Animal Welfare in laying hen production

FACT SHEET

Background information

The EU legislation on the protection of animals on the farm aims to ensure that animals are kept and raised respecting the minimum physiological needs and to minimise painful practices. Specific EU legislation exists on the welfare of poultry, pigs and calves. Council Directive 1999/74/EC lays down minimum standards for the protection of laying hens.

Council Directive 1999/74/EC, adopted in 1999, distinguishes two types of rearing systems for laying hens: enriched cages, where laying hens have at least 750 cm² of cage area per hen; non-cage systems with nests (at least one for 7 hens), adequate perches and where the stocking density does not exceed 9 laying hens per m² usable area. The hens kept in the enriched cage systems and the non-cage systems must also have a nest, perching space of 15cm per hen, litter to allow pecking and scratching and unrestricted access to feed through measuring at least 12cm per hen in the cage.

Article 7 of the Directive provides that all egg production units must be registered with the competent authorities in Member States. Article 10 of the Directive provides that the Commission shall submit to the Council a report on the various systems of rearing laying hens. Member States are primarily responsible for the implementation of the Directive, since its adoption in 1999.

Objectives

At the end of the training process, participants will acquire the following knowledge and skills:

- Relevant EU legislation;
- Scientific basis for proper housing and management;
- Assessment of existing farming systems (including cages and alternative systems for hens) in relation to compliance with the current EU legislation;
- Animal welfare outcomes: practical experience on the farm;
- How to carry out efficient inspections at farm level, including practical guidance on how to verify compliance of the farming systems with the EU legislation (for example, how to measure the useable area in enriched cages as provided in Council Directive 1999/74).
Content of the training

The contents of the training course are listed below:

- FVO activities for the implementation of the EU legislation on Animal Welfare in poultry production;
- Risk assessment in support to policy making: EFSA’s work on the welfare of laying hens;
- How scientific work on the ethological needs of the hens have influenced the legislation;
- Experiences and perspectives on the state of implementation of the legislation in Europe; options to be envisaged to ensure proper enforcement of Council Directive 1999/74/EC;
- Welfare of laying hens: a definition;
- Housing systems and hens: risk to welfare;
- Hen behaviour and behavioural priorities;
- Physiology and stress indicators;
- Welfare risk related to management procedures (beak trimming, depopulation);
- Animal Based Measures for on-farm evaluation of laying hens’ welfare;
- Integrated assessment of laying hens’ welfare on farm in compliance with the current EU legislation;
- How to conduct an audit (useful tools and good practices).

Targeted audience

Official veterinarians belonging to NCAs of EU MSs, EFTA, Candidate and Third Countries, involved in official controls on animal welfare aspects concerning the farming of laying hens; development of good practices to improve the application of European norms.

Calendar and locations

I edition: 22-25 September 2015, Scotland (United Kingdom)
II edition: 18-21 October 2016, Scotland (United Kingdom)