



Laying Hens

A code of practice issued under the Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 2011

Code of Practice 2013



Department of
**Agriculture and
Rural Development**

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This Code replaces “The Northern Ireland Code of Recommendations for the Welfare of Livestock- Laying Hens” published in 2005 - ISBN 1-85527-722-0.





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1.0 Introduction

1.1 What is the purpose of this Code of Practice?

In all laying hen production systems birds are reliant on stockmanship for all their daily requirements and their welfare. If it is to be done well, the rearing of laying hens requires both experience and the observance of high standards of management of the birds, their environment and hygiene. Unless that work is done well, the welfare of the birds cannot be adequately protected. This code sets out the welfare legislative requirements that owners of laying hens and persons who are in charge of them must meet.

This Code also includes information and good practice to equip all those responsible for laying hens to adopt a standard of husbandry, care and handling to satisfy the legislative requirements.

1.2 Who does this Code apply to?

This code applies to owners of laying hens and persons who are in charge of them. Under the Welfare of Farmed Animals Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 a person responsible for a farmed animal is responsible for meeting the legal obligations for animal welfare. Responsibility for meeting minimum standards relating to the provision, design and maintenance of the facilities and equipment, the allocation of operational responsibilities and the competence and supervision of performance of employees, lies with every person in charge of the laying hens.

Legislative Requirement

Welfare of Farmed Animals Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 states at:

Regulation 5 - (1) A person responsible for a farmed animal -

- (a) shall not attend to the animal unless that person is acquainted with any relevant code of practice and has access to the code while attending to the animal;
- (b) shall take all reasonable steps to ensure that a person employed or engaged by that person does not attend to the animal unless that other person -
 - (i) is acquainted with any relevant Codes of practice;
 - (ii) has access to all such codes while attending to the animal; and
 - (iii) has received instruction and guidance on those Codes.

(2) In this section, a “relevant code of practice” means a code of practice issued or revised under section 16 of the Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 relating to the particular species of farmed animal to which a person is attending.

1.3 What animals does this Code apply to?

This code applies to **laying hens**. In this code the word “**laying hens**” means a hen of the species *Gallus gallus* which has reached laying maturity and is kept for production of eggs not intended for hatching.

This code therefore does not apply to pullets at the rearing stage, when they have not yet reached laying maturity. However, there are various sources of information regarding the husbandry and welfare of pullets available from the breeding companies and from the RSPCA follow link to useful publication

<http://www.rspca.org.uk/sciencegroup/farmanimals/standards/layinghens>

1.4 What happens if I do not follow the minimum standards in this Code?

Failure to meet a minimum standard in this code may be used as evidence to support a prosecution for an offence under the Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 and/or the Welfare of Farmed Animals Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012. A person who is charged with an offence under this legislation can defend himself or herself by showing that he or she has equalled or exceeded the minimum standards in this code.

2.0 Flock Management

2.1 Stockmanship

The knowledge, experience, skills, abilities and attitude of the flock-keeper are integral to the standard of welfare experienced by the laying hens.

Regardless of the production system employed, there will be inherent problems and particular welfare risks which the flock-keeper must manage for the benefit of the birds. Familiarity with the risks that are characteristic of the production system in which they work is an important aspect of stockmanship. Flock-keepers need to employ strategies to improve the management of the birds where indicators suggest that the system is not meeting their welfare needs. Good stockmanship is particularly important to ensure the welfare of laying hens in larger groups, group housing or in outdoor conditions because it is more difficult to observe birds individually in those systems.

All flock-keepers should demonstrate a full understanding of the welfare needs and basic biology of the birds and have shown that they are capable of safeguarding them under all foreseeable conditions before taking responsibility for a flock. A good flock-keeper will have a compassionate and humane attitude, will be able to anticipate and avoid many potential welfare problems, and have the ability to identify those that do occur and respond to them promptly.



Flock-keepers should establish a methodical routine in completing the range of tasks involved in keeping laying hens. As part of this, they should be particularly vigilant in checking that systems are operating properly and birds are behaving normally. This will enable them to detect problems in their earliest stages and acquire a good understanding of the action to be taken if a problem is noticed. If the cause is not obvious, or if the flock-keeper's action is not effective, immediate veterinary or technical advice should be obtained.

The strain of bird selected must be suitable for the production system.

It is essential to ensure that enough time is available within the flock-keeper's daily work routine for the birds to be properly inspected and for any remedial action to be taken.

The rearing of pullets to adequate and consistent bodyweights and a smooth transition from rearing to laying phases has a significant impact on the laying hens' subsequent wellbeing and productive performance. It is therefore important that flock-keepers, as far as possible, ensure that pullets have been reared to a high standard and that they have been given, appropriate experience of management practices and environmental conditions (e.g. particular feeding and watering systems, natural light, perches, litter) to enable them to adapt to the husbandry system which they will encounter in the laying units.

In order to develop a positive relationship between man and bird there should be frequent, close but quiet approach from an early age.

Large flocks can be managed successfully but in general the larger the size of unit, the greater the degree of skill and dedication needed to safeguard the welfare of the birds.

Legislative Requirement

Welfare of Farmed Animals Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 states at:

Schedule 1, paragraph 1 - Animals shall be cared for by a sufficient number of staff who possess the appropriate ability, knowledge and professional competence.

Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 states at:

Section 9 (1) - A person commits an offence if that person does not take such steps as are reasonable in all the circumstances to ensure that the needs of an animal for which that person is responsible are met to the extent required by good practice.

Section 9 (2) - For the purposes of this Act, an animal's needs shall be taken to include -

- (a) its need for a suitable environment,
- (b) its need for a suitable diet,

- (c) its need to be able to exhibit normal behaviour patterns,
- (d) any need it has to be housed with, or apart from, other animals, and
- (e) its need to be protected from pain, suffering, injury and disease.

Section 9 (3) - The circumstances to which it is relevant to have regard when applying subsection (1) include, in particular -

- (a) any lawful purpose for which the animal is kept, and
- (b) any lawful activity undertaken in relation to the animal.

Section 9 (4) - This section does not apply to the destruction of an animal in an appropriate and humane manner.

2.2 Staffing and Training

Those responsible for the care of laying hens need to be competent and well trained. Appropriate training for staff on the care and maintenance of laying hens, and effective implementation of this training, can significantly influence the welfare of laying hens. Training should continue throughout the duration of the employment, and suitable refresher courses should be undertaken regularly. Wherever possible, the training should be of a type which leads to formal recognition of competence. Knowledge of the normal appearance and behaviour of laying hens is essential for monitoring their health and welfare. It is important that those in charge of laying hens are able to recognise early signs of distress, disease or abnormal behaviours so that prompt action is taken or advice sought.

Owners, managers or persons in charge are required to ensure that their staff has either the relevant knowledge and training, or appropriate supervision and support, to ensure that the health and welfare needs of the birds in their care are met. Training can be provided either by the completion of specific courses focusing on the care and management of laying hens, or on the job, by experienced supervisors. It is important to ensure that all staff, including contract or temporary staff, are trained and competent in their relevant tasks.

A training plan should be implemented to ensure that those working with laying hens recognise signs, not only of normal behaviour and good health but also of illness or disease or impending health problems. If specialised tasks are to be performed, for example vaccination or humane culling, then specific training should be given. Alternatively, the services of a competent contractor using trained staff should be obtained.

The College of Agriculture Food and Rural Enterprise (CAFRE) offer a Work Based Diploma Level III in Poultry production. This is delivered in conjunction with Commercial Poultry companies that producers are under contract too. If a producer would like to get information on this course they should advise their farm liaison who shall contact CAFRE.



Legislative Requirements

Welfare of Farmed Animals Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 states at:

Schedule 1, paragraph 1 - Animals shall be cared for by a sufficient number of staff who possess the appropriate ability, knowledge and professional competence.

2.3 Inspection

A thorough inspection should take place at least once a day and a second daily inspection is recommended at a different time of day. Such inspections should be made independently of any automatic surveillance equipment. The thorough inspection should enable the handler to detect illness and injury of individual hens, and special attention should be paid to bodily condition, movements, respiratory distress, condition of plumage, eyes, skin, beak, legs, feet and claws, and where appropriate, combs and wattles. Attention should also be paid to the presence of external parasites, to the condition of droppings, to feed and water consumption, to growth and to egg production level. Where appropriate the birds should be encouraged to walk. Individual examination should be made of those birds for which the overall inspection indicates this to be necessary.

Flock-keepers should establish, in advance, the best course of action to take should problems be identified and ensure that veterinary or other expert advice is available when required.

While it may not be possible to examine each bird individually during routine inspection a good indication of flock health should be gained on each occasion. Where birds are not being fed on a freely available feed diet, inspection is particularly effective at feeding time when any birds which are unfit will be slow to feed and can be identified. The early signs of ill health may include changes in food and water intake, in preening, in 'chatter' and in activity. There may also be a drop in egg production and changes in egg quality such as shell defects.

The healthy individual bird should have sounds and activity appropriate to its age, breed or type, clear bright eyes, good posture, vigorous movements if unduly disturbed, clean healthy skin, good feather condition, well formed shanks and feet, effective walking and active feeding and drinking behaviour.

Housing and equipment must be designed so that all the birds can be clearly seen. Supplementary lighting may be needed for the inspection of birds in the bottom tier of cage systems.

In the event of signs of serious respiratory disease the use of personal protection equipment must be considered (e.g. in suspected cases of Avian Influenza and Newcastle

Disease). When respiratory signs together with mortality are observed veterinary advice must be sought immediately.

An up-to-date list of Notifiable Diseases relevant to Northern Ireland can be found at the following site - <http://www.dardni.gov.uk/index/publications/pubs-dard-animal-health/animal-diseases-notifiable-diseases-list.htm>

Legislative Requirements

Welfare of Farmed Animals Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 states at:

Schedule 1, paragraph 3 - Where animals are kept in a building, adequate lighting (whether fixed or portable) shall be available to enable them to be thoroughly inspected at any time.

Schedule 1, paragraph 5 - Any animals which appear to be ill or injured shall be cared for appropriately without delay, and where they do not respond to such care, veterinary advice shall be obtained as soon as possible.

Schedule 1, paragraph 6 - Where necessary, sick or injured animals shall be isolated in suitable accommodation with, where appropriate, dry comfortable bedding.

Schedule 3, paragraph 5 - To facilitate inspection, installation and depopulation of hens there shall be a minimum aisle width of 90 cm between tiers of cages and a space of at least 35 cm shall be allowed between the floor of the building and the bottom tier of cages.

Schedule 3, paragraph 9 - Accommodation comprising two or more tiers of cages shall have devices, or appropriate measures shall be taken, to allow inspection of all tiers without difficulty and facilitate the removal of hens.

Schedule 4, paragraph 1 - All hens shall be inspected by the owner or other person responsible for the hens at least once a day.

3.0 Feed and Water

Adequate quality, and quantity of feed and water is essential for maintaining good standards of laying hens welfare. Nutrient composition, feed availability, quantity of feed, absence of contaminants within the feed and water, and access to the feeders and drinkers are all important parameters.



Feeding and watering equipment should be designed, constructed, placed, operated and maintained in such a way that:

- it minimises spillage or contamination of feed and water;
- all birds have sufficient access to it to avoid undue competition between individuals;
- it does not cause or result in injury to birds;
- it operates in all weather conditions; and
- the consumption of water and feed can be monitored.

Feeder space allocation should be sufficient to enable the birds to obtain adequate feed with the minimum of competition. If feed is not provided ad libitum, sufficient space must be available to allow all birds to eat at the same time.

Sudden changes in the type or quantity of feed and feeding procedures, other than those appropriate to the physiological needs of the birds, shall be avoided except in case of emergency.

Systems which call for the complete withholding of feed and water on any day must not be adopted. Under no circumstances may birds be induced to moult by withholding feed and water. However, feed, but not water, may be withheld for up to 12 hours prior to slaughter. This period of 12 hours include the catching, loading, transport, lairaging and unloading time prior to slaughter.

Stale or contaminated feed or water should not be allowed to accumulate and should be replaced immediately. Precautions must be taken to minimise the risk of drinking water freezing. In addition, all equipment, including bulk feed bins, must be easily and effectively cleaned and disinfected.

In non-cage systems, whole grain may be scattered over the litter each day to encourage foraging and scratching and reduce the possibility of feather pecking outbreaks. Birds should also have regular access to insoluble grit to aid digestion.

Compounded feeds which have been prepared for other species should be avoided, as certain substances can be toxic to birds.

The birds should have unrestricted access to a clean fresh water supply. In order to reduce the potential for disease introduction, potable (drinking quality) water should be used if possible. If water is obtained from sources other than the mains supply, e.g. from a bore hole, regular testing of water quality should be carried out and sanitizing treatments implemented if necessary.

Drinking systems, including header tanks, should be protected, maintained and cleaned, as appropriate, to prevent microbial contamination of water.

Bowl or bell drinkers are more likely to become contaminated than nipple lines, and should be subject to a high level of cleaning and disinfection between flocks.

Water quality should be assessed, including factors that affect taste, solid build up within water systems and toxicity. Factors relevant to poultry production include colour, turbidity, mineral content, pH, bacteria and toxic compounds including heavy metals.

Drinkers must fill sufficiently quickly to avoid any birds remaining thirsty. Water troughs should be designed and placed where:

- they are protected from fouling;
- there is a low risk of the water freezing in cold weather; and
- there is sufficient space, to provide easy access for all birds.

A water meter should be fitted to each house to enable daily monitoring of water usage. Daily records of water consumption provide an early warning of potential problems.

Arrangements should be made in advance to ensure that adequate supplies of suitable feed and water can be made available in emergencies such as interruptions in power supplies. A secondary or alternative water supply should also be put in place.

Body condition, weight, egg quality and production should be used to monitor the effectiveness of the feeding regime.

Legislative Requirements

Welfare of Farmed Animals Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 states at:

Schedule 1, paragraph 22 - Animals shall be fed a wholesome diet which is appropriate to their age and species and which is fed to them in sufficient quantity to maintain them in good health, to satisfy their nutritional needs and promote a positive state of well-being.

Schedule 1, paragraph 23 - Animals shall not -

- (a) be provided with food or liquid in a manner which may cause unnecessary suffering or injury; or
- (b) be provided food or liquid containing any substance which may cause unnecessary suffering or injury.

Schedule 1, paragraph 24 - All animals shall have access to feed at intervals appropriate to their physiological needs (and, in case, at least once a day), except where a veterinary surgeon acting in the exercise of his profession otherwise directs.

Schedule 1, paragraph 25 - All animals shall have access to a suitable water supply and be provided with an adequate supply of fresh drinking water each day to be able to satisfy their fluid intake needs by other means.



Schedule 1, paragraph 26 - Feeding and watering equipment shall be designed, constructed, placed and maintained so that contamination of food and water and the harmful effects of competition between animals are minimised.

Schedule 1, paragraph 27 (1) - No other substance, with the exception of those given for therapeutic or prophylactic purposes or for the purpose of zootechnical treatment shall be administered to animals unless it has been demonstrated by scientific studies of animal welfare or established experience that the effect of that substance is not detrimental to the health or welfare of the animals.

Schedule 1, paragraph 27 (2) - “zootechnical treatment” has a meaning given in Article 1(2)(C) of Council Directive 96/22/EEC(a) concerning the prohibition on the use in stock farming of certain substances having a hormonal or thyrostatic action and beta-agonists.

Additional conditions that apply to the keeping of laying hens in non-cage systems.

Schedule 2, paragraph 2 - All systems shall be equipped in such a way that all laying hens have -

- (a) linear feeders providing at least 10 cm per hen or circular feeders providing at least 4 cm per hen;
- (b) either continuous drinking troughs providing 2.5 cm per hen or circular drinking troughs providing 1 cm per hen;

Schedule 2, paragraph 3 - Where a system is equipped with nipple drinkers or cups, there must be at least one nipple drinker or cup for every 10 laying hens.

Schedule 2, paragraph 4 - Where a system has drinking points plumbed in, at least two cups or two nipple drinkers must be within reach of each laying hen.

Additional conditions that apply to the keeping of laying hens in enriched cages.

Schedule 3, paragraph 3 - A feed trough which can be used without restriction shall be provided. Its length shall be at least 12 cm multiplied by the number of hens in the cage.

Schedule 3, paragraph 4 - Each cage shall have a drinking system appropriate to the size of the group; where nipple drinkers are provided, at least two nipple drinkers or two cups shall be within the reach of each hen.

4.0 Accommodation

4.1 General

Advice on welfare should be sought from qualified advisers before any new buildings are constructed or existing buildings modified. The incorporation of facilities for raising drinkers and feeders to aid access for handling equipment and depopulation should be considered.

When a new poultry house is being constructed, ideally it should be located as far away as possible from other commercial poultry premises, other livestock enterprises and other potential sources of contamination such as abattoirs, sewage treatment plants, landfill sites, open water areas etc. When a poultry house is close to such sites a higher level of protection against the introduction of disease is required, including wildlife control and ensuring that no drainage or waste from the nearby property enters the farm.

The design, construction and maintenance of enclosures, buildings and equipment for laying hens should be such that they:

- allow the fulfilment of essential biological needs and the maintenance of good health;
- facilitate good management of the birds;
- allow for easy maintenance of good conditions of hygiene and air quality;
- provide shelter from adverse weather conditions;
- limit the risk of disease, disorders manifested by behavioural changes, traumatic injuries to the birds, injuries caused by birds to each other and, as far as possible, contamination of the birds by droppings;
- exclude predators, rodents, wild animals, wild birds and minimise insects;
- allow for the prevention and treatment of infestations of internal and external parasites; and
- incorporate damp-proof membranes to prevent insulation breakdown, and measures to prevent easy access by vermin to the insulation material.

Red mites are a serious parasite of laying hens and pose a major threat to their welfare. They are blood sucking parasites, emerging only at night to feed and so may be difficult to detect. Their feeding disrupts hens' normal behaviour through irritation & restlessness as the birds endure the parasitism and may cause anaemia to such a degree that birds may die. Red mites also transfer diseases such as Salmonella.

Mites are difficult to control in all systems but are more likely to reproduce and infest hens where there is poor hygiene and also in systems where there are many places for them to hide and survive.



Control measures, such as regular spraying with miticide chemicals and thorough cleaning of all equipment between flocks, will be much more effective if houses and equipment are designed, constructed and maintained to minimise harbourage for red mites.

Floors, perches and platforms should be of a suitable design and material and not cause discomfort, distress or injury to the birds.

Birds shall be kept in such a way that they can keep themselves clean.

Ventilation, heating, lighting, feeding, watering and all other equipment should be designed, sited and installed so as to avoid the risk of injuring birds.

Legislative Requirement

Welfare of Farmed Animals Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 states at:

Schedule 1, paragraph 11 - Materials used for the construction of accommodation, and in particular for the construction of pens, cages, stalls and equipment with which the animals may come into contact, shall not be harmful to them and shall be capable of being thoroughly cleaned and disinfected.

Schedule 1, paragraph 12 - Accommodation and fittings for securing animals shall be constructed and maintained so that there are no sharp edges or protrusions likely to cause injury to them.

Schedule 3, paragraph 8 - Cages shall be suitably equipped to prevent hens escaping.

Schedule 3, paragraph 10 - The design and dimensions of the cage door shall be such that an adult hen can be removed without undergoing unnecessary suffering or sustaining injury.

4.2 Housing – Structural

Ideally, there should be a hard surface/gravel around the perimeter of houses which is designed to avoid puddling of mud and/or faeces.

Buildings should be of sound construction and well maintained to prevent access by wild birds and to deter rodents. Insulation/cladding should be maintained in good repair as damage allows easy refuge for rodents. Avoid storing materials such as feedbags, litter and moveable equipment within the house for the same reason.

Where possible surfaces should be smooth, hard and impervious to enable effective cleaning and disinfection and should not be harmful to the birds. Ancillary buildings such as storage rooms, rest rooms, toilets etc. should be of a similar standard.

Accommodation and fittings for securing birds should be constructed and maintained so that there are no sharp edges or protrusions likely to cause injury to them.

Legislative Requirements

Welfare of Farmed Animals Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 states at:

Schedule 1, paragraph 11 - Materials used for the construction of accommodation, and in particular for the construction of pens, cages, stalls and equipment with which the animals may come into contact, shall not be harmful to them and shall be capable of being thoroughly cleaned and disinfected.

Schedule 1, paragraph 12 - Accommodation and fittings for securing animals shall be constructed and maintained so that there are no sharp edges or protrusions likely to cause injury to them.

Schedule 1, paragraph 13 - Air circulation, dust levels, temperature, relative air humidity and gas concentrations shall be kept within limits which are not harmful to the animals.

Schedule 4, paragraph 4 - Those parts of buildings, equipment or utensils which are in contact with the hens shall be thoroughly cleansed and disinfected regularly and in any case every time depopulation is carried out and before a new batch of hens is brought in.

4.3 Housing - Enriched Cages

All laying hens in enriched cages must have at least 750 cm² of cage area per hen, 600 cm² of which shall be usable; the height of the cage other than that above the usable area shall be at least 20 cm at every point and the minimum total area for any cage shall be 2000 cm². The laying hens must also have access to a nest, litter area so that pecking and scratching are possible and perches allowing at least 15 cm per hen.

The nest area must provide a quiet and separate area for birds to lay their eggs without being disturbed. It consists of both “separation” (i.e. the sides, curtains etc) and the flooring (i.e. the material preventing contact with the wire mesh). If either element is deficient the nest area cannot be “fit-for-purpose”. It is important that the nest area meets the behavioural needs of the birds for quiet and separation so that they can lay their eggs without being disturbed. There should be at least 65 cm² of nest space per hen.

Perches must have an appropriate top surface width that allows the birds claws to grip below, although not necessarily fully lock around the perch. An acceptable width is between 3 and 5 cm. The perch should have no sharp edges and provide at least 15 cm per hen. It should be designed and constructed to avoid damage to the feet. Perches should be positioned to reduce the potential for fouling of any hens perched below and



droppings falling into drinking and feeding facilities. Perch placement within cages should not restrict birds' ability to exhibit natural behaviours such as wing-flapping and leg stretching and there should be at least 20 cm headroom (height) above the perch.

If there is evidence that claws of hens are found to be overgrown or broken then the provision of claw shortening devices should be enhanced. Excessively abrasive devices may cause injury so caution should be exercised in specifying such devices.

To facilitate inspection, installation and depopulation of hens there must be a minimum aisle width of 90 cm between tiers of cages and a space of at least 35 cm must be allowed between the floor of the building and the bottom tier of cages. The aisle width should be measured as the unobstructed width between outer edges of the feed troughs. The distance to the floor should be measured to the mesh base of the cage.

In enriched cages, the litter provision may be met by distributing food on to "scratch" mats at regular intervals throughout the day. The size of mats and frequency of food distribution should reflect the number of birds in each cage and should provide an adequate opportunity for all hens to exhibit natural scratch and peck behaviours on a regular and reasonable basis.

Legislative Requirements

Welfare of Farmed Animals Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 states at:

Regulation 4, paragraph 1 - A person responsible for (a) poultry (other than those kept in the systems referred to in Schedules 2 and 3) kept in a building, shall ensure they are kept on or have access at all times to well-maintained litter or a well drained area for resting;

Schedule 3, paragraph 2 - Laying hens shall have:

- (a) at least 750 cm² of cage area per hen, 600 cm² of which shall be usable; the height of the cage other than that above the usable area shall be at least 20 cm at every point and the minimum total area for any cage shall be 2000 cm² ;
- (b) access to a nest;
- (c) litter such that pecking and scratching are possible; and
- (d) appropriate perches allowing at least 15 cm per hen.

Schedule 3, paragraph 3 - A feed trough which can be used without restriction shall be provided. Its length shall be at least 12 cm multiplied by the number of hens in the cage.

Schedule 3, paragraph 4 - Each cage shall have a drinking system appropriate to the size of the group; where nipple drinkers are provided, at least two nipple drinkers or two cups shall be within the reach of each hen.

Schedule 3, paragraph 5 - To facilitate inspection, installation and depopulation of hens there shall be a minimum aisle width of 90 cm between tiers of cages and a space of at least 35 cm shall be allowed between the floor of the building and the bottom tier of cages.

Schedule 3, paragraph 6 - Cages shall be fitted with suitable claw-shortening devices.

Schedule 3, paragraph 7 - While the cages are occupied the surfaces and all equipment shall be kept satisfactorily clean.

Schedule 3, paragraph 8 - Cages shall be suitably equipped to prevent hens escaping.

Schedule 3, paragraph 9 - Accommodation comprising two or more tiers of cages shall have devices, or appropriate measures shall be taken, to allow inspection of all tiers without difficulty and facilitate the removal of hens.

Schedule 3, paragraph 10 - The design and dimensions of the cage door shall be such that an adult hen can be removed without undergoing unnecessary suffering or sustaining injury.

4.4 Housing – Non-Cage Systems

Additional conditions apply to non-cage systems i.e. Free Range, Barn or Organic systems.

The usable area accessible to the hens may be made up of the ground surface of the building and any additional raised areas or platforms at least 30 cm wide, including perforated floors providing arrangements are in place to prevent fouling of hens below.

Nests should be provided with a floor substrate which encourages nesting behaviour. This is especially important at the start of lay, when the provision of loose litter may be used to encourage the pullets to use the nests. Individual nests should be designed to accommodate only one bird at a time. Communal nests should be designed using divisions and suitable access points to minimise overcrowding. If individual nests are used, there must be at least one nest for every seven hens. If group nests are used, there must be at least 1m² of nest space for a maximum of 120 hens (approximately 84 cm²/hen).

Nest floors may not be made of wire mesh unless this is overlain by another material such as straw, artificial grass mats or plastic.

Perches should not be sited above a litter area and where possible should be over a droppings pit. The horizontal distance between perches must be at least 30 cm and the horizontal distance between the perch and the wall must be at least 20 cm. There should be at least 20 cm headroom (height) above the perch.



Design and layout of perching must be carefully considered to avoid the potential for injury.

- The provision of perches utilises the vertical dimension of the house interior, effectively reducing the stocking density of birds at floor level.
- Birds have a strong ethological need to perch above ground level, particularly at night.
- Perches provide a refuge from aggressive vent and head pecking providing they are sited at a suitable height above floor level and at a sufficient distance apart.

In some systems there is a significant height difference between e.g. the litter area and raised droppings platform which increases the risk of collision injuries. Consideration should be given to the provision of ramps or ladders so that hens can move freely to and from the litter area without risking injury.

Multi-tier systems with perforated platforms must have droppings belts or trays beneath. Perches should be positioned to reduce the potential for fouling of any hens perched below and droppings falling into drinking and feeding facilities.

Even where ladders are provided, nests, roosting areas, perches and platforms should not be so high above floor level that birds have difficulty in using them or risk injury.

Birds should have 24 hours per day access to a littered area which must be maintained in a friable condition and at an adequate depth for dust bathing, approximately 10 cm. To ensure good litter management, this depth of litter may be made up over the first two months of use.

Mouldy litter should not be used. There should be frequent checks to ensure that litter does not become infested with parasitic organisms harmful to birds.

Attention should also be paid to the advice given in the DEFRA booklet “Poultry Litter Management” <http://adlib.everysite.co.uk/adlib/defra/content.aspx?doc=12838&id=12839>

Legislative Requirements

Welfare of Farmed Animals Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 states at:

Schedule 2, paragraph 2 - All systems shall be equipped in such a way that all laying hens have -

- (c) at least one nest for every seven hens. If group nests are used, there shall be at least 1 m² of nest space for a maximum of 120 hens;
- (d) perches without sharp edges and providing at least 15 cm per hen, which shall not be mounted above the litter, and the horizontal distance between perches shall be at least 30 cm and the horizontal distance between the perch and the wall shall be at least 20 cm; and

- (e) at least 250 m² of littered area per hen, the litter occupying at least one third of the ground surface.

Schedule 2, paragraph 5 - The floors of installations shall be constructed so as to support each of the forward-facing claws of each hen's foot.

Schedule 2, paragraph 6 - If systems are used where the laying hens can move freely between different levels-

- (a) there shall be no more than four levels;
- (b) the headroom between the levels shall be at least 45 cm;
- (c) the drinking and feeding facilities shall be distributed in such a way as to provide equal access for all hens; and
- (d) the levels shall be so arranged as to prevent droppings falling on the levels below.

Schedule 2, paragraph 8 - The stocking density shall not exceed nine laying hens per square metre of usable area.

4.5 Automatic or Mechanical Equipment

All automated or mechanical equipment essential for the health and well-being of the birds must be inspected at least once a day to check that there is no defect in it.

Provision should be made for an appropriate back-up system to guarantee sufficient air renewal to preserve the health and well-being of the birds in the event of failure of the system.

An alarm system (which will operate even if the principal electricity supply to it has failed) must be provided to give warning of any failure of the system.

All equipment and services, including feed hoppers, feed chain and delivery systems, drinkers, ventilating fans, heating and lighting units, fire extinguishers and alarm systems, should be cleaned and inspected regularly and kept in good working order.

Ventilation, heating, lighting, feeding, watering and all other equipment or electrical installation should be designed, sited and installed so as to avoid risk of injuring the birds.

All automated equipment upon which the birds' welfare is dependent, must incorporate a fail-safe and/or standby device and an alarm system to warn the flock-keeper of failure. Defects should be rectified immediately or other measures taken to safeguard the health and welfare of the birds. Alternative ways of feeding and of maintaining a satisfactory environment should therefore be ready for use. A secondary or alternative water supply should also be put in place.



All electrical installations at mains voltage should be inaccessible to the birds and properly earthed.

Legislative Requirements

Welfare of Farmed Animals Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 states at:

Schedule 1, paragraph 18 - All automated or mechanical equipment essential for the health and well being of the animals shall be inspected at least once a day to check that there is no defect in it and no parts of the equipment have become seriously worn.

Schedule 1, paragraph 19 - Where defects or worn parts in automated or mechanical equipment of the type specified in paragraph 18 are discovered, these shall be rectified immediately, or if this is impossible, appropriate steps shall be taken to safeguard the health and well being of the animals pending the rectification of such defects including the use of alternative methods of feeding and watering and methods of providing and maintaining a satisfactory environment.

4.6 Ventilation and Temperature

Provision of insulation and ventilation should be designed to avoid heat and cold stress. Care should be taken to protect confined birds from draughts in cold conditions.

Birds, particularly those in cages, should not be exposed to strong direct sunlight or hot surroundings long enough to cause heat stress as indicated by prolonged panting.

In the event of feather loss, steps should be taken wherever possible to ensure that hens are not subjected to cold stress; for example, hens should be given more food.

The ventilation system, and facilities for storing and handling litter and manure should be designed, maintained and managed to prevent the exposure of birds to gases such as ammonia, hydrogen sulphide, carbon dioxide, carbon monoxide in concentrations which cause discomfort to the birds or which are detrimental to their health.

Legislative Requirement

Welfare of Farmed Animals Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 states at:

Schedule 1, paragraph 13 - Air circulation, dust levels, temperature, relative air humidity and gas concentrations shall be kept within limits which are not harmful to the animals.

4.7 Lighting

In normal conditions, in enriched cage and multi-level systems, light intensity should be at least 5 lux, and preferably not less than 10 lux, measured at any feed trough level.

In other systems i.e. non-cage single level systems, light intensity in the perching, walking and feeding areas should be at least 10 lux measured at bird eye height. However, a temporary reduction in lighting level may assist in addressing behavioural problems such as feather pecking or cannibalism.

The lighting regime in the hen house must provide in each 24 hour period at least a minimum period of 8 hours continuous darkness.

In all houses, especially those with natural light, measures should be taken to ensure that light distribution is as even as possible.

A period of twilight should be provided to give birds time to roost without disturbance or injury.

Legislative Requirements

Welfare of Farmed Animals Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 states at:

Schedule 1, paragraph 14 - Animals kept in buildings shall not be kept in permanent darkness.

Schedule 1, paragraph 15 - Where the natural light available in a building is insufficient to meet the physiological and ethological needs of any animals being kept in it, then appropriate artificial lighting shall be provided.

Schedule 1, paragraph 16 - Animals kept in buildings shall not be kept without an appropriate period of rest from artificial lighting.

Schedule 4, paragraph 3 (1) - All buildings shall have light levels sufficient to allow all hens to see one another and be seen clearly, to investigate their surroundings visually and to show normal levels of activity.

Schedule 4, paragraph 3 (2) - Where there is natural light, light apertures shall be arranged in such a way that light is distributed evenly within the accommodation.

Schedule 4, paragraph 3 (3) - After the first days of conditioning, the lighting regime shall be such as to prevent health and behavioural problems; and accordingly, it shall follow a 24-hour rhythm and include an adequate uninterrupted period of darkness lasting, by way of indication, about one third of the day.



Schedule 1, paragraph 3 - Where animals are kept in a building, adequate lighting (whether fixed or portable) shall be available to enable them to be thoroughly inspected at any time.

Schedule 4, paragraph 3 (4) - A period of twilight of sufficient duration ought to be provided when the light is dimmed so that the hens may settle down without disturbance or injury.

4.8 Emergency Procedures

Flock-keepers should make advance plans for dealing with emergencies such as fire, flood, power or equipment failure, or disruption of supplies, and should ensure that all staff are familiar with the appropriate emergency action. This must include an independent alarm system that is tested and serviced at regular intervals. At least one responsible member of the staff should always be available to take the necessary steps. Fire precautions should be a major priority for all flock-keepers. Where buildings need to be locked, arrangements must be made to allow rapid entry in case of emergency.

Consideration should be given to installing fire alarms that can be heard and responded to at any time of the day or night.

In case a 999 call has to be made ensure that:	
a.	an emergency action plan is prominently displayed in all hen houses or staff office;
b.	each phone has fixed by it a notice giving instructions to the emergency services on how to reach the building; and
c.	the farm name is prominently displayed at entrance.

The HSE website provides essential information and guidance in agriculture and practical guidance to help improve health and safety on the farm. It is relevant to everyone, whether as an employer, employee or self-employed person. <http://farmsafe.hseni.gov.uk/>

More information is available in the Northern Ireland Fire safety booklet, “fire safety risk assessment, animal premises” <https://www.nifrs.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/Animal-Premises.pdf> and the Defra booklet, “Farm Fires: protecting farm animal welfare” https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/69362/pb9326-farm-fires.pdf

Expert advice on all fire precautions can be obtained from local fire officers in Fire Brigade Area Command Headquarters - www.nifrs.org/feedback.php

5.0 Health

5.1 General

A documented health and welfare programme should be implemented for each unit which sets out the health and husbandry activities covering the whole production cycle. It should also establish management procedures and control measures to reduce the risk of infections and injury. This will normally include an effective vaccination protocol (which should be carefully monitored to ensure effectiveness) to reduce the risk of disease outbreaks. The health and welfare programme should be developed in consultation with an experienced poultry veterinarian, reviewed yearly against performance and updated accordingly.

Important indications of good health are clear bright eyes, alertness, good posture, vigorous movements if unduly disturbed, active feeding and drinking, singing and vocalisation, and clean and healthy skin, shanks and feet. Any departure from the norm may indicate a problem which should be given immediate attention.

5.2 Disease Treatment and Culling

A disease problem may first be noticed by a reduction in egg production and/or egg quality, a change in water consumption, a reluctance to eat, changes in droppings consistency and/or litter quality or in the general behaviour of the flock. It is good management practice to keep daily records of egg production, water consumption and where possible, feed intake. Veterinary attention should be sought at an early stage in any outbreak of disease so that the cause can be determined and appropriate action taken. Measures to control diseases caused by external parasites should be taken by using the appropriate parasiticides.

Birds that are seriously injured or show evident signs of health disorder, such as those having difficulties in breathing or walking, and are likely to suffer, must receive appropriate treatment or be humanely killed immediately.

Flock-keepers should look for signs of conditions such as egg peritonitis, cannibalism or vent-pecking, significant feather loss and red mite infestation.

A veterinarian must be contacted whenever necessary.

All those in contact with birds should practice strict hygiene and disinfection procedures. Where possible the site should be managed so that all houses are empty simultaneously to facilitate effective cleaning and disinfection. An “all in – all out” approach with periods when there are no birds on site will also act to provide a disease break.



Injured, sick or distressed birds must be treated without delay and if necessary separated from the rest of the flock in suitable accommodation available for this purpose, or killed in accordance with the legislation. Dead birds must be removed promptly.

It is an offence to allow an animal to suffer unnecessary pain or distress. It may be necessary to cull or humanely kill laying hens on farm if they do not recover, or are unlikely to recover, after treatment or to prevent further suffering. The bird should be destroyed in a humane manner and by a competent person experienced and/or trained both in the techniques and the equipment used for killing poultry. The killing of individual birds or the whole flock cull must be planned in advance. Flock keepers must have a standard operating procedure for this process and must ensure it is followed on each occasion.

When houses are emptied and cleaned, manure or old litter should be removed from the site before re-stocking so as to reduce the risk of the carryover of disease.

Further information on the practical slaughter of poultry can be found at the Humane Slaughter Association website - <http://www.hsa.org.uk/POULTRY%20WEBSITE/Poultry%20Slaughter%20Project/PSPSite/Introduction.html>

6.0 Permitted and Prohibited Procedures

The Welfare of Animals (Permitted Procedures by Lay Persons) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 sets out the procedures that are permitted to be carried out on animals by a lay person. These procedures interfere with the sensitive tissues or bone structure of an animal. Therefore the keeper must ensure that the procedure is necessary and that the suffering is minimised by employing best practice when carrying out the mutilation.

6.1 General

A prohibited procedure is one which involves interference with the sensitive tissues (for example skin) or the bone structure of the animal, other than when carried out by a veterinary surgeon, for the diagnosis of disease, for the purpose of its medical treatment or is specified in regulations made by the Department.

A lay person is defined as a person who has received instruction or who is otherwise experienced in the performance of that procedure. The operator must be competent to perform the task with minimum distress to the bird.

The only procedure permitted to be performed on laying hens in flocks of 350 or more birds is beak trimming. It shall only be performed using infra-red technology and shall not be performed on birds of 10 days of age or more unless in an emergency. On all birds it

must be performed using a suitable instrument with removal of not more than 1/3 of the beak and cauterisation to stop any bleeding.

Procedures to facilitate identification and other management tools may be permitted under strict conditions in small flocks with less than 350 birds. Detoeing, dubbing and removal of part of the wattle may only be performed on birds under 72 hours old. These procedures cut into the sensitive tissues of the animal and must be carried out only with consideration of the necessity of the risk of suffering and of infection of the living tissues.

These procedures have a severe effect on the welfare of the individual bird on which they are performed. They must only be considered if justified by evidence of a substantial and unavoidable detriment to the birds themselves and to other birds.

Legislative Requirements

Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 states at:

Section 5, (1) - A person commits an offence if -

- (a) that person carries out a prohibited procedure on a protected animal;
- (b) that person causes such a procedure to be carried out on such an animal.

Section 5 - (2) - A person commits an offence if -

- (a) that person is responsible for an animal,
- (b) another person carries out a prohibited procedure on the animal, and
- (c) the first-mentioned person permitted that to happen or failed to take such steps (whether by way of supervising the other person or otherwise) as were reasonable in all the circumstances to prevent that happening.

The Welfare of Animals (Permitted Procedures by Lay Persons) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 states at:

Regulation 4, (1)-(3) - A prohibited procedure may be carried out in an emergency for the purpose of saving life or relieving pain of a protected animal and must be done:

- in such a way as to minimise the pain and suffering it causes to the protected animal;
- in hygienic conditions; and
- in accordance with best practice.

A record shall be kept for 3 years detailing the circumstances and reasons for carrying out the emergency procedures.

Welfare of Animals (Permitted Procedures by Lay Persons) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 states for a laying hen or a chick that is not intended to become a laying hen which is kept on an establishment with less than 350 such birds.



Web tagging:

Schedule 7- Paragraph 7 (1) - The procedure shall only be carried out on farmed birds for the purposes of breed improvement programmes or testing for the presence of disease.

Schedule 7 - Paragraph 7 (2) - The procedure shall only be carried out on birds other than farmed birds for conservation purposes (including education and captive breeding programmes) or for research.

Wing tagging:

Schedule 7- Paragraph 8 (1) - The procedure shall only be carried out on farmed birds for the purposes of breed improvement programmes or testing for the presence of disease.

Schedule 7 - Paragraph 8 (2) - The procedure shall only be carried out on birds other than farmed birds for conservation purposes (including education and captive breeding programmes) or for research.

De-toeing of domestic fowl and turkeys:

Schedule 7 - Paragraph 13 - This procedure may not be carried out on a bird that is aged 72 hours or over.

Dubbing:

Schedule 7 - Paragraph 14 (1) - Dubbing shall be performed using a suitable instrument.

Schedule 7- Paragraph 14 (2) - This procedure may not be carried out on a bird that is aged 72 hours or over.

Removal of the dependent portion of its wattles:

Schedule 7 - Paragraph 15 (1) - The removal of the dependent portion of its wattles shall be performed using a suitable instrument.

Schedule 7 - Paragraph 15 (2) - The procedure may not be carried out a bird that is aged 72 hours or over.

Beak trimming of poultry:

Schedule 7 – Paragraph 11 (1) - For all poultry the beak trimming procedure shall be performed using a suitable instrument.

Schedule 7 – Paragraph 11 (2) - For all poultry any subsequent haemorrhage from the beak shall be arrested by cauterisation.

Schedule 7 – Paragraph 11 (3) - For all poultry the procedure shall be performed on -

- (a) both the lower and upper beaks, with not more than one third of each removed; or
- (b) the upper beak only, with not more than one third removed.

Further conditions for laying hens and chicks that are intended to become laying hens, which are kept on establishments with 350 or more such birds, beak trimming;

Schedule 7 – Paragraph 11 (4) states;

- (a) shall only be performed in order to prevent feather pecking or cannibalism;
- (b) shall only be carried out using infra-red technology;
- (c) shall not be performed on birds which are 10 days or over; and
 - a. shall be carried out by a person who has been provided with suitable and sufficient information, instruction and training so that they are qualified to perform the procedure.

Schedule 7 – Paragraph 11 (5) - Sub-paragraphs (4)(b) and (c) do not apply where the procedure is carried in an emergency in order to control an outbreak of feather pecking or cannibalism.

7.0 Record Keeping

Well-developed record keeping should be sufficient to meet quality assurance, regulatory and management requirements.

Records are an essential aid to management and those to be kept for animal welfare legislative requirements should always include any medicinal treatment given to the birds and the number of mortalities found on each inspection. It is good practice to keep records of the following:

- Daily egg production;
- Where possible, feed consumed (daily and cumulative);
- Body weight in relation to expected growth rates;
- Daily water consumption (water meters should be fitted in each house);
- Testing and maintenance of automatic equipment, including alarms, fail safes, fire extinguishers and stand-by generators;
- Daily maximum and minimum temperature;
- The lighting regime - intensity and duration;
- Dates of cleaning/disinfection and bacterial counts between placements; and
- Veterinary consultation, date and outcome.

As well as these record keeping requirements, a number of other legislative provisions exist for record keeping on farms including under Egg Marketing legislation

<http://eurlex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=CONSLEG:2008R0589:20100701:EN:PDF> and Salmonella legislation http://www.legislation.gov.uk/nisr/2008/263/pdfs/nisr_20080263_en.pdf

Mortality, culling and, if possible, morbidity levels should be closely monitored. Autopsies should be carried out in cases where mortality levels are significant or higher than



breeder's targets. Records should be kept of all these results.

Legislative Requirements

Welfare of Farmed Animals Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 states at:

Schedule 1, paragraph 7 - A record shall be maintained of –

- (a) any medicinal treatment given to animals; and
- (b) the number of mortalities found on each inspection of animals, in the case of laying hens, Schedule 4, paragraph 1.

Schedule 4, paragraph 1 - All hens shall be inspected by the owner or other person responsible for the hens at least once a day.

Schedule 1, paragraph 8 - The record referred to shall be retained for a period of at least three years from the date on which the medicinal treatment was given, or the date of the inspection, as the case may be, and shall be available to an inspector upon request.

8.0 Catching, Handling and Transport

No person may transport any bird in a way which causes or is likely to cause injury or unnecessary suffering to that bird.

The main welfare issues to be considered during the catching and loading process are the risks of injury and distress to birds. These risks can be minimised by planning and preparing adequately for the catching process, and by ensuring that all operators are suitable trained. It is important that disturbance of the birds during the catching process is minimised and the specific processes used to catch birds will need to take that into account. Reducing the lighting levels can help minimise stress during the catching process.

No person shall transport any bird unless:

- it is fit for its intended journey; and
- suitable provision has been made for its care during the journey and on arrival at the place of destination.

For these purposes a bird should not normally be considered fit for its intended journey if it is ill, injured, or fatigued.

Any person transporting birds must ensure that the birds are transported without delay to their place of destination.

The means of transport and containers and crates must be constructed, maintained, operated and positioned to -

- provide adequate ventilation and air space;
- allow for appropriate inspection and care of the birds;
- protect the birds from injury or unnecessary suffering during transport;
- prevent any protrusion of the heads, legs or wings from them;
- allow the birds to be conveyed and taken out without injury;
- protect the birds from rain and road spray; and
- allow them to be easily put inside.

Birds should not be deprived of feed or water before transport; however, feed, but not water, may be withheld for up to 12 hours prior to slaughter. This period of 12 hours must be an inclusive period to include the catching, loading, transport, lairaging and unloading time prior to slaughter.

Every effort should be made to co-ordinate collection/delivery times with the rearer or the slaughterhouse, in order to limit the time birds are held in containers before and after transport.

Before de-populating houses, any hindrance from fixtures and fittings, especially sharp edges and protrusions, must be removed. Care must be taken in catching birds in order to avoid panic and subsequent injury to and smothering of the birds, for example by reducing the intensity of the light or using a blue light.

Particular care should be taken when moving birds within a house to ensure that no bird is injured by the equipment or handling process. The proper handling of birds requires skill, and it should be undertaken only by competent persons who have been appropriately trained. It should be carried out quietly and confidently, exercising care to avoid unnecessary struggling which could bruise or otherwise injure the birds.

For catching birds in cages, they must be removed from the cage singly to avoid injury or suffering and must be held by BOTH legs. The breast should be supported during removal from the cage.

Loose-housed birds must be caught and held by both legs to avoid injury or suffering.

In all systems, birds should only be carried by both legs and care taken to avoid hitting solid objects particularly if wings are flapping. They should not be carried by their wings, heads or necks. 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. Distances birds are carried should be minimised, for example by bringing transport containers as close as possible to the birds.



Transport containers with large openings should be used to avoid damage to the birds; the design, size and state of repair of any container used to carry birds should allow them to be put in, conveyed and taken out without injury.

During the time birds are held in the containers they should be protected from bad weather and excessively hot or cold conditions. They should not be allowed to become stressed (as indicated by prolonged panting) by being left in containers exposed to strong direct sunlight. Adequate ventilation for the birds is essential at all times.

Care should also be taken when crates are loaded on to vehicles, and in their transportation and unloading, to avoid physically shocking the birds.

Birds that cannot be transported because they are unfit to travel due to being ill, injured, infirm or fatigued should be given prompt veterinary treatment or humanely despatched on farm without delay.

Legislative Requirements

The Welfare of Animals (Transport) Regulations (NI) 2006 states at:

Regulation 4 - (1) - It is an offence to transport any animal in a way which causes, or is likely to cause, injury or unnecessary suffering to that animal.

Regulation 4 - (2) - It is an offence to transport any animal except in such receptacles or means of transport, under conditions (in particular with regard to space, ventilation, temperature and security) and with such supply of liquid and oxygen, as are appropriate for the species concerned.

9.0 Birds with Access to Open Runs

Birds with access to outdoor runs should be given protection from adverse weather conditions, predators and risks to their health. They should, at all times, have access to a dry, overhead shelter and secure housing when required for bird welfare and health reasons.

Land on which birds are kept for prolonged periods may become 'fowl sick', i.e. contaminated with organisms which cause or carry disease to an extent which could seriously prejudice the health of the birds on the land. Land should be frequently monitored for worm burden. The time taken for land to become fowl sick depends on the type of land and stocking density. Appropriate measures should be taken to prevent fowl sickness or to provide a new ranging area by moving the housing (in the case of portable units) or to rotating the ranging area outside fixed buildings.

Sufficient housing should be available to the birds at all times. It may be necessary to exclude birds from the range in bad weather if there is a clear danger that their welfare will be compromised.

Birds should be encouraged to use the outdoor area by provision of adequate suitable, properly managed vegetation, overhead cover and a fresh supply of water all sufficiently far from the house to encourage the birds to range.

Factors such as soil type, drainage, size of flock and frequency of land rotation are very important in deciding the number of birds that a particular area can carry. Heavy, poorly drained soil can carry fewer birds than land which is light and well drained.

Legislative Requirements

Welfare of Farmed Animals Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 states at:

Regulation 4 - (1) - A person responsible for -

- (a) poultry (other than those kept in the systems referred to in Schedules 2 and 3) kept in a building, shall ensure they are kept on or have access at all times to well-maintained litter or a well drained area for resting;

10.0 Additional Requirements for Free Range Birds

The siting, construction and design of housing for Free Range birds should be of a sufficient standard to ensure that the birds are not subject to distress caused by extremes of temperature.

In Free Range systems, the open runs must have some overhead shelter and provide protection against predators such as foxes and dogs. Drinking points, protected from wild bird access, should be available when necessary. Windbreaks should be provided on exposed land.

Factors such as soil type, drainage, size of flock and frequency of range rotation are very important in deciding the number of birds that a particular area can carry. Heavy, poorly drained soil can carry fewer birds than land that is light and well drained.

It is important to establish a system of rotation of range or house movement in order to prevent poaching and build up of parasitic infection and disease. Where houses in free-range systems are to remain in one location, steps should be taken to prevent the ground immediately around the house becoming poached and should be sampled for evidence of worm eggs. Flocks and portable houses should be moved with sufficient regularity to avoid continuously muddy conditions and/or contamination of the land with organisms which cause or carry disease to an extent which could seriously prejudice the health of poultry. Unless the house is moved frequently it is good practice to protect



the ground immediately adjacent to it, e.g. by concreting, providing slatted or wire mesh platforms, covered verandas or areas of gravel.

Birds should be encouraged to use the outdoor area by the provision of adequate suitable, properly managed vegetation, a fresh supply of water which is protected from wild bird access and overhead cover, all sufficiently far from the house to encourage the birds to range. On free range sites, access to streams and surface water should be restricted.

Covered verandas are a useful addition to range, particularly during inclement weather. Where the area within a veranda is included in the calculation of floor space, it must be accessible to hens for 24 hours a day and have the same artificial lighting system as within the inner part of the unit and both internal and external popholes (if attached to a free range house) must be of the same dimensions.

Popholes providing access to range, and those between house and veranda, must be at least 35 cm high and 40 cm wide and a total opening of 2 m must be available per group of 1000 hens;

When birds are transferred to range houses, precautions should be taken to avoid crowding and suffocation, particularly during the first few nights. Cannibalism is a danger under this system, and birds should not normally be confined for too long during hours of daylight or subjected to direct sunlight during confinement.

Legislative Requirements

Welfare of Farmed Animals Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 states at:

Schedule 2, paragraph 7 - If laying hens have access to open runs -

- (a) there shall be several popholes giving direct access to the outer area, at least 35 cm high and 40 cm wide and extending along the entire length of the building; in any case, a total opening of 2 m shall be available per group of 1,000 hens; and
- (b) the open runs shall be-
 - (i) of an area appropriate to the stocking density and to the nature of the ground, in order to prevent any contamination, and
 - (ii) equipped with shelter from adverse weather conditions and predators and, if necessary, appropriate drinking troughs.

Appendix A

Other legislation applicable to Laying Hens, including those with record-keeping requirements:

This does not represent an exhaustive list and you should check that you are complying with all current legislation.

Registration of Establishments (Laying Hens) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2003 - all establishments keeping more than 350 or more laying hens must be registered by the Department and provide details on farming methods and the capacity of each hen house.

Diseases of Poultry (Northern Ireland) Order 1995 as amended - requires all flocks of at least 250 birds to keep records including the species of bird and when a notifiable disease is suspected in a flock, mortality records must be maintained as well as numbers of birds showing clinical signs of disease as well.

Avian Influenza (Preventive Measures) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2007 - those keeping poultry must provide details of species of bird, husbandry system in which they are kept, the number of species usually kept, number with access to open air, details on seasonal stocking variations and nearby open water. Any changes in stocking rate by an increase or decrease of 20% or more requires notification.

Control of Salmonella in Poultry Scheme Order (Northern Ireland) 2008 - requires the occupier of a holding on which one or more breeding flocks or laying flocks of at least 250 poultry of any single species are to notify the Department of the identity of the holding, occupier and flocks, the species kept and the number of flocks and poultry on the holding.

The Veterinary Medicines Regulations 2011 - (as amended) – require records to be kept on medicine usage, administration and disposal of unused medicines. Records must be kept for at least 5 years.

Note: Welfare of Farmed Animals (Northern Ireland) Regulations 2012 relates to recording what medicine is administered and when (for welfare purposes) and applies to all farm animals. The Veterinary Medicines Regulations 2011 recording requirements are much greater in terms of what must be recorded and how long the records must be kept and must be recorded at the point of acquisition rather than administration. Records need only be kept in relation to medicines for food producing animals (i.e. to protect the food chain).

Commission Regulation (EC) No 589/2008 - (marketing standards for eggs) - lays down rules for producing and selling table eggs for human consumption and requires records to be kept of the date, number and age of hens when placed on farm, also eggs produced and sold.



Animals and Animal Products (Examination for Residues and Maximum Residue Limits) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2009 - requires various records to be kept.

Animal By-Products Regulation (EC) 1774 /2002 - sets out the rules on collection, transport and disposal of animal by-products including fallen stock.

Useful links:

For general information on DARD visit: <http://www.dardni.gov.uk/>

Or email: animal.welfare@dardni.gov.uk

For further DARD Animal Health and Welfare publications please visit the DARD website at: <http://www.dardni.gov.uk/index/publications/pubs-dard-animal-health.htm>

For information on Avian Influenza visit: <http://www.dardni.gov.uk/index/animal-health/animal-diseases/avian-influenza.htm>

For information on Salmonella visit: <http://www.dardni.gov.uk/index/animal-health/animal-diseases/salmonella.htm>

For information on Egg Marketing visit: <http://www.dardni.gov.uk/index/fisheries-farming-and-food/animal-products/poultry-and-eggs.htm>

DEFRA publications can be viewed at: <http://www.defra.gov.uk/publications/>

Rural Support - offer a listening and signposting service for farmers and rural families in Northern Ireland, who may need help with bureaucracy, family circumstances, health and finances. They can help you source information and advice about farm payments, personal and business finance and debt, social security benefits, support for carers, mental health assistance and many other issues. If you're feeling worried or stressed and would like to talk to someone in confidence, trained volunteers are ready to help. **All calls are confidential and the helpline operates from 8am to 11pm, seven days a week (voicemail and support options available at all other times) - 0845 606 7 607**
<http://www.ruralsupport.org.uk/>

Appendix B

Contact details for Codes of Practice at Dard Direct Offices

ARMAGH

A:tek Building
Edenaveys Industrial Estate
Newry Road
Armagh
BT60 1NF
Tel: 0300 200 7840

BALLYMENA

Academy House
121a Broughshane Street
Town Parks
Ballymena
BT43 6HY
Tel: 0300 200 7840

COLERAINE

Crown Buildings
Artillery Road
Millburn
Coleraine
BT52 2AJ
Tel: 0300 200 7840

DOWNPATRICK

Rathkeltair House
Market Street
Demesne of Down Acre
Downpatrick
BT30 6LZ
Tel: 0300 200 7840

DUNGANNON

Crown Buildings
36 Thomas Street
Drumcoo
Dungannon
BT70 1HR
Tel: 0300 200 7840

ENNISKILLEN

Inishkeen House
Killyhevlin Industrial Estate
Killyhevlin
Enniskillen
BT74 4EJ
Tel: 0300 200 7840

LONDONDERRY

Crown Buildings
Asylum Road
Edenballymore
Londonderry
BT48 7EA
Tel: 0300 200 7840

MAGHERAFELT

Unit 36-38
Meadowlane Shopping Centre
Moneymore Road
Magherafelt
BT45 6PR
Tel: 0300 200 7840

MALLUSK

Castleton House
15 Trench Road
Grange of Mallusk
Mallusk
BT36 4TY
Tel: 0300 200 7840

NEWRY

Glenree House
Unit 2 Springhill Road
Carnbane Industrial Estate
Carnbane
Newry
BT35 6EF
Tel: 0300 200 7840

NEWTOWNARDS

Sketrick House
Jubilee Road
Corporation South
Newtownards
BT23 4YH
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OMAGH

Sperrin House
Sedan Avenue
Lisnamallard
Omagh
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