

LAYER HENS

RSPCA APPROVED FARMING SCHEME
STANDARDS



SEPTEMBER 2015

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OVERVIEW

Introduction

The RSPCA established the Approved Farming Scheme as part of its efforts to improve the lives of Australia's farmed animals. The RSPCA Approved Farming Scheme is a not-for-profit program that works by:

- establishing animal welfare standards that go beyond regulatory requirements
- enabling differentiation and marketing of products from RSPCA Approved farms
- offering consumers a higher animal welfare alternative.

The *RSPCA Approved Farming Scheme Standards – Layer Hens* (from here on referred to as “the Standards”) outline animal welfare requirements that are designed to assist the industry to continually improve and demonstrate good animal welfare practices and outcomes.

These Standards take into consideration RSPCA Australia policy, available scientific research, current legislation applied in Australia, codes of practice, standards and guidelines for animal welfare, veterinary, technical and producer advice, and current industry good practice.

Principles underpinning the RSPCA Approved Farming Scheme Standards

The Standards are underpinned by the principles of the ‘Five Freedoms’:

- freedom from hunger and thirst: by ready access to fresh water and a diet to maintain full health and vigour
- freedom from discomfort: by providing an appropriate environment including shelter and a comfortable resting area
- freedom from pain, injury or disease: by prevention, rapid diagnosis and treatment
- freedom to express normal behaviour: by providing sufficient space, proper facilities and company of the animal's own kind
- freedom from fear and distress: by ensuring conditions and treatment which avoid mental suffering.

Covering both behavioural and physiological needs, together, these ‘freedoms’ provide a comprehensive framework for the assessment of layer hen welfare and require that those responsible for the care of layer hens provide:

- caring and responsible planning and management
- skilled, knowledgeable and conscientious stockpersonship
- appropriate environmental design
- considerate handling and transport
- humane slaughter.

Eligibility

These Standards apply to layer hens kept in eligible non-cage housing systems, in Australia.

Eligible housing systems (egg-laying facilities) under the Scheme, where the provisions of these Standards are met, include:

- indoor systems where hens are housed within a shed
- outdoor systems where hens are housed in sheds, and have, by choice, access to an outdoor area
- outdoor systems where hens are kept in an outdoor area and have, by choice, continuous access to a shelter.

Products that are eligible for approval under the RSPCA Approved Farming Scheme must be derived from layer hens housed in non-cage systems which meet the provisions of these Standards. Eligible non-cage systems may be located on farms that also operate cage systems, however, appropriate separation and traceability arrangements must be in place to ensure eggs associated with the Scheme are clearly identified.

Licensees are responsible for ensuring that the housing system, in addition to meeting the Standards, meets the labelling (production descriptor) requirements of the industry and/or retailer (whichever is appropriate) and all relevant legislative labelling requirements.

RSPCA Australia has discretion to determine the suitability or eligibility of the housing system as applicable within the context of the Scheme.

Application

The documentation that supports the RSPCA Approved Farming Scheme consists of:

- *Operations Manual* – details the operation of the Scheme for both Approved Producers and Licensees, including the application process and the Assessment procedures
- *Standards* (specific to each species) – provide the requirements for the housing, handling transport and/or slaughter of the species
- *Traceability policy* – outlining chain of custody requirements for the Scheme
- *Species-specific information notes* – providing information about a range of aspects relating to species-specific standards and to the production process generally.

Requirements of the RSPCA Approved Farming Scheme

It is a requirement of the Scheme that:

1. Sections 1 through 9 of the *RSPCA Approved Farming Scheme Standards – Layer hens* are complied with.
2. The requirements in the relevant state or territory legislation applicable to the farming enterprise are complied with, including but not limited to animal welfare, animal health, water and land use, transportation, processing, environmental protection, biosecurity, food safety and product labelling.

RSPCA Australia has discretion to request proof of compliance with regulatory requirements through the provision of documentation from the relevant local council, state/territory government, quality assurance program or other appropriate body.

3. The following are completed and subsequently reviewed on an annual basis and made available to RSPCA Australia and to the RSPCA Australia Assessor:
 - Animal Care Statement – specifying general management and standard operating procedures
 - Veterinary Health Plan – specifying animal health management procedures.

Existing quality assurance manuals for other programs or accreditation schemes and/or existing standard operating procedures, and records to support production activities may be utilised to meet the requirements of these Standards, provided the specific provisions in these Standards are demonstrated. Equivalence is determined by RSPCA Australia.

4. Each enterprise nominate a designated person (or persons) who has:
 - responsibility for the operation of the farming enterprise
 - responsibility for overseeing the management and application of the requirements of the Scheme.

The owner of the birds raised under the RSPCA Approved Farming Scheme has, at all times, the final responsibility for ensuring the welfare of the birds and on-going compliance with these Standards.

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THE STANDARDS

1 Sourcing and placement of pullets

Egg producers are encouraged to source pullets from rearing systems that have been assessed to be compliant with the *RSPCA Approved Farming Scheme Standards – Pullets (Layer Hens)*.

Sourcing of pullets

- 1.01 Pullets must be sourced from floor-based¹ or tiered² systems.
- 1.02 A record specifying the name of the rearing facility and shed number from which pullets are sourced must be kept for each flock placed.
- 1.03 A record specifying the bird type/strain must be kept for each flock placed.

Transport of pullets to the egg-laying facility

- 1.04 Date and time of pullet departure from the rearing facility and arrival at the laying facility must be recorded.

Placement of pullets

- 1.05 Pullets must be placed within their new housing facilities as soon as possible after arrival.
- 1.06 A record specifying time of completion of pullet placement must be kept.
- 1.07 The number of pullets delivered by the rearing facility must be recorded.
- 1.08 The number of pullets delivered by the rearing facility must not exceed the specified maximum placement number.
- 1.09 Pullet transport mortalities ('dead-on-arrivals') must be recorded and reported to the rearing facility.
- 1.10 The laying facility must be appropriately prepared prior to the arrival of the pullets. Pre-placement preparation activities include:
 - a. flushing of water lines
 - b. checking water and feed availability and quality
 - c. cleaning and sanitation
 - d. litter provision
 - e. appropriate temperature and ventilation settings.

¹ **Floor-based systems**, as defined in these Standards, house birds at ground level.

² **Tiered systems**, as defined in these Standards, house birds on one or more levels above ground level and may also include floor area at ground level.

SOURCING AND PLACEMENT OF PULLETS

- 1.11 A record specifying completion of pre-placement laying facility preparation must be kept.
- 1.12 Pullets must be observed at least three times in the 24-hour period following placement to ensure that their appearance, vocalisations and behaviour are normal, including:
 - a. clean appearance
 - b. active, responsive yet calm behaviour
 - c. even distribution across the laying facility.
- 1.13 Times of pullet observation checks, notes of any problems identified and action taken must be recorded.

2 Feed and water

- 2.01 Feeding and watering equipment design, position and height must allow birds to access feed and water with minimal effort and using normal posture.
- 2.02 Feeding and watering systems and equipment must be operating effectively to ensure the birds' daily requirements for feed and water are met.
- 2.03 Where electrified wire is used to prevent birds perching over feeding and/or watering systems, the wire must only be switched on during the period coinciding with nest box training.
- 2.04 Feed and water distribution within the laying facility must ensure that a uniform supply is available and is accessible to birds.
- 2.05 Feed and water must be available in sufficient quantity and quality to meet the birds' requirements.
- 2.06 Birds must be observed to be feeding and drinking and notes of any problems identified and action taken must be recorded.
- 2.07 Birds must have unrestricted access to feed and water, with the exception of birds being treated under veterinary advice, birds being prepared for depopulation or during extreme heat where feeding birds during cooler parts of the day may be required to reduce the risk to their welfare.
- 2.08 Unthrifty birds that are not able to reach feed or water must be euthanased immediately.

3 Environment and housing

- 3.01 The laying facility must be designed, constructed and maintained to minimise thermal discomfort to birds.
- 3.02 Floors, surfaces, fittings and equipment in laying facilities must be designed, constructed and maintained to:
 - a. minimise the risk of injury or disease in birds
 - b. facilitate cleaning
 - c. prevent build-up of parasites that affect birds.
- 3.03 Where infrastructure is observed to cause injury to birds, action must be taken to prevent this situation recurring.
- 3.04 Where present, alarms and controls for ventilation, heating and cooling must be fully operational and maintained as required.
- 3.05 Date and time of checks of alarms and controls for ventilation, heating and cooling, notes of any problems identified and action taken must be recorded.
- 3.06 Personnel must be available to respond to alarms and controls for ventilation, heating and cooling.
- 3.07 A maintenance program must be in place to ensure that facility defects are identified and prompt action is taken to ensure their return to full operation.
- 3.08 A record of facility maintenance/repairs must be maintained.
- 3.09 Contingencies must be in place to ensure that conditions in the laying facility can be managed and that feed and water can be provided to birds including in the event of equipment failure, fire or other natural disasters.
- 3.10 Quarantine and biosecurity procedures must be in place to minimise the risk of introduction and spread of disease among birds.
- 3.11 Facilities (including feed and litter storage areas) must be constructed and maintained to reduce the attractiveness to and restrict the entry of wild birds, rodents, predators and other pests or animals that could cause distress or transmit diseases to birds.
- 3.12 Pest animal control programs must use the most humane techniques that are applicable to the situation, achieve the program aims and reduce the risk of impact on non-target species.

Temperature

- 3.13 Indoor minimum and maximum temperature must be recorded daily.

Ventilation

- 3.14 Natural³ or mechanical⁴ ventilation systems must be operational and effective to provide adequate air exchange for the age and number of birds.
- 3.15 Ammonia levels must be managed to not exceed 15ppm at bird head height.
- 3.16 Dust levels at bird head height must be managed to avoid negative impacts on bird welfare.

³ Natural ventilation systems, as defined in these Standards, rely on natural airflow to manage air exchange.

⁴ Mechanical ventilation systems, as defined in these Standards, rely on extraction fans to manage air exchange. Stirring fans may be used in each system to assist with air movement within the laying facility.

Lighting

- 3.17 The lighting system must provide a minimum period of 8 hours continuous artificial or natural lighting per day and a minimum period of 8 hours continuous darkness (with all lights off) to be provided at night, in every 24-hour period. The exception to this is during extreme heat where feeding birds during cooler parts of the day may be required to reduce the risk to their welfare.
- 3.18 The light intensity measured at bird head height across the laying facility, must ensure that, during the light period, no area of the laying facility is lit at less than 10 lux.
- 3.19 **From 1 January 2020**, the light intensity between lighting periods must be adjusted in a gradual manner over at least 15 minutes.

Flooring

- 3.20 Where all or part of the laying facility consists of raised flooring the design must:
- provide adequate support for the birds' feet
 - avoid damage to or entrapment of birds' feet
 - prevent manure build-up protruding through the floor.

Litter

- 3.21 Where the laying facility does not allow provision of litter indoors, birds must have access to a veranda or an outdoor area to allow birds to dust bathe and forage.
- 3.22 Where the laying facility allows provision of litter indoors, litter must completely and evenly cover the usable⁵ area of the laying facility floor at ground level.
- 3.23 For tiered systems, the litter area must provide sufficient space to allow at least one third of the flock (calculated as per stocking density requirements under 6.01) to forage and dust bathe at any one time.
- 3.24 Birds must be given continuous access to litter as soon as possible but no later than three weeks following placement allowing for a period in which to train birds to use the nests.
- 3.25 **From 1 January 2018**, where a period in which to train birds to use the nests is used, birds must at least have daily access to litter immediately after the egg-laying period.
- 3.26 Litter must be maintained to a minimum average depth of:
- 50mm during the first two months of use
 - 100mm after the first two months of use.
- 3.27 Litter must be of good quality, water-absorbing material and provide for the bird's behavioural need to dust bathe, scratch and forage.
- 3.28 Litter supplies must be accompanied by documentation specifying source, type and volume.
- 3.29 Litter must be actively maintained in a dry and friable condition.
- 3.30 Litter condition must be monitored daily and prompt action taken where crusts and/or wet areas are identified.

⁵ **Usable area**, as defined in these Standards, may include any horizontal floor surface (including litter, slats or wire-mesh surfaces), verandas (where accessible at all times) and any area occupied by feeding and watering equipment and nest boxes (where accessible at all times), on one or more levels within the laying facility provided that each area is accessible to the birds. Usable area can only be included where there is sufficient headroom between levels to allow birds to stand normally and where the area is accessible to stock-persons to observe and reach birds.

- 3.31 Litter management equipment must be available on-farm.
- 3.32 Irreparably wet or fouled litter must be removed promptly and replaced with dry, friable litter.

Nest boxes

- 3.33 Birds must be provided with a minimum of one single nest for every 7 birds or 1m² nest boxes for every 120 birds.
- 3.34 Nest boxes must be enclosed and provide a suitable floor substrate to encourage nesting behaviour.
- 3.35 Nest box flooring must not consist of wire or plastic-coated wire.
- 3.36 Nest boxes must be kept clean and operational.
- 3.37 Where used during nest box training, nest box lighting must:
 - a. only be turned on in the morning
 - b. be turned off in the afternoon
 - c. not be used once birds have learnt to lay in the nest.
- 3.38 Where electric wires are used along walls and corners to prevent floor eggs, these must:
 - a. only be turned on in the morning during nest box training
 - b. be turned off in the afternoon
 - c. not be used once birds have learnt to lay in the nest.
- 3.39 Floor eggs must be collected frequently and at least three times in every 24-hour period during nest box training.
- 3.40 Date and time of floor egg collection and number of floor eggs collected must be recorded.

Perches

- 3.41 Perches must be provided at all times.
- 3.42 Perches must be provided at not less than 15cm per bird unless a producer is able to demonstrate that this would obstruct movement of birds and people throughout the laying facility in which case no less than 7.5cm per bird is permitted.
- 3.43 Perches must be constructed and positioned to:
 - a. be raised above and not flush with floor areas
 - b. allow birds to access them
 - c. allow birds to stand in a normal posture
 - d. provide a comfortable support for the bird's feet and keel bone
 - e. minimise the risk of injury
 - f. prevent vent pecking by birds below and/or behind
 - g. minimise fouling of birds below.

Environmental enrichment

- 3.44 Environmental enrichment in the form of pecking objects must be provided inside the laying facility at all times.
- 3.45 Pecking objects must be provided either in loose form or be suspended.
- 3.46 Pecking objects must be evenly distributed throughout the laying facility to prevent undue competition and allow easy access for birds.
- 3.47 Pecking objects must be maintained, replaced or changed as necessary to ensure birds have continuous access and maintain interest.
- 3.48 Where used, organic pecking objects must be stored in a manner that avoids the introduction of pathogens and/or pests.

4 Veranda

RSPCA Standards do not require that birds have access to a veranda. However, where the veranda is included in the calculation of usable area, the following additional Standards must be met.

- 4.01 Birds must be given access to the veranda⁶ as soon as possible but no later than three weeks following placement allowing for a period in which to train birds to use the nests.
- 4.02 **From 1 January 2018**, where a period to train birds to use the nests is used, birds must at least have daily access to the veranda immediately after the egg-laying period.
- 4.03 The veranda must be designed and constructed to provide shade, natural light and good airflow.
- 4.04 The usable floor area of the veranda must provide sufficient space to allow at least one third of the flock (calculated as per stocking density requirements under 6.01) to forage and dust bathe at any one time.
- 4.05 The roof of the veranda must be waterproof.
- 4.06 Litter must completely and evenly cover the veranda floor.
- 4.07 Litter must be maintained at a minimum average depth of:
 - a. 50mm during the first two months of use
 - b. 100mm after the first two months of use.
- 4.08 Litter must be of good quality, water-absorbing material and provide for the bird's behavioural need to dust bathe, scratch and forage.
- 4.09 Litter supplies must be accompanied by documentation specifying source, type and volume.
- 4.10 Litter must be actively maintained in a dry and friable condition.
- 4.11 Litter condition must be monitored daily and prompt action taken where crusts and/or wet areas are identified.
- 4.12 Litter management equipment must be available on-farm.
- 4.13 Irreparably wet or fouled litter must be removed promptly and replaced with dry, friable litter.
- 4.14 Access to the veranda must meet the following requirements:
 - a. openings must be of a minimum height to allow birds to pass through using normal posture
 - b. number and position of openings must ensure that all birds have the opportunity to access the veranda
 - c. design and position of openings must avoid birds being able to obstruct the movement of other birds and avoid injury to birds
 - d. position of openings must allow the veranda to be visible to birds at ground level within the laying facility
 - e. the area around openings must be kept clean.

⁶ A **veranda**, as defined in these Standards, is an addition to the laying facility which provides birds with a roofed area in which to forage and dust bathe. The veranda protects birds from weather extremes while still providing natural light and natural ventilation through a combination of solid and permeable (for example, wire netting) walls.

- 4.15 Any ramps for birds to access the veranda must:
- a. be made from non-slip material
 - b. allow for minimal effort and ease of bird movement to and from the laying facility
 - c. be cleaned after each batch.
- 4.16 The veranda must be actively managed and maintained to:
- a. encourage birds to access all areas
 - b. control disease and parasites
 - c. avoid injury or mortality
 - d. minimise contact with wild birds.

5 Outdoor systems

RSPCA Standards do not require that birds have access to an outdoor area unless the laying facility does not provide litter indoors or a veranda. Where an outdoor area is provided, the following additional Standards must be met.

- 5.01 Birds must be given access to the outdoor area as soon as possible but no later than three weeks following placement allowing for a period in which to train birds to use the nests.
- 5.02 Birds must at least have daily access to the outdoor area immediately after the egg-laying period. The exceptions to this are during extreme weather conditions, while training birds to use the nests, under direct veterinary advice, during treatment specified in the Veterinary Health Plan, or on the day of depopulation.
- 5.03 **From 1 January 2018**, where a period in which to train birds to use the nests is used in a laying facility that does not provide litter indoors or a veranda, birds must at least have daily access to the outdoor area immediately after the egg-laying period.
- 5.04 A daily record specifying the date and times of access to the outdoor area must be kept.
- 5.05 Access to the outdoor area must meet the following requirements:
 - a. openings must be of a minimum height to allow birds to pass through using normal posture
 - b. number and position of openings must ensure that all birds have the opportunity to access the outdoor area
 - c. design and position of openings must avoid birds being able to obstruct the movement of other birds, avoid injury to birds and take into account prevailing weather conditions
 - d. position of openings must allow outdoor area to be visible to birds at ground level
 - e. the area around openings must be kept clean and well drained.
- 5.06 Any ramps for birds to access outdoor areas must:
 - a. be made from non-slip material
 - b. allow for minimal effort and ease of bird movement to and from the laying facility
 - c. be cleaned after each batch.
- 5.07 The outdoor area must be actively managed and maintained to:
 - a. encourage birds to access all areas
 - b. provide birds with palatable vegetation
 - c. control disease and parasites
 - d. avoid injury or mortality
 - e. prevent land degradation
 - f. avoid accumulation of water
 - g. minimise contact with wild birds
 - h. minimise the risk of fire.

- 5.08 At least 8m² of natural and/or artificial overhead shade/shelter per 1000 birds must be provided and distributed across the outdoor area.
- 5.09 Birds must be observed to be using shade/shelter structures and action taken to modify facilities if use is deficient.

6 Stocking density

Indoor systems

- 6.01 Stocking density in the laying facility must be no more than:
 - a. 7 birds/m² of the usable area for floor-based systems
 - b. 9 birds/m² of the usable area for tiered systems.
- 6.02 Upon occurrence of disease, injury, feather pecking, cannibalism, other indicator of poor welfare or where there is difficulty managing environmental conditions, stocking density must be reviewed and, if necessary, reduced when a new flock is placed to ensure the welfare of the birds.

Outdoor systems

RSPCA Standards do not require that birds have access to an outdoor area unless the laying facility does not provide litter indoors or a veranda. Where an outdoor area is provided, the following additional Standards must be met.

- 6.03 A maximum of 1500 birds per ha of outdoor area to be available to birds in outdoor systems with no rotational range management strategies in place (i.e. a fixed outdoor area).
- 6.04 A maximum of 2500 birds per ha of outdoor area to be available to birds in outdoor systems with rotational range management strategies in place.
- 6.05 Where used, the area inside a veranda leading onto the outdoor area may be included in the calculation of outdoor area available to the birds unless the veranda has been included in the calculation of usable area within the laying facility.

7 Management procedures

Training and competency

- 7.01 Persons responsible for the management and/or handling of birds must be appropriately trained and competent in their required tasks, including:
- a. handling and catching of birds
 - b. inspection of birds and laying facility environment
 - c. maintaining laying facility environment
 - d. identification of normal and abnormal bird behaviour
 - e. deviations in production targets
 - f. bird care and treatment of injury or distress
 - g. euthanasia of birds.
- 7.02 Staff induction/training programs and standard operating procedures must be consistent with the requirements of these Standards.
- 7.03 Records of staff training must be maintained.
- 7.04 Company owned and/or contractor farms must have internal assessment systems in place to ensure on-going compliance with the RSPCA Standards.

Animal Care Statement

- 7.05 An Animal Care Statement must be drawn up and complied with.
- 7.06 The Animal Care Statement must specify general management and standard operating procedures as relevant to the egg-laying facility, including, but not limited to:
- a. sourcing and placement of pullets
 - b. feeding and watering
 - c. environment and housing
 - d. veranda and outdoor area, as relevant
 - e. maintaining stocking density
 - f. bird observation
 - g. euthanasia
 - h. depopulation.
- 7.07 The current Animal Care Statement must be provided to RSPCA Australia and be available at the time of an assessment.
- 7.08 The Animal Care Statement must be reviewed on an annual basis.

Bird observation

- 7.09 Birds must be observed at least twice in every 24-hour period to ensure that their appearance, vocalisations and behaviour are normal, including:
- a. feather cover, cleanliness, absence of injuries
 - b. active, responsive, calm behaviour, low noise level
 - c. absence of signs of injurious pecking (see requirements under 8.08)
 - d. even distribution across the laying facility.

- 7.10 Date and times of daily bird checks, notes of any problems identified (including the absence of normal behaviour) and action taken must be recorded.
- 7.11 Inspections must be increased during hot weather or disease outbreak.
- 7.12 Weak, ill or injured birds must be identified and treated or euthanased without delay.
- 7.13 Dead birds must be removed from the immediate vicinity of the laying facility and disposed of in a safe and hygienic manner.
- 7.14 Where birds are found to be entrapped or have escaped, they must be freed or caught immediately and action taken to prevent the situation recurring.
- 7.15 Where the cause of ill health or disease and the appropriate treatment is unable to be identified, veterinary advice must be sought and followed accordingly.
- 7.16 RSPCA Australia must be notified of any major event⁷ which impacts flock health and welfare adversely.
- 7.17 Animals, other than placed birds, must be prevented from entering the laying facility.

Records

- 7.18 The following records must be maintained for each flock:
 - a. number of birds
 - b. bird age
 - c. bird mortality, separated into 'deaths' and 'culls' and noting the main reason for culling
 - d. mortality rates per laying facility per week over the life of the flock
 - e. feather cover score (see requirements under 8.11).
- 7.19 The following production records must be maintained for each flock:
 - a. total monthly egg production
 - b. total number of eggs supplied to Licensee⁸.
- 7.20 Current flock records, as well as flock records since the previous assessment, must be available on farm at the time of an assessment.

⁷ A **notifiable major event**, as defined in these Standards, includes, but is not restricted to unusual or unexpected incidences of high mortality or morbidity; sustained above-trend mortality rate(s) including during transportation; non-endemic and/or exotic disease outbreaks; pest animal incursions resulting in disease outbreak and/or increased mortality or morbidity; infrastructure or equipment failure resulting in disease outbreak and/or increased mortality or morbidity; feed or water supply quality and/or formulation issues resulting in disease outbreak and/or increased mortality or morbidity.

⁸ A **Licensee**, as defined in these Standards, has entered into a Trademark Licence Agreement with RSPCA Australia and is permitted to use the RSPCA Approved Farming Scheme logo on product.

8 Health

Veterinary Health Plan

- 8.01 A Veterinary Health Plan must be drawn up and complied with.
- 8.02 The Veterinary Health Plan must contain details of the following:
- a. procedures for the identification and treatment of weak, ill or injured birds, including separation/treatment and euthanasia
 - b. procedures to prevent injurious pecking and identify feather loss
 - c. a vaccination schedule
 - d. a worm monitoring and treatment schedule
 - e. a red mite monitoring and treatment schedule
 - f. any prophylactic or corrective medicines administered, their withholding periods, dose rates and when birds should be treated
 - g. quarantine and biosecurity procedures
 - h. pest control procedures to restrict access of wild birds, predators and rodents to the flock
 - i. cleaning and sanitation procedures.
- 8.03 The current Veterinary Health Plan must be provided to RSPCA Australia and be available at the time of an assessment.
- 8.04 The Veterinary Health Plan must be reviewed on an annual basis and authorised by the designated veterinarian.

Health records

- 8.05 Health records must be kept for each flock.
- 8.06 Health records must contain details of the following:
- a. vaccinations
 - b. diseases
 - c. mortalities, separated into 'deaths' and 'culls' and noting the main reason for culling
 - d. injuries
 - e. other treatments administered to birds.

Medicines

- 8.07 Antibiotics must only be administered for therapeutic purposes under veterinary advice.

Management of injurious pecking

- 8.08 Daily monitoring of birds must occur to identify early signs of injurious pecking including pecking directed at the body feathers of other birds, feather eating, feather damage or bare areas around the tail or signs of persistent aggression such as pecking directed at the head, loud vocalisation and chasing/fighting other birds.
- 8.09 If there are a large number of birds that exhibit early signs of injurious pecking or aggression, action must be taken to adjust management practices and to seek further technical or veterinary advice.

- 8.10 A bird that is injured as a result of injurious pecking or aggression must be promptly removed for treatment or be euthanased.
- 8.11 Feather cover must be monitored at least once a month throughout the life of the flock using a scoring method that assesses feather cover on the back/vent and the head/neck to enable action to be taken promptly where feather loss occurs. The method requires visual assessment and scoring⁹ of a total of 50 birds (5 different birds in 10 different areas of the laying facility):
- 0 = no/minimal = no bare skin visible, no or slight wear, only single feathers lacking
 - 1 = slight = moderate wear and damaged feathers or two or more adjacent feathers missing with an area of bare skin visible of < 5cm
 - 2 = moderate/severe = bare skin visible of an area of 5cm or more
- 8.12 Feather cover score must be entered into the feather loss benchmarking tool¹⁰ and on laying facility records together with notes of any problems identified and action taken.
- 8.13 Where beak-trimmed birds are sourced, the procedure must be:
- a. performed on day-old birds at the hatchery by a competent operator using an infrared technique and appropriately calibrated equipment
 - b. limited to tipping of the beak only
 - c. even, rounded and consistent across the flock.
- 8.14 Where it is identified that birds have been incorrectly trimmed, the supplier and RSPCA Australia must be notified.
- 8.15 Beak trimming procedures not specified in these Standards must not be performed unless prior approval has been obtained from RSPCA Australia.

Induced moulting

- 8.16 Induced moulting is not permitted regardless of whether the practice uses feed-withdrawal or non feed-withdrawal methods.

Other management procedures

- 8.17 Management or husbandry procedures not specified in these Standards must not be performed unless prior approval has been obtained from RSPCA Australia.

⁹ **Feather cover scoring**, as defined in these Standards, requires the use of the AssureWel feather cover scoring system (www.assurewel.org/layinghens/featherloss) to assess and record feather cover on the back/vent and the head/neck of the bird.

¹⁰ **Feather loss benchmarking tool**, as defined in these Standards, requires the use of the AssureWel feather loss benchmarking tool (www.assurewel.org/layinghens/howisyourfeatherlossmeasuringup/featherlossbenchmarkingtool) to help determine what action should be taken to improve feather cover.

9 On-farm euthanasia

- 9.01 Birds must be handled and euthanased in a manner that ensures that distress or discomfort is minimised.
- 9.02 The approved methods for on-farm euthanasia of individual birds are:
- a. cervical dislocation
 - b. captive bolt to the head
 - c. CO₂.
- 9.03 Following cervical dislocation, captive bolt or CO₂ use, birds must be checked to ensure death, evidenced by a limp carcass, no rhythmic breathing, lack of corneal reflex and dilated pupils.
- 9.04 Killing pliers or other equipment that crushes the neck and methods of cervical dislocation that require spinning or flicking of the bird by the head must not be used.
- 9.05 On-farm euthanasia methods not specified in these Standards must not be performed without prior approval from RSPCA Australia.
- 9.06 On-farm euthanasia of all or part of a flock at the end of lay must not be performed without prior approval from RSPCA Australia.

10 Depopulation

Section 10 Depopulation is not assessed at this point in time.

Bird handling and catching

- 10.01 Persons involved in the handling and catching of birds must be appropriately trained and competent.
- 10.02 Persons involved in the handling and catching of birds must meet on-farm biosecurity procedures.
- 10.03 A person responsible for the welfare of the birds must be present at catching.
- 10.04 Removal of water facilities must not take place until immediately before catching commences.
- 10.05 Birds must have access to feed within 12 hours before catching commences.
- 10.06 Removal of environmental enrichment in preparation for catching must coincide with removal of feed to minimise disturbance to the birds.
- 10.07 Lighting must be dimmed during catching to ensure that birds are calm.
- 10.08 The catching process must be designed and managed to ensure that bird crowding, distress or discomfort is minimised and injuries or mortalities are prevented.
- 10.09 Flock preparation involving separation of the birds into groups must proceed calmly and birds are not to be kicked or picked up and thrown aside.
- 10.10 Birds must be caught and carried either firmly around the body, encompassing both wings, or by grasping both legs.
- 10.11 No more than four birds must be carried in one hand.
- 10.12 Birds must not be caught, suspended or dragged by the head or neck.
- 10.13 Inappropriate catching techniques used by the catching crew must be addressed immediately by the person responsible for the welfare of the birds.
- 10.14 A record of catching must be maintained for each flock, including:
 - a. the name of the person responsible for the welfare of the birds at catching
 - b. the names of persons involved in the catching of birds
 - c. time feed and water is withdrawn
 - d. time catching commenced and concluded
 - e. number of birds caught.

Off-farm slaughter of end-of-lay hens

- 10.15 Persons involved in the loading and transport of birds must meet on-farm biosecurity procedures.
- 10.16 A person responsible for the welfare of the birds must be present during loading for transport.
- 10.17 The timing of catching and transport must be coordinated between the producer, catching crew, transporter and receiver in order to ensure that birds are not off water for more than 20 hours and to minimise time birds spend waiting on the vehicle.

- 10.18 Access roads and pick-up pads must be well maintained to provide a level and compacted surface and kept clear to ensure access at catching and loading for transport.
- 10.19 An assessment of birds must be made before catching commences to confirm that they are fit for the intended journey.
- 10.20 Any birds rejected from transport must be immediately euthanased.
- 10.21 Transport modules must be inspected to ensure that they are clean, intact and cannot cause injury to birds during loading and transport.
- 10.22 Transport modules must be of a depth and have openings of sufficient size to avoid injury to the bird.
- 10.23 Transport modules must provide sufficient floor space to allow birds to sit comfortably at the same time without being on top of each other.
- 10.24 During hot weather, floor space per bird must be increased to allow for sufficient air flow to minimise the risk of heat stress.
- 10.25 Location and placement of transport modules must aim to minimise the time that birds are handled during loading.
- 10.26 Birds must be placed, not thrown, swung or dropped into a crate or module.
- 10.27 The crate or module handling operator must load units onto the transport trailer at a speed and angle that minimises tilting of the crates or drawers.

11 Transport

Section 11 Transport is not assessed at this point in time.

- 11.01 The transporter must have a written emergency protocol in place that includes out of hours contacts and standard procedures for protecting bird welfare in the case of an accident, transport delay or other emergency.
- 11.02 Persons involved in the handling and transport of birds must be appropriately trained and competent.
- 11.03 Persons involved in the handling and transport of birds must meet on-farm biosecurity procedures.
- 11.04 Action must be taken to minimise the risk of heat or cold stress to birds during transport or while the vehicle is stationary.
- 11.05 A record of bird transport must be maintained, including:
 - a. time of departure from farm
 - b. time of arrival at destination
 - c. transport mortalities.

12 Slaughter

Section 12 Slaughter is not assessed at this point in time.

- 12.01 Persons involved in the handling, stunning and slaughter of birds must be appropriately trained and competent to ensure bird welfare is not compromised.
- 12.02 Birds must be slaughtered at the closest available processing plant to their source farm unless prior approval has been obtained from RSPCA Australia.
- 12.03 Only processing plants that have been assessed by RSPCA Australia to meet these slaughter Standards may be used to slaughter RSPCA Approved birds.
- 12.04 **From 1 January 2016**, a Closed Circuit Television (CCTV) system must be installed and operational:
 - a. to allow a clear view of live bird handling processes, and
 - b. be monitored to ensure that these Standards are maintained.
- 12.05 Procedures must be in place to manage equipment failure and other breakdowns that may impact on bird welfare.
- 12.06 Upon arrival at the processing plant, birds must be placed in a lairage area that is:
 - a. covered to provide shelter and shade
 - b. fitted with fans and misting equipment to allow cooling of birds.
- 12.07 A record of lairage must be maintained, including:
 - a. hourly checks of the birds for heat or cold stress or other signs of distress
 - b. lairage temperature and humidity
 - c. schedule of processing.

Shackling – Electrical stunning systems

- 12.08 Shackling of birds should occur in a purpose-built area with a maximum light level of 5 lux.
- 12.09 Handling and hanging technique must reduce the incidence of wing flapping.
- 12.10 Shackling crews must place birds' legs in the shackles firmly but gently.
- 12.11 **From 1 January 2020**, a breast comforter must be installed from the end of the shackling point to the stunner and be operating in a manner that does not cause injury or discomfort to birds.
- 12.12 Transport modules must be checked to ensure that no birds have been left behind.
- 12.13 The shackling area must be checked at the end of the batch to ensure that no birds have been left behind.
- 12.14 Dead or culled birds must be collected in a bin placed in the unloading and shackling area and then disposed of in a safe and hygienic manner.
- 12.15 Damaged crates or module drawers and frames must be removed for disposal or repair.

Stunning

12.16 Birds must be stunned prior to slaughter.

Stunning – Electrical stunning systems

12.17 Birds must not be suspended from the shackling line for more than 60 seconds before they are stunned.

12.18 Equipment and procedures for stunning must ensure birds are immediately rendered unconscious without receiving pre-stun shocks.

12.19 Where the stun has not been effective:

- a. affected birds must be cut and bled out to ensure they are dead prior to entering the scalding
- b. equipment must be checked and adjusted to correct the fault in the system.

Stunning – Controlled atmosphere systems

12.20 The module unloader must be checked at the end of each batch of birds to ensure no birds have fallen to the floor or are trapped in the loader unit. Fallen or trapped birds must be either placed into the gas stunning unit's entry point or, if injured, immediately euthanased.

12.21 Birds must not be subjected to the gas mixture until the correct concentration has been reached.

12.22 Gas stunning units must have windows or other surveillance to allow observation of the birds to verify that the gas mixture is rendering birds insensible with minimal distress.

12.23 When exiting the gas stunning unit, birds must be checked to ensure they are unconscious. Conscious birds must be promptly placed back into the gas stunning unit entry point and the gas concentration verified to ensure adequate levels to induce unconsciousness are maintained.

12.24 The shackling console outside the gas stunning unit must be constructed and operated to prevent the birds spilling to the floor.

12.25 Should the controlled atmosphere system fail, birds present in the gas stunning unit must be removed and safely contained until the fault in the system has been corrected.

Bleeding out

12.26 Bleeding out must commence prior to birds regaining consciousness.

12.27 Birds must be checked to ensure that they have been cut effectively to bleed out and are dead prior to entering the scalding.

12.28 Manual cutting systems using one knife-hand must have at least one back-up knife-hand checking birds.

12.29 Automated cutting systems must at all times have at least one back-up knife-hand checking birds.

12.30 Where bleeding out has not been effective:

- a. affected birds must be euthanased prior to entering the scalding
- b. the knife-hand(s) and/or automated equipment must be checked to ensure correct operation.

Bird injury and damage records

12.31 Recording of the following must be made at processing of RSPCA birds:

For all birds:

a. total number of red birds, separated into birds with and without a cut.

For a sample of 100 birds from each batch processed:

b. percentage of birds that have not been effectively stunned

c. percentage of birds requiring a back-up cut

d. percentage of birds with broken and dislocated wings.

END OF STANDARDS



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