JOINT INDUSTRY WELFARE GUIDE
TO THE HANDLING OF END OF LAY HENS AND BREEDERS
(Domestic Fowl)

INTRODUCTION

This revision to the Code of Practice updates and reinforces the need to ensure that the highest possible standards of welfare are maintained at all stages involving the depopulation of end of lay hens and breeders.

The working group who were involved in this revision were representative of the production, transport and processing sectors and it is their recommendations, based on knowledge and practical experience, that has enabled a number of additions and amendments to be incorporated. The content of this Code can easily be integrated into both individual farmers' and company management guidelines, thereby ensuring that all persons involved in the handling and transport of birds are fully aware of their responsibilities.

Members of the working group recommend most strongly that there should be one individual who takes overall responsibility for the whole process of removing birds from their laying accommodation to the point where the transport leaves the farm. This would normally be expected to be the farmer or their appointed agent and is intended to provide for the establishment of a clear line of authority, thereby ensuring that the standards laid down in this Code are achieved and maintained.

It should be noted that this Code is aimed at the handling and transport of laying hens and breeders of the species Gallus gallus (domestic fowl).

As knowledge of this subject is continually developing, further changes may be necessary in the light of growing industry experience and new equipment design.

1st November 1999
JOINT INDUSTRY WELFARE GUIDE TO THE HANDLING OF END OF LAY HENS AND BREEDERS

PLANNING

1. It is essential to book forward as early as possible to ensure depletion at optimum age.

2. At least one week before depiction agree date of collection.

3. If birds are to be slaughtered for human consumption, and if the producer disposes of more than 20,000 domestic fowl per annum, the Poultry Meat Farmed Game Bird Meat and Rabbit Meat (Hygiene and Inspection) Regulations 1995 require one of the following:

   either:
   a) A health attestation signed by a veterinary surgeon in accordance with Schedule 17 of the Regulations, which must accompany the birds to the slaughterhouse.

   or:
   b) A declaration from a veterinary surgeon that the holding is under his supervision, and a production report. This report must be provided to the processing plant by the producer in advance, so that it can be made available to the plant’s Official Veterinary Surgeon at least 72 hours before slaughter, as required by the Regulations.

   The production report must include at least the following information:

   i) Holding of origin
   ii) Intended date of arrival at slaughterhouse
   iii) Expected number of birds
   iv) Mortality data
   v) Details of any disease diagnosed and the results of any laboratory examination
   vi) Details of any medication administered

   The Official Veterinarian is empowered to require additional information as specified in Schedule 22, Part 2.

   (Where the producer disposes of less than 20,000 birds per annum, he/she is required to send to the processor a declaration that his/her annual production does not exceed 20,000 birds. In such cases an anti-mortem inspection may be carried out at the slaughterhouse. Alternatively, the producer can opt to follow point ‘a’ or ‘b’ above).

4. In any event, the processor will need the following information:

   a) Number of birds
   b) Age
   c) Breed
   d) Approximate weight
   e) Production system
   f) Feather condition (see Appendix 1)
   g) Health status of flock
   h) Any farm access problems?

5. At least 5 days before collection

   a) Finalise flock details (see 4 above)
   b) Agree time of lorry arrival
   c) Agree the appropriate number of handlers to be provided by: i) Processor, ii) Farmer, to ensure loading can be completed within a reasonable period of time, whilst maintaining the highest standards of bird welfare.
   d) Ensure the number of crates or modules to be supplied are adequate for the age and size of the flock.
   e) Agree name of person in charge of the operation on farm and telephone contact in case of late change or emergency.
   f) Agree with processor when feed should be withdrawn (see paragraph 17 below).

PRE-CATCHING

Processor

6. Ensure the lorry is on site in good time before catching is due to start.

7. Ensure crates or modules are clean and free from damage and suitable for the size and type of bird being collected.

8. Ensure that the lorry driver is fully competent to ensure bird welfare and consider, in conjunction with the farmer, if additional labour is required to enable loading to be completed in reasonable time.

9. Ensure the lorry driver's hours are sufficient to avoid any delay in transporting birds to their destination.
THE CONTROL OF THE CATCHING OPERATION IS THE SOLE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE FARMER OR THEIR APPOINTED REPRESENTATIVE.

House and Site preparation

10. Ensure that there is good site access and that roadways are kept in good condition.

11. Keep access roads and the areas around the catching doors clear of clutter and clean and tidy.

12. In laying cage systems prepare cage fronts so that birds can be easily removed. In loose house systems all feeders, drinkers and portable perches should be removed from the catching area, wherever possible. In addition, nest boxes should be closed.

13. For loose house systems, suitable catching frames should be available.

14. Clear all passageways and doorways to allow free movement of personnel.

15. Reduce in house lighting to the lowest level acceptable (or use blue lighting) to calm the birds without hampering catchers and provide sufficient and properly positioned outside lighting to enable loading to be carried out.

16. Override automatic ventilation to ensure it continues operation during catching and isolate all other electrical motors.

17. Water must be available to the birds right up to the point of catching. The farmer must be aware of the need to periodically provide water for the remaining birds, dependent upon the length of time of the catching operation. Feed should be withdrawn in consultation with the processor and in accordance with the Code of recommendations for the welfare of livestock - Domestic Fowls, which allows feed to be withdrawn for up to 12 hours prior to slaughter.

18. Ensure all catching staff are present in good time before loading starts.

19. Unskilled or inexperienced catchers should receive prior training, be instructed in the welfare codes, have access to a copy, and be closely supervised by an experienced operator.

20. Before catching starts it is the responsibility of the farmer or their appointed agent to ensure that ALL staff are reminded of their responsibilities in relation to this Code of Practice (see Appendix 2).

21. Work should be broken down into separate operations and staff allocated to each task according to their physical ability, skill and experience.

22. The whole operation should be carried out with the minimum amount of fuss or noise.

23. Everyone involved in the operation must be made aware that the mistreatment of birds will not be tolerated.

Laying Cages

24. Birds must be removed from the cage singly to avoid injury or suffering and must be held by BOTH legs.

25. The breast should be supported during removal from the cage, or a breast support slide used.

26. Once removed the bird must be handed to a carrier, or placed in a module.

Loose Housed Birds

27. Mobile catching frames should be used to reduce any risk of smothering.

28. Birds must be caught by BOTH legs to avoid injury or suffering.

29. Where there is no suitable roadway to free range units, alternative transport from field to lorry must be provided with adequate labour for the extra handling of crates or modules in order not to prolong loading time.

All Systems

Collector/Carriers of birds

30. Birds should only be carried by the legs and care taken to avoid hitting solid objects particularly if wings are flapping.

31. The number of birds carried will depend upon the size of the bird and the ability of the carrier but a maximum of 3 per hand must not be exceeded.
32. If any bird escapes it should be re-caught immediately and as quietly as possible.

33. Visibly unfit or injured birds must not be loaded but should be slaughtered on-farm as quickly and humanely as possible, by a suitably trained person.

34. Birds should be handed to the loader as quickly and quietly as possible, consistent with their loading speed.

Driver and Loaders responsibilities

35. Care must be taken to avoid injury when birds are placed in the crate or module. The number of birds per crate or module must take account of climatic condition and legislative requirements.

36. Appropriate sheeting of the lorry must take place dependent upon climatic conditions.

37. Birds should be transported to their destination with the minimum delay. Drivers should preferably contact the processing plant before leaving the farm.

38. Drivers should be provided with mobile phones or two-way radios in case of unforeseen problems arising.

MISCELLANEOUS

39. Plans must be in place in case of a delay or emergency.

40. Ideally toilet and hand washing facilities should be provided for catching teams.

41. A first aid kit should be available.

ON-FARM SLAUGHTER

All provisions of this Code of Practice apply in relation to the on-farm slaughter of birds.

JOINT INDUSTRY WELFARE GUIDE TO THE HANDLING OF END OF LAY HENS AND BREEDERS

REFERENCES

- The Transport of Animals (Cleansing and Disinfection) Order 1999 - (due to come into force at the end of 1999).
- The requirements of the various regulations relating to Health and Safety must be followed.

Enquiries to:

British Egg Industry Council
Second Floor
89 Charterhouse Street
London EC1M 6HR
0207 6083760

British Free Range Egg Producers Association
PO Box 3425
Ashton Keynes
Swindon SN6 6WR

British Poultry Council
Europoint House
5 Lavington Street
London SE1O ONZ

National Farmers' Union
Agriculture House
Stoneleigh Park
Stoneleigh
Warwickshire CV8 2TZ

Grateful thanks are extended to all those egg producers, hen processors, and to ADAS, whose input has enabled this revision of the Code of Practice to take place.
Appendix 1

The following is the feather scoring system used in work by ADAS. It is included here to provide the farmer or their appointed agent with guidance when assessing the feathering of the flock due to be depopulated.

**FEATHER SCORES**

1. Complete feather cover,

2. Worn feathers delectable,

3. Badly worn feathers or small bare patches, approximately 25mm in diameter.

4. Badly worn feathers or large bare patches (up to 75% of the area)

5. Badly worn feathers over most of the area, or mostly devoid of feathers.

Appendix 2

The following is intended to serve as a useful reminder for farm staff, catchers and drivers, of the principle points that should be adhered to during the catching operation.

Farmers (or their appointed agent) and processors may wish to consider reproducing these points on a laminated sheet of A4 paper, which can be easily referred to during the catching operation.

- Before catching starts it is the responsibility of the farmer or their appointed agent to ensure that ALL staff are reminded of their responsibilities in relation to the handling of end of lay hens and breeders.

- **Everyone involved in the catching operation must be made aware that the mistreatment of birds will not be tolerated.**

- The whole operation should be carried out with the minimum amount of fuss or noise.

- *Cages* - Birds must be removed from the cage singly to avoid injury or suffering and must be held by BOTH legs, with the breast supported.

- *Loose Housed Systems* - Birds must be caught by BOTH legs to avoid injury and suffering.

  In loose houses systems mobile catching frames should be used to reduce any risk of smothering.

- Once removed the bird must be handed to a carrier, or placed in a module.

- Birds should only be carried by the legs and care taken to avoid hitting solid objects particularly if wings are flapping.

- No more than 3 birds per hand must be carried, depending upon the size of the bird and the ability of the carrier.
- If any bird escapes it should be re-caught immediately and as quietly as possible.

- Visibly unfit or injured birds must not be loaded but should be slaughtered on-farm as quickly as humanely as possible, by a suitably trained person.

- Birds should be handed to the loader as quickly and quietly as possible, consistent with their loading speed.

- Care must be taken to avoid injury when birds are placed in the crate or module. The number of birds per crate or module must take account of climatic and legislative requirements.