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CODE OF ACCEPTED FARMING PRACTICE

FOR

THE WELFARE OF THE DOMESTIC FOWL

Adopted from Draft 5 of Model Code of Practice for
The Welfare of Animals (Domestic Poultry), 2nd Edition
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INTRODUCTION

This Code of Practice is intended as a guide for people responsible for the welfare and husbandry of domestic fowls kept for egg or meat production. It recognises that the basic requirement for welfare of poultry is a husbandry system appropriate to their physiological and behavioural needs.

The basic needs of poultry are:

* readily accessible food and water to maintain health and vigour;
* able to move, stand, stretch and lie down;
* able to lay in a sheltered, protected place;
* appropriate interaction with other birds;
* accommodation which provides protection from the weather and which neither harms nor causes distress;
* prevention of disease, injury and vice, with rapid attention and, if practicable, treatment should they occur.

Additional requirements for birds maintained under specific management systems are outlined in appendices 1 and 2.

The Code emphasises that, whatever the form of husbandry, managers and others responsible for the day-to-day needs of domestic poultry have a responsibility to care for animals under their control.

The importance of good stockmanship in animal welfare cannot be over-emphasised. Persons responsible for the care of poultry should be well trained, experienced and dedicated. A knowledge of the normal appearance and behaviour of their birds is essential for them to be treated efficiently and with consideration.

Assistance with the establishment of poultry farms and advice on the management of poultry can be obtained from recognized advisers and veterinarians in private or government employment. Veterinary advice should also be immediately sought when poultry are in ill health.

This Code is based on the knowledge and technology available at the time of publication. It does not replace the need for experience and commonsense in the husbandry of domestic poultry.

This Code will be reviewed every 5 years, or sooner if necessary, to take account of advances in technology and in the understanding of animal physiology and behaviour and in regard to the expectations of the industry and the general community.

1. HOUSING

1.1 Advice on welfare aspects should be sought when new cages or equipment are being purchased, new buildings being constructed or existing buildings modified. Such advice is available from qualified advisers in private or Government employment.

1.2 Floors and other surfaces should be designed, constructed and maintained so as to minimise the risk of injury and disease, and to adequately support the birds so that they can stand, stretch, move freely and turn around. The floor should be constructed so as to enable support for each forward pointing toe and the slope of the floor should not exceed 8 degrees.

1.3 Deep litter floors should be checked frequently for dryness and friability. If litter becomes caked, wet or excessively dusty the problem should be rectified.

1.4 Nest boxes and roosting areas should be easily accessible and should not be so high above the floor level that birds may be injured when ascending or descending.

1.5 In cages, birds should be able to stand at normal height. Cages should be at least higher than the maximum height of the birds.

1.6 Alternative husbandry systems should be encouraged and cages phased out when practical and economical alternative systems are developed and available for commercial use. Innovative cage designs which enhance animal welfare should also be encouraged.

1.7 For cages designed for no more than 4 birds, the cage doors should be the whole height and width of the cage front to allow birds to be placed in cages or removed from cages without injury.

1.8 Multi-deck cages should be arranged so that birds in the lower tiers are protected from excreta from above and so that all birds are visible to a person walking past the cages.

1.9 Nest litter, where used, should be changed regularly so as to be clean, dry, friable and moisture absorbent.

2. SPACE ALLOWANCES

2.1 It is recommended that stocking density be regularly reviewed and adjusted. The space allowed for each bird may vary according to the species, breed, strain and type of bird in addition to increasing age and weight.

2.2 The stocking density will also depend on the quality and type of housing and the capacity to achieve and maintain acceptable levels of temperature, humidity, air exchange, removal of noxious odours and lighting. Upon the occurrence of disease or evidence of behavioural changes, such as cannibalism, stocking densities should be re-evaluated immediately and adjusted accordingly. Other factors may be involved in disease or behavioural changes.

2.3 Full details on maximum stocking densities are presented in appendix 2.

3. EQUIPMENT

3.1 All equipment to which poultry have access should be designed and maintained so as to avoid injury or pain to the birds.

3.2 All feeders and waterers should be checked for efficient operation at least once each day.

3.3 All automated hatchery and environmental control equipment must have adequate back-up systems and alarms for when equipment fails.

4. LIGHTING

4.1 Young birds reared away from the hen require a high light intensity (of about 40 lux) on the food and water for the first three days after hatching in order to learn to find food and water. It may then be reduced to as low as 2 lux during rearing.

4.2 During inspection of poultry a high enough light intensity (at least 10 lux) at bird level is required.

4.3 Laying hens should have a period of 8 hours of darkness per day. Where young poultry are housed in enclosed sheds using continuous light, a "blackout" training period, commencing with 15 minutes and increasing over a few days to one hour in each 24 hours should be implemented to prevent panic should lighting fail.

4.4 Where poultry do not have access to daylight they should be given lighting over a period of at least 8 hours per day. Photo periods in excess of 20 hours per day may be detrimental to the laying bird.

5. VENTILATION

5.1 Ventilation is required at all times to provide fresh air. The accumulation of water vapour, heat, noxious gases and dust particles may cause discomfort or distress and predispose to the development of disease. Consideration should be given to the feasibility of dust filters where air is mechanically recirculated in poultry houses.

5.2 Recognising the possibility of extremes of weather conditions, ventilation facilities and equipment should aim to maintain shed humidity below 80% at all times especially at temperatures above 30^{oC}

5.3 The presence of ammonia is usually a reliable indicator of the build-up of noxious gases; it should not be allowed to exceed 20 parts per million (ppm) of air measured at bird level in enclosed buildings without immediate corrective action being taken. (A level of 10 to 15 ppm of ammonia in the air can be detected by smell. An ammonia level of from 25 to 35 ppm will cause eye and nasal irritation in humans- an indication that action should be taken to reduce its level).

5.4 Hydrogen sulphide levels should be keep below 5 ppm and carbon dioxide below 0.3%. If ammonia level is kept under adequate control then it is likely that these gases will be at low levels.

5.5 If stocking density of fowls on deep litter exceeds 28 kg/m^2 (equivalent to approx. 710 cm^2 per 2.0 kg bird) in summer months or 32 kg/m^2 (620 cm^2 per 2.0 kg bird) in winter months mechanical air movement is essential. In force-ventilated sheds, assisted ventilation should be capable of exhausting up to 4.6m^3 air/hour/kg liveweight during summer months with an optimum velocity of air movement past the bird of 0.25 to 1.0 m/second.

5.6 In all artificially ventilated sheds there must be an alarm system to warn of power failure or adverse temperature change and this must be able to operate independently of mains power supply.

6. TEMPERATURE

6.1 Young Birds (day-old to five weeks)

6.1.1 Newly-hatched birds have a poor ability to control body temperature and require supplementary heat to bring their environmental temperature up to the comfort range as evidenced by alert and active behaviour. Optimum temperatures vary for different species and operators should know of the specific requirements for the species under their care.

6.1.2 Supplementary heat at gradually reducing levels may be required up to 5 weeks of age. The behaviour of the birds is the best indicator of comfort and whether insufficient or excessive heat is being provided.

6.2 Growing and Adult Poultry

6.2.1 Poultry should be protected from draughts during cold weather and have access to shade during hot weather.

6.2.2 Adequate precautions should be taken to minimise stress produced by temperatures high enough to cause prolonged panting, particularly when high temperatures are accompanied by high humidity. In hot weather provision of adequate cool water and ventilation is essential. Where high temperatures are causing distress, foggers, roof sprinklers, fans or other systems should be used to control heat build-up within buildings. Foggers should not be used if relative humidity reaches 80% at temperatures above 30 °C.

6.2.3 It is essential that no stocking density or other constraining practice be allowed to prevent birds adopting behaviour to facilitate body heat loss in hot weather, such as panting, vibrating the floor of the mouth cavity ("gular flutter") standing erect with wings held away from the body and raising of the scapular feathers.

6.2.4 The construction and positioning of nest boxes should be such that they do not become heat traps.

6.2.5 Recognising the possibility of extremes of environmental conditions, housing and facilities for heating and cooling should aim to maintain shed temperatures between 23^0C and 33^0C at all times.

7. PROTECTION

7.1 Birds should be protected from predators and, if necessary, from other birds. Vermin control measures should be taken if necessary.

7.2 Poultry accommodation should be sited so as to be safe from the effects of fires and floods.

7.3 Fire-fighting equipment should be available to all poultry houses, e.g. equipment should be capable of delivering water of sufficient volume and pressure to control a fire in any part of a poultry house.

7.4 When planning new buildings, consideration should be given to the use of construction materials with a high fire resistance, and all electrical and fuel installations should be planned and fitted so as to minimise the fire risk.

8. FOOD

8.1 Poultry, other than newly-hatched birds, should have access to food at least once in each 24 hour period. The complete withholding of food for longer periods is not acceptable. The period for newly-hatched birds may be extended to not more than 72 hours.

8.2 Poultry should receive a diet containing adequate nutrients to meet their requirements for good health and vitality. Poultry should not be provided with food that is deleterious to their health.

8.3 When using mechanical systems for delivery of food alternative methods of feeding should be available. There should be enough food on hand, or ready means of obtaining food, in the event of failure of supply. The manufacturer's recommendations on number of birds per feeder should not be exceeded. For fowls in cages a trough length of not less than 10 cm per bird is recommended.

9. WATER

9.1 Poultry should be provided with sufficient drinkable water to meet their physiological requirements. Water should be cool in summer.

9.2 Under no circumstances should poultry, other than those newly-hatched, be deprived of water for more than 24 hours. Newly-hatched birds require water within 72 hours.

9.3 Water which is contaminated or deleterious to health should not be provided.

9.4 A minimum of one day's calculated water requirements should be available in storage or auxiliary supply in case of breaks, repairs or failure of pumping equipment.

9.5 When a poultry enterprise is first established, or when a new water source is obtained, the water should be tested for salt content and microbiological contamination and advice obtained on its suitability for poultry. As the composition of water from bores, dams or water holes may change with changes in flow or evaporation, the water may require more frequent monitoring for suitability for use. Information on water testing can be obtained from the local office of the Department of Agriculture.

9.6 At least two drinking points (drinker, nipple or cup) should be available to every bird. The manufacturer's recommendation on number of birds per drinker should not be exceeded, For adult fowls in cages a minimum trough length of 10 cm per bird is recommended.

10. HEALTH AND DISTRESS

10.1 Those responsible for the care of domestic poultry should be aware of the signs of ill-health or distress. Signs of ill-health in poultry include reduced food and water intake, reduced production,
changes in the nature and level of their activity, abnormal condition of their feathers or droppings, or other physical features. Evidence of behavioural changes may indicate ill-health or distress or both.

10.2 If persons in charge are not able to identify the causes of ill-health or distress or to correct these, they should seek advice from those having training and experience in such matters. Such persons may be poultry veterinarians or other recognized advisers in private or Government employment.

10.3 Poultry producers should also operate an effective program to prevent infectious disease and internal and external parasitism. Vaccinations and other treatments applied to poultry should be undertaken by people skilled in the procedures.

10.4 Medication should only be used in accordance with the manufacturers instructions unless professional advice has been given to vary the directions.

10.5 Should an outbreak of feather picking or cannibalism occur, or an outbreak appear imminent, environmental factors that may aggravate it should be examined and if appropriate, adjustments made, such as reducing the stocking density, light intensity, temperature, humidity or disturbances to the pecking order, removing birds with traumatic injuries, removing individuals observed to be instigating pecking, or eliminating shafts of bright sunlight.

10.6 Dead birds should be removed at least daily and disposed of promptly and hygienically. Records of mortalities, treatment given and response to treatment should be maintained to assist disease investigations.

10.7 Birds with an incurable sickness or a significant deformity should be removed from the flock and humanely destroyed as soon as possible. Neck dislocation and gassing using carbon dioxide or other suitable gases are acceptable methods provided these are carried out competently.

10.8 Where required, premises and equipment should be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected before restocking to control the carry-over of disease-causing organisms to incoming birds.

10.9 Buildings should be effectively constructed and maintained to prevent the entry of wild birds, rodents and predators which are capable of causing disease and/or distress.

11. INSPECTIONS

11.1 The frequency and level of inspection should be related to the likelihood of risk to the welfare of the birds, but should be at least once each day. Inspections are best made separately to other management practices. Under certain circumstances more frequent inspections may be required, such as during hot weather or during outbreaks of disease or cannibalism. Dead and injured birds should be removed for appropriate treatment without delay. Checks should also be made of the effectiveness of any automated feeding or watering systems where these have been installed.

11.2 Where cages are installed in multiple tiers it should be possible to easily and routinely inspect birds in all tiers.

11.3 Poultry should be checked regularly for evidence of external parasites and effective treatment should be instituted according to the manufacturer's directions.

12. MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

12.1 Artificial Insemination

12.1.1 Artificial insemination is a highly skilled procedure which should be carried out only by competent, trained personnel maintaining a high standard of hygiene and taking care to avoid unnecessary disturbance or injury to the birds.

12.2 Beak Trimming

12.2.1 Industry should consider all practical steps to remove the need for beak trimming including such options as breed and strain selection, light management and cage design.

12.2.2 In the interim beak trimming may be carried out as a preventative measure and should be carried out only by a competent operator soon after hatching and preferably within 3 weeks. It may be sufficient to remove only the tip of the upper beak and in any case the operator should not remove more than half of the upper beak and one-third of the lower beak.

12.2.3 Further trimming of the beaks of growing birds may be necessary as a last resort to prevent vice during the laying period but not as a means of restricting or retarding body weight.

12.3. Dubbing

12.3.1 If dubbing is necessary it should be carried out by a competent operator soon after hatching, preferably within 72 hours. Industry should consider

all practical steps to remove the need for dubbing.

12.4. Toe Trimming

12.4.1 To avoid injury to hens during mating, the last joint of each of the two inside toes of male breeding birds may be removed soon after hatching, preferably within 72 hours.

12.4.2 Sharp spurs on adult males should be trimmed to prevent injury to other birds and handlers.

12.5. Blinkers ("Spectacles")

12.5.1 The use of blinkers and other vision impairing equipment is not recommended except where other measures to control cannibalism fail.

12.5.2 Blinkers should be applied by a competent operator and those which cause mutilation of the nasal septum should not be used.

12.5.3 Blinkers which may injure the bird if they become entangled should not be used.

12.5.4 Blinkers should not be applied to poultry unless nest boxes are situated at ground level.

12.6. Castration ("Surgical Caponising")

12.6.1 This operation requires entry into the abdominal cavity and therefore is an act of veterinary science requiring anaesthesia and surgical training appropriate only to a registered veterinary surgeon.

12.7. Devoicing

12.7.1 This is an unacceptable practice and should not be undertaken.

12.8. Flight Restriction

12.8.1 If flight restriction is required, the flight feathers of one wing may be trimmed.

12.8.2 De-winging, pinioning, notching or tendon severing to restrict flight in poultry are unwarranted practices and should not be performed.

12.9. Moult Inducement and Controlled Feeding

12.9.1 Moult inducement or controlled feeding practices should only be carried out on healthy birds under close management supervision and under conditions that will not cause cold stress. Substitution of whole barley in place of normal rations is a preferred method of moult inducement. Adequate feeding space is necessary during such practices.

12.9.2 The use of electric pulse wires to control feeding or to compensate for deficient cage designs is not recommended. Wires to deter birds from

perching over feed or water containers should only be live for necessary training periods.

12.9.3 Methods of moult inducement and controlled feeding which totally deprive birds of food or water for more than 24 hours should not be used and could be 'prima facie' evidence of cruelty.

12.10. Identification

12.10.1 Wing and leg bands used for bird identification should be checked regularly and where necessary loosened or removed to avoid injury to the bird. Webbing between the toes may also be used for identification by marks made within 72 hours of hatching.

13. HATCHERY MANAGEMENT

13.1 Culled or surplus hatchlings awaiting disposal should be treated as humanely as those intended for retention or sale. They should be removed and humanely destroyed by a recommended method such as carbon dioxide gassing and thoroughly inspected to ensure that all are dead.

13.2 Hatchery waste, including unhatched embryos, should be destroyed quickly and effectively.

13.3 Hatchlings should be brooded within 72 hours of hatching. Weak, deformed and unthrifty birds should be culled and destroyed humanely.

13.4 Young birds in brooders should be inspected at least twice every 24 hours.

14. TRANSPORT OF DAY OLD BIRDS

14.1 Day old birds should be placed in suitably ventilated boxes without overcrowding. Care should be taken to ensure adequate ventilation of the boxes, particularly when they are stacked. The birds should be protected from direct sunlight and cold draughts.

14.2 Packing materials used inside boxes should be new, clean, dry and non-toxic.

14.3 A standard container measuring 60cm by 45cm should contain on average no more than 100 chickens in summer and 120 in winter (i.e about 25 sq cm per bird).

14.4 Boxes used for long distance freighting should be clearly marked with the date and time of dispatch and written instructions should be provided on required holding conditions for the attention of those responsible for transportation.

14.5 Hatchlings should be brooded as soon as possible after delivery.

15. TRANSPORT AND SALE OF GROWING AND ADULT POULTRY

15.1 Birds should be herded for pick-up only under the supervision of a competent person to avoid suffocation and bruising. They should be handled and crated gently to avoid injury. At all times care should take precedence over speed and labour cost.

15.2 Sick or injured birds should not be crated and should be treated or humanely destroyed.

15.3 Crates or cages used for the transport of poultry should be of a design that prevents escape from or the protrusion of any part of a bird through the crate such that it could be entrapped or damaged during handling or transport. Cage floors should be rigid or supported to prevent collapse onto structures or cages below.

15.4 Crates, or cages, should be loaded on transports in a manner that provides for adequate ventilation for the birds particularly when vehicles are stationary. Crates, or cages, should be securely attached to the transport vehicles to prevent injury to the birds.

15.5 Crates should be ventilated and of sufficient height to allow birds to stand, move and seek comfort but to prevent bruising during transport. Crates should be designed and maintained to allow birds to be put in and taken out without injury.

15.6 Measures should be taken (e.g use of wind deflectors or covers) to protect birds in crates from wind and rain and from excessively hot or cold conditions.

15.7 Birds should not be held in crates or containers for longer than 24 hours unless they are assured of access to food and water. It is recommended when a delay is anticipated and holding time likely to exceed 24 hours, that the birds be released into a shed where they have access to feed and water or immediate slaughter arranged at another slaughterhouse, whichever may be appropriate.

15.8 Contingency plans should be in place to minimise any delay, that could be stressful to birds, as a result of transport breakdowns and to minimise any distress to the birds.

15.9 The responsibility for birds during transportation rests with the transport driver.

15.10 Where poultry are sold at saleyards they should be unloaded without delay from transports and placed in pens or cages with access to feed and water.

15.11 Stocking densities at saleyards should not exceed those densities recommended in the appendices by more than 50% for more than 12 hours.

15.12 Poultry should not be held at saleyards for more than 24 hours.

16. POULTRY AT SLAUGHTERING ESTABLISHMENTS

16.1 Care should be exercised to ensure that poultry are not subjected to unnecessary stress while awaiting slaughter.

16.2 Contingency plans should be available in the event of an industrial dispute or processing plant closure.

16.3 Birds should be stunned and bled, or decapitated, with minimal handling and in such a manner, either manually or mechanically, that minimises distress and bruising/injury.

Detailed recommendations are contained in the publication "Model Code of Practice in Animal Welfare, No 6, Livestock and Poultry at Slaughtering Establishments".

APPENDIX 1

ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POULTRY FREE TO RANGE

1. Management

Poultry should not be permitted to range on land which has become contaminated with poisonous plants, chemicals or organisms which cause or carry disease to an extent which could seriously prejudice the health of poultry. The time taken for land to become so contaminated depends upon the type of land and the stocking density. Flocks should be moved before this stage is reached.
Portable houses should be sited on well drained land and should be moved regularly to avoid continuously muddy conditions which may lead to the discomfort of the birds.

Shelter from sun and rain should always be available. Windbreaks should be provided in exposed areas.

2. Housing

The maximum recommended densities for housing on free range systems are presented in Appendix 2.

When fowls have access to housing, precautions should be taken to avoid crowding and suffocation, particularly during the first few nights. Birds should not be confined for too long during hours of daylight or subjected to direct sunlight during confinement.

3. Health & Protection

3.1 Predators

Precautions should be taken to protect poultry against foxes, cats, dogs and other predators.

3.2 Diseases

Regular monitoring for parasitic and infectious disease should be undertaken and treatment applied to control or eradicate these before outbreaks cause ill-health or losses.

Cannibalism is likely if localised high stocking densities occur.

3.3 Food

Poultry free to range should have access to supplementary feed.

APPENDIX 2

FOWLS

MAXIMUM RECOMMENDED STOCKING DENSITIES ACCORDING TO HOUSING TYPE UNDER GOOD MANAGEMENT CONDITIONS

In preparing this Code of Practice the Animal Welfare Advisory Committee (AWAC) has incorporated recommendation 2 of the Senate Select Committee on Animal Welfare report on Intensive Livestock Production i.e that the maximum stocking density for cages with three or more birds be reduced from 56 kilograms per square metre to 46 kilograms per square metre.

AWAC wishes to indicate to industry that, in the next revision of this Code it will consider a shift away from the current practice of calculating floor space per hen by kilogram of live weight per unit of floor area. It intends to adopt a space allowance for hens in terms of square centimetres of floor area per bird.

System	Density (live-weight per unit of floor area)	Qualifications
1. Deep Litter (where greater than 50 percent of the floor is litter)		
Rearing of fowls for laying and rearing of layer and meat chicken breeders.	30kg/m^2 Applies to terminal liveweight at 16-22 weeks (equivalent to approx. 670cm^2 per 2.0kg bird)	Floor area to include any slatted or metal mesh area and any area occupied by feeding and watering equipment.
Laying and breeding fowls.	30 kg/m^2 Applies only to birds housed under optimum temperature and ventilation conditions lower densities otherwise apply.	Floor area to include any slatted or metal mesh area and any area occupied by feeding and watering equipment and nest boxes. In the case of birds kept for breeding, liveweight to include weight of cockerels.
Meat chickens	40 kg/m^2 (equivalent to approx. 450cm^2 per 1.8 kg bird)	Includes area occupied by feeding and watering equipment.

2. CAGES

Rearing of fowls for laying or breeding	40 kg/m^2 (equivalent to 750cm^2 per 3.0 kg bird)	Relates to cage floor area.
Laying or breeding fowls (includes cockerels) 3 or more fowls per cage	46 kg/m^2 (equivalent to approx. 650cm^2 per 3.0 kg bird) For birds of any weight maintained in this system the minimum space requirement per bird is 650cm^2	Density relates to cage floor area. Irrespective of the number of birds per cage, each bird should have spaces for feed and water according to the manufacturer's recommendations.
2 Fowls per cage	26 kg/m^2 (equivalent to approx. 770cm^2 per 2.0 kg bird)	
Single fowl cages	20 kg/m^2 (equivalent to 1000cm^2 per 2.0 kg bird)	

3. Free Range Arks

Arks with slatted floors	40 kg/m^2	1,500 hens per hectare of open space either continuous use or on part rotational basis.
Solid floor houses	20 kg/m^2 (equivalent to approx. 1,000 cm^2 per 2.0 kg bird)	