodation.

Research suggests that the body width of a 12 week old pullet is approximately 70% of its fully grown width. It is therefore recommended that a minimum of 70%, but preferably 100%, of the perch length provided per bird in lay is provided in rear.

A minimum of 8cm of raised perching per bird is required under the RSPCA welfare standards for laying hens. However, some producers provide more than this. For example, in Scotland, it is a legal requirement to provide a minimum of 15cm of raised perch per bird. Therefore, where pullets will be provided with an increased level of raised perch provision during lay, they should be provided with the equivalent level of provision in rear.

Multi-tier

* **i** These standards are specific to any system incorporating raised tiers.

* **i** Systems whereby birds can be placed and held within tiers during the early period of rearing are referred to within these standards as multi-tier rearing aviaries, or aviaries.

E 10.3 * Where chicks are confined during the initial 2 week brooding period:

- a) birds must have access to litter (see information box below)
- b) litter must remain in a friable condition
- c) birds must not be stocked at a rate any greater than 65 birds/m² and,
- d) birds must not be stocked at a density any greater than 7kg/m².

* **i** In reference to standard E 10.3 a), litter should cover the entire floor area. However, it is acknowledged that this may not always be possible due to system design.

The RSPCA will review each system on a case-by-case basis (see standard E 10.22), and will advise on appropriate level of litter to be provided for each system.

* **i** In relation to standard E 10.3 c), this calculation should be based on the area of slatted floor (e.g. brood section) to which the birds are confined. Additional useable areas within the brood section, such as raised platforms, may not be used to calculate the stocking rate.

E 10.5 * Pullets must be given access to both raised tiers and the littered floor, at no later than 15 days of age.

E 10.12 * The maximum number of raised tiers directly above each other must not exceed 3.

E 10.16 * For all pullets destined for multi-tier laying systems, a minimum of 124cm² of slatted (tier) area must be provided per bird.

E 10.18 * Aviary rearing systems must have a manure belt removal system, which must be run at frequent intervals and, after the initial two week brooding period, at least once a week.

E 10.19 * In multi-tier rearing aviaries with temporary partitions between brood sections, partitions must:

- a) be removed by the time the birds are 15 days of age at the latest
- b) once removed, allow birds free access along the full length of the tier.

* **i** The RSPCA welfare standards for laying hens require birds *have full access along the length of the tier*. It is recognised that this is not possible in multi-tier rearing aviaries with permanent partitions. Therefore, we strongly encourage the use of temporary partitions, which allow full movement along tiers.

The RSPCA is considering a minimum brood section area in systems where permanent partitions are in place.

E 10.20 * Where required, producers that are members of a farm assurance scheme must notify the scheme of the date of placement of chicks in aviary rearing systems at least one month, and not more than two months, in advance of flock placement for each flock placed.

* **i** **RSPCA Assured members are required to notify RSPCA Assured of the date of placement of chicks in aviary rearing systems at least one month, and not more than two months, in advance of flock placement for each flock placed.**

* **i** **Providing a scheme with advanced notice of bird placement within multi-tier rearing aviaries will enable timely assessment of these systems at critical times, e.g. to check the birds have been provided with full access to the system at 15 days of age.**

E 10.21 * Ramps must be provided:

- a) to facilitate movement between tiers and between the floor and first tier, and
- b) in sufficient numbers to prevent crowding and displacements on tiers.

* **i** **The RSPCA is considering the appropriate design and level of ramp provision in multi-tier systems and will review any scientific and practical evidence as it becomes available.**

Currently it is recommended that ramps are of wire mesh construction and placed at an angle of not more than 45 degrees.

In aviary systems, where food and water is available only within tiers, ramps running alongside tiers, rather than away from tiers, may better aid navigation back into the system, particularly in the early rearing period.

E 10.22 * Any multi-tier aviary rearing system used must be accepted for use by the RSPCA.

* **i** **To find out whether a multi-tier aviary system is accepted for use by the RSPCA, please contact the Farm Animals Department or visit:**
<http://science.rspca.org.uk/sciencegroup/faranimals/standards/pullets>

Producers or system manufacturers that would like to have a system accepted should contact the RSPCA Farm Animals Department.

Environmental enrichment

E 12.1 For every 1,000 birds there must be at least 2 items of environmental enrichment which must be:

- a) in the form of pecking and/or foraging objects
- b) permanently available within the house
- * c) provided no later than 15 days of age.

E 12.2 * Prior to 15 days of age, if any feather pecking is seen, including gentle manipulation of the feathers of another bird, pecking enrichments must be provided as per standard E12.1 immediately to prevent escalation of the behaviour.

Protection from other animals

M 6.1 * A written wild animal control plan (WACP) must:

- a) be in place, and
- b) implemented on farm.

M 6.2 * Levels of potentially harmful wild animals (e.g. rodents and birds) must be managed humanely to avoid:

- a) the risk of disease spread to livestock
- b) damage to livestock buildings and the services on which livestock depend
- c) contamination and spoilage of feed.

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In England and Wales, the following legislation applies to the management of wildlife:

- **Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981**
- **Animal Welfare Act 2006**
- **The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010**
- **Protection of Badgers Act 1992**
- **Pests Act 1954**
- **The Spring Traps Approval (England) Order 2012**
- **The Spring Traps Approval (Wales) Order 2012**
- **The Small Ground Vermin Traps Order 1958**
- **Food and Environment Protection Act 1985**
- **The Control of Pesticides Regulations 1986**
- **Animals (Cruel Poisons) Act 1962**

Equivalent legislation applies in Scotland and Northern Ireland.

- M 6.3 *** The primary means of protecting livestock from wild animals, as documented in the WACP, must be by:
- physical exclusion methods
 - the removal of elements in the vicinity that might encourage the presence of wild animals
 - maintaining units in a clean and tidy condition to minimise the risk of wild animals gaining access to the unit.

* **i** **Physical exclusion measures are the most humane and effective methods of providing protection from wild animals.**

Measures should only be applied after the area has been checked and cleared of elements that could encourage the presence of wild animals, as applying some measures can interfere with rodent behaviour and encourage them to spread to other areas. Humane methods of protecting livestock from other animals include:

- **construction/maintenance of fencing appropriate for excluding the wild animals in question**
- **removal of shelter/cover (e.g. weeds, heaps of rubble, broken equipment etc.) in the area surrounding the livestock buildings**
- **removal/protection of obvious food sources**
- **maintenance of drains**
- **maintenance/proofing of buildings against wild animals**
- **storing bedding away from livestock.**

In free range systems it is appreciated that elements, such as natural cover, are provided in order to encourage birds onto the range. Some of the methods listed above are intended to remove unnecessary and unintended harbourage sites, as opposed to elements specifically provided for other purposes.

* **i** **Rodents are less likely to inhabit an area if there is no cover or food supply. Reduced food availability will also increase the likelihood of rodents consuming bait, where applied. When stores or livestock buildings are empty, the opportunity should be taken to clean spaces and introduce any necessary controls before restocking.**

M 6.4 * Where any method of lethal control is being considered, a site survey of the unit must be carried out before applying the control, i.e. bait or traps, identifying:

- the type, level and extent of the problem species
- any non-target animals likely to be present (including pets and children)
- any maintenance and proofing issues.

M 6.5 * Where any lethal method of control is used, its use must have taken into account the results of the site survey (see standard M 6.4).

M 6.6 * The WACP must include provisions that specifically exclude the following methods of control:

- snaring
- gassing
- vertebrate glue traps.

M 6.7 * Long-term baiting must not be used as a routine rodent control measure.

* **i** In relation to standard M 6.7, site plans should therefore highlight potential high risk areas for wild animal activity (rather than permanent baiting locations).

Long-term baiting should not be necessary if bait traps are applied effectively. Long-term baiting can contribute to bait resistance in rodents.

However, where bait traps are applied effectively and the requirements of standard M 6.3 have been implemented, and there continues to be problems with protecting livestock from wild animals, it is appreciated that continued baiting may be necessary. However, this should be part of a continued review of the need to bait following the requirements of standard M 6.4.

* **i** The RSPCA is opposed to the use of poisons that cause animal suffering and it is important not to rely solely on the use of rodenticide. The RSPCA is concerned about the welfare of all animals that have the capacity to suffer, and therefore all alternative forms of deterrent and humane control should be exhausted before resorting to the use of poisons for rodents.

* **i** Any baiting programme should be considered carefully and justified in risk assessments for each location where used. Consideration should be given to using non-toxic baits in order to ascertain the presence of rodents, which may necessitate the use of rodenticide.

M 6.8 * When bait and/or traps are used, records of their use must be kept and:

- a) state the location of the bait/traps
- b) state what bait/traps were used
- c) state the volume/number of bait/traps placed
- d) state the name of the person who placed the bait/trap
- e) be retained for at least two years.

M 6.9 * Bait and traps must:

- a) be placed in suitable positions, and
- b) be sufficiently protected to avoid harming non-target animals.

M 6.10 * Bait must be used according to the manufacturer's instructions for:

- a) storage
- b) usage, including areas of use and replenishment
- c) disposal.

M 6.11 * Traps must be:

- a) used according to the manufacturer's instructions
- b) maintained in good order
- c) disposed of appropriately if no longer fit for purpose, e.g. have broken
- d) stored safely and securely.

- M 6.12 *** Bait points must:
- a) be monitored regularly, and
 - b) records of monitoring must be kept, including:
 - i. levels of any activity at each bait point
 - ii. any missing or disturbed bait
 - iii. the name of the person responsible for monitoring the bait points.

- M 6.13 *** Trap points must:
- a) be monitored at least twice a day, ideally at dawn and dusk, and
 - b) records of monitoring must be kept, including:
 - i. level of activity at each trap
 - ii. any missing or disturbed traps
 - iii. the name of the person responsible for monitoring the traps.

M 6.14 * Any injured, sick or dying wild animals found – that have been targeted for control – must be humanely dispatched immediately to prevent further suffering.

*  **Regular replenishment of bait will help to prevent sub-lethal doses, which can result in a build-up of resistance to the active ingredient.**

M 6.15 * Where bait is used, dead animals must be disposed of safely, in line with the manufacturer's product label.

*  **Safe disposal of wild animals that have died as a result of poisoning reduces the risk of secondary poisoning in non-target species, such as domestic and other wild animals (including birds), that may consume the carcasses.**

- M 6.16 *** Once treatment is complete, all traps and traces of bait must be:
- a) removed
 - b) disposed of / stored according to the manufacturer's instructions.

- M 6.17 *** Managers must ensure that all stock-keepers:
- a) have access to a copy of the Campaign for Responsible Rodenticide Use '*UK Code of Best Practice: Best Practice and Guidance for Rodent Control and the Safe Use of Rodenticides*'
 - b) are familiar with its content
 - c) understand and apply its content.

*  **Producers are strongly encouraged to complete the free, self-study training course on rodent control available at: <http://rodentcontrolonfarms.co.uk/login/index.php>. The content of the course is based on a LANTRA course and is approved by the Campaign for Responsible Rodenticide Use. Further information is available in the AHDB document '*Rodent Control on Farms: A practical guide to effective and responsible use of bait rodenticides*'.**

M 6.18 * Farm dogs and cats must not be permitted in the pullet house.