

Reports and Comments

Updated Code of Practice for the Welfare of Meat Chickens and Meat Breeding Chickens in England

Following a period of consultation in 2017, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) has recently published an updated Code of Practice for the Welfare of Meat Chickens and Meat Breeding Chickens in England. The Code came into force in March 2018.

Much of the content in the 2018 Code is similar to that found in previous guidance documents: the 2002 Code of Practice for the Welfare of Meat Chickens and Meat Breeding Chickens, and the 2011 Interim Guidance for Keepers of Conventionally Reared Meat Chickens in Relation to the Welfare of Farmed Animals (England) Regulations, as amended by the Welfare of Farmed Animals (England) (amendment) Regulations 2010. The 2018 Code combines information from both of these documents and is more user-friendly in style. It has also been updated where necessary, taking into account new legislation and advances in scientific and veterinary knowledge.

The Code covers all husbandry systems across all sectors of the meat chicken production industry (including parent and grandparent breeding birds) and it is intended that the Code “help all those who care for meat chickens and meat breeding chickens to practise good standards of stockmanship to safeguard chicken welfare”. Both the Five Freedoms and the Three Essentials of Stockmanship are provided at the beginning of the document and it is suggested that they “form the guiding principles for the assessment of welfare within any system”.

The main body of the document is divided into three sections:

- 1) Recommendations applying to all husbandry systems;
- 2) Additional recommendations for free-range systems; and
- 3) Additional recommendations for meat breeding and grandparent chickens.

Throughout the document, relevant legislation (such as paragraphs from the Animal Welfare Act 2006, the Welfare of Farmed Animals [England] Regulations 2007, and the Mutilations [Permitted Procedures] [England] Regulations 2007) are provided alongside the related section.

Compared to the previous guidance, some sections have been extended, eg the section on leg health discusses bird health and welfare more extensively and also includes a paragraph requiring that particular attention is given to lame birds when assessing birds before transportation: “Prior to crating and loading, an assessment of birds’ fitness to travel must be undertaken. Careful consideration should be given by the keeper as to whether any lame birds are legally fit to travel for the proposed journey. If they are not, they should be humanely killed on farm”.

There are some new sections, including one on environmental enrichment, which states that: “Environmental enrichment can improve bird health and welfare by reducing disturbances, aggression, injurious pecking, fear responses and stress and improving leg health by increasing the level of physical activity”.

A number of Annexes provide further, useful information (eg applicable legislation) and worked examples (eg cumulative daily mortality rate).

Code of Practice for the Welfare of Meat Chickens and Meat Breeding Chickens (2018). A4, 47 pages. Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs. Further information is available online at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/code-of-recommendations-for-the-welfare-of-livestock-meat-chickens-and-breeding-chickens>.

*E Carter,
UFAW*

Updated Codes of Welfare published for dogs, cats and equids in England

There are approximately 8.5 million dogs, 8 million cats and 1 million horses in the United Kingdom. According to the Animal Welfare Act 2006 (Section 9), any person responsible for an animal is required to take all reasonable steps to meet the needs of that animal. Under the Act, the needs of an animal are based on the ‘Five Freedoms’ and are considered to be:

- 1) Its need for a suitable environment;
- 2) its need for a suitable diet;
- 3) its need to be able to exhibit normal behaviour patterns;
- 4) any need it has to be housed with, or apart from, other animals; and
- 5) its need to be protected from pain, suffering, injury and disease.

To help inform dog, cat and equine owners and keepers about their responsibility to meet the welfare needs of an animal in their care, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has recently revised and updated the Codes of Practice for these three species (in association with the Canine and Feline Sector Council [dogs and cats], and the Equine Sector Council for Health and Welfare and the British Horse Industry Confederation [horses, ponies, donkeys and their hybrids]). The codes came into force on 6 April 2018.

All three Codes give information as to why each of the five ‘needs’ is important, and what people should do to meet each of these needs for an animal in their care. However, all the Codes clearly state that each animal and situation is different and it is the responsibility of the owner or keeper to find out the individual needs of their particular cat, dog or horse, and how best to meet them.