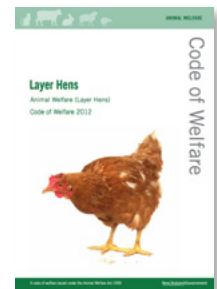


SCIENCE TEXTS

Short Written Texts (Government Publications)

National Animal Welfare Advisory Committee (NAWAC). *Animal Welfare (Layer Hens) Code of Welfare 2012*. NZ Government (2012). Extract from section 6 – Behaviour (p. 23).



6. Behaviour

Introduction

The ability for layer hens to be able to show normal behaviour in the farm environment is an important welfare consideration. Layer hens show much of the natural behaviour exhibited by their wild ancestors, the jungle fowl. While selective breeding has reduced their drive to perform some behaviours (e.g. sexual behaviour) they have retained a strong need to perform many of their ancestral behaviours including:

- Laying their eggs in a protected nesting area;
- Perching (or roosting);
- Scratching and foraging;
- Dustbathing; and
- Extending and flapping their wings, flying onto roosts, preening, and vigilance for predators.

Current housing systems may constrain these behaviours to some extent. Indoor systems are more constraining than outdoor systems and colony cages provide reduced opportunities for foraging and dustbathing behaviours to be expressed. There is also evidence that certain behaviours are more important to hens than others at different times. For example, as hens approach the time to lay their eggs they place a high value on a nest site, and rank nesting behaviour a higher priority than feeding.

Where the ability of hens to escape is constricted, fear and panic can lead to smothering.

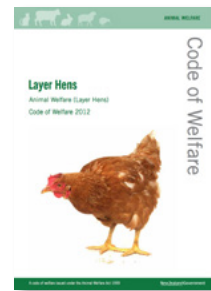
Minimum Standard No. 12 – Behaviour

- (a) Hens must have the opportunity to express a range of normal behaviours. These include, but are not limited to nesting, perching, scratching, ground pecking, and dustbathing.
- (b) Any cage installed prior to 31 December 1999 must be replaced with a housing system that meets the requirements of Minimum Standard 12(a) by 31 December 2016.
- (c) Any cage installed prior to 31 December 2001 must be replaced with a housing system that meets the requirements of Minimum Standard 12(a) by 31 December 2018.
- (d) Any cage installed on or prior to 31 December 2003 must be replaced with a housing system that meets the requirements of Minimum Standard 12(a) by 31 December 2020.
- (e) Any cage installed between 1 January 2004 and the date of issue of this code must be replaced with a housing system that meets minimum standard 12(a) by 31 December 2022.
- (f) Any housing systems installed after the date of issue of this code must meet the requirements of Minimum Standard 12(a).

SCIENCE TEXTS

Short Written Texts (Government Publications)

National Animal Welfare Advisory Committee (NAWAC). *Animal Welfare (Layer Hens) Code of Welfare 2012*. NZ Government (2012). Extract from section 6 – Behaviour (p. 24).



Note:

Section 73(3) of the Animal Welfare Act 1999 provides that the National Animal Welfare Advisory Committee (NAWAC) may, in exceptional circumstances, recommend minimum standards that do not fully meet the obligations to ensure that the physical, health and behavioural needs of the animal are met. In making this recommendation NAWAC must have regard to, among other things, the feasibility and practicality of effecting a transition from current practices and any adverse effects that may result from such a transition, and the economic effects of any transition from current practices to new practices.

NAWAC considers that the use of layer hen cages providing less than 750 sq cm per hen and no perches, discrete nesting areas or scratching surfaces, does not fully meet the obligations of the Act. Minimum Standards 12 (b), (c), (d) and (e) provide for a transition from these cages to alternative ways of housing and managing layer hens – i.e. colony cages and barns.

Example indicators for Minimum Standard No. 12 – Behaviour

- Layer hens are active and alert, calm, confident and inquisitive
- Layer hen behaviour is monitored and timely remedial action is taken when appropriate, including managing the effects of injurious pecking
- Layer hens show types and frequencies of activities that are normal for their age

Recommended Best Practice

- (a) Pullets reared for barn systems should be reared with access to litter and perches from 6-18 weeks of age, to aid familiarisation with the laying system.
- (b) Pullets reared for multi-tier barn systems should be reared with access to feed and water on multiple levels from 6-18 weeks of age, to aid familiarisation with the laying system.
- (c) Layer hens should be provided with litter for dustbathing.
- (d) Resources should be located in a way that minimises competition between birds and encourages them to perform a range of normal behaviours.
- (e) All hens should be provided with several resources to promote foraging behaviour.

General Information

The minimum standards and suggested indicators outlined elsewhere throughout this code are also intended to ensure that housing and management allows the behavioural needs of layer hens to be met, and provide advice on how these needs can be met.

Injurious pecking (damaging feather pecking, vent pecking and cannibalism) is often associated with poor foraging opportunities, overcrowding and dietary imbalance. The problem is more difficult to manage in large group-housed systems and it is particularly important that pullets are given access to litter and range before placement in the layer barn. In large flocks there may also be competition or avoidance of negative social interactions by some hens. For example some hens may be unwilling to leave a barn for the outdoors for fear of encountering unfamiliar or dominant individuals.

Consideration of group dynamics and the abundance and positioning of resources in the design and management of large flocks should be made in order to ensure that as many individuals as possible have sufficient space and access to resources to perform a full behavioural repertoire.