



National Animal Welfare Advisory Committee. *Animal Welfare Act (Layer Hens) Code of Welfare 2005*. Wellington, New Zealand. Ministry of Agriculture & Forestry, 2005. Copyright. Extracts from Animal Welfare Act (Layer Hens) Code of Welfare 2005.

This code is intended to encourage all those responsible for its implementation to adopt the highest standard of husbandry, care and handling, to equal or exceed the minimum standards.

Under the Act the "owner" of an animal or the "person in charge" is responsible for meeting the legal obligations to animal welfare. In the case of chicks, chickens, pullets and layer hens the owner of the animal(s) may place these birds in the care of others for the purpose of rearing, transport and slaughter.

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 will lie with the owner of the layer hens, and may also lie with the person in charge of the layer hens, depending on the role of that person.

Advice is given throughout the code and is designed to encourage owners/operators to strive for a high level of welfare. Explanatory material is provided where appropriate.

Responsibility for meeting minimum standards during the operation of particular tasks will lie with the person responsible for carrying out that particular task. That person is "in charge" of the animals at that particular point in time. Generally, a stockhandler is the person in charge of the animals in that stockhandler's care. In practice, the identification of the person in charge will depend on the minimum standard in question.

This code provides for the general principles of the care and use of layer hens. The incorporation of the code in quality assurance programmes will help to ensure its success (see Section 6.1 - Quality Assurance Systems).

Other codes that are relevant, and that are either being produced for the first time, or are in the process of being reviewed, include codes concerned with the transport of animals, slaughter at licensed and approved premises, emergency slaughter, and the use of animals for scientific purposes. Where relevant these other codes should be consulted (see Appendix III).

This draft was written by a working group established by the Egg Producers Federation of New Zealand (Inc) and has been reviewed by representatives of the industries, veterinarians, advisers, animal scientists, welfareists and members of the general public. As required by the Act, NAWAC publicly notified the draft code of welfare on 16 July 2002.

## 1.5 Contents of this Code

Section 69 of the Act provides that a code of welfare may relate to one or more of the following -

- a species of animal
- animals used for purposes specified in the code

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- the regulation trespasses unduly on personal rights and freedoms
- the regulation is not made in accordance with the general objects and intentions of the statutes under which it is made, or
- it was not made in compliance with the particular notice and consultation procedures prescribed by statute.

Any person or organisation wishing to make a complaint should refer to the publication *Making a Complaint to the Regulations Review Committee*, which can be obtained from the website: <http://www.clerk.parliament.govt.nz/Publications/Other/>

or by writing to:  
Clerk of the Committee  
Regulations Review Committee  
Parliament Buildings  
Wellington.

## 1.3 Process for Code Development

A draft code may be developed by anyone including NAWAC or the Minister. It is then submitted to NAWAC. Provided the draft meets criteria in the Act for clarity, compliance with the purposes of the Act, and prior consultation, NAWAC publicly notifies the code and calls for submissions. NAWAC is then responsible for recommending the form and content of the code to the Minister after having regard to the submissions received, good practice and scientific knowledge, available technology and any other relevant matters.

NAWAC may recommend draft standards that do not fully meet the obligations in the Act if certain criteria specified in the Act are met.

The Minister issues the code by notice in the Gazette.

## 1.4 Scope

This code applies to all persons responsible for the welfare of layer hens kept for the purpose of producing eggs for sale. For those flocks from which eggs are not sold, the Act applies. NAWAC nevertheless, encourages all owners or persons in charge of layer hens to comply with the relevant sections of this code. It is not the purpose of this code to define marketing standards for egg production systems.

The pre-hatched chick that is in the last half of development is also covered by this code. This has particular application to the sale of embryonated eggs.

In many layer hen production systems the chicks, chickens, pullets and layer hens are reliant to a greater or lesser extent on human management for their daily requirements.

The rearing of chicks, chickens, pullets and layer hens, if it is to be done well, requires both experience and observance of high standards. Unless that work is done well, the welfare of the birds cannot be adequately protected.

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Minimum Standard No. 7 – Stocking Densities for Birds in Cage, Free-range and Barn systems		7 – 18 Weeks		19 or more Weeks	
		Birds / sq m (maximum)	Sq cm / bird (minimum)	Birds / sq m (maximum)	Sq cm / bird (minimum)
(a)	Houses for Barn systems:	14	724	7	1428
(b)	Houses for Free-range:	14	724	10	1000
(c) The outdoor area in free-range systems must be sufficiently large and also be managed to ensure that the ground does not become pugged, muddy, dusty or contaminated so as to harm the health and welfare of the birds.					
(d)	Cage systems	(i) Cages existing prior to the commencement of this code	(ii) New cages built after the commencement of this code	(iii) All cages existing prior to commencement of this code from 1/1/2008	(iv) All cages from 1/1/2014
		450	550	500	550
(e)	Sq cm / bird (minimum)	Cages for birds aged 7 – 18 weeks must provide a minimum floor space of at least 370 sq cm per bird and for a maximum of 27 birds per sq m.			

**Note:**

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

Based on current knowledge, NAWAC would ideally like current cages to be eventually phased out but is unable to recommend replacement of current cages with alternative systems including enriched cages, until such time as it can be shown that, in comparison to current cage systems, in the context of supplying New Zealand's ongoing egg consumption needs, they would consistently provide better welfare outcomes for birds and be economically viable.

NAWAC has not specified the minimum amount of space that should be provided for outside areas for free-range systems. There are significant differences between managing birds indoors e.g. more uniform environment, no climatic extremes, more confinement etc, and outdoors e.g. topography, soil type, climate etc. This means that there will be a number of different ways to manage outdoor areas e.g. rotation, portable housing, vegetation, shelter, use of gravel, or sawdust. It is therefore not possible to stipulate a minimum stocking density that would address all situations. NAWAC intends that producers should manage birds outdoors in ways appropriate to the particular location to ensure they comply with the outcome-based minimum standards.

While stocking densities will vary according to a number of variables, a commonly used stocking density has been 11 sq m per bird.

**Rearing**

**Introduction**

In both of the following systems, it is normal management practice to ensure that the birds are able to huddle together to conserve heat or to have sufficient room so that each bird can rest without contact with other birds so as to ensure adequate air circulation.

If producers choose to introduce pullets to the range from 7 weeks of age then the management of the outdoor area provided should meet specifications in Minimum Standard No. 6.

**Floor Rearing on Litter**

The birds are usually confined to the area immediately adjacent to the heating source for the first two weeks of life, and thereafter are allowed to range at increasing distances from the heat source, until they can range over the entire area provided by the shed in which they are housed. This system is almost identical to the conditions under which broiler or meat chickens are reared.

**Cage Rearing**

The entire building is usually heated to the required temperature of 34-36°C. For the first 0-5 week period the birds are housed in groups at densities between 160 and 220 sq cm per bird depending on the facilities available and the flock size.

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**Floor space allowance per hen in New Zealand cage systems**

Current space allowance (450cm<sup>2</sup>)

Space allowance from 2014 (550cm<sup>2</sup>)

A4 sheet of paper (621cm<sup>2</sup>)

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NAWAC considers that cages that provide a minimum floor space of less than 550 sq cm per bird, do not fully comply with section 10 of the Act. Minimum Standard 7(d) allows for a transition period for the phasing out of cages that provide less than 550 sq cm.

NAWAC notes, however, that any decision to provide greater minimum space and/or behavioural enrichment or to phase out such cages altogether, will be left to such time as this code is reviewed in 2009. NAWAC will, at that time, consider: current New Zealand and international research on alternative systems including enriched cages; current good practice; available technology; public submissions; international practices and trends; and the feasibility, practicality and economic effects of any change.

#### Recommended Best Practice

Parameters that relate to stocking densities of houses and other aspects of animal welfare should be available for auditing purposes, which include mortality and culls, total number of birds and floor area.

#### 3.4.2 Feather Pecking and Cannibalism

Feather pecking can be a serious problem in all egg production systems, but is exacerbated in non-cage systems where many birds can mix. The exact causes of feather pecking are not known, but may include redirection of foraging behaviour, genetic predisposition, plumage colour variation in target animals, light intensity, food access and composition, and stocking density. Once feather pecking begins, it is very difficult to stop, and can quickly escalate into cannibalism that may result in death. From both a welfare and production point of view, cannibalism is a major problem, and every effort should be made to avoid it.

A number of management options for preventing or handling outbreaks of feather pecking and cannibalism are given below:

- Selection for docile strains
- Use of birds of uniform colour
- Avoidance of sudden changes in food composition
- Minimisation of aggression at key resources (feeders, drinkers, nest boxes, etc.)
- Selection of 'low aggression' feeds (Tryptophan rich)
- Scatter feeding
- Removal/culling of aggressors
- Removal of pecked birds
- Application of deterrents (tars)
- Provision of escape areas
- Reduction of stocking density