

# Farm animal welfare regulations

## Beak trimming

A Regulation was enacted in 2002 banning the beak trimming of laying hens in England from 1 January 2011. The ban was repealed in the *Mutilations (Permitted Procedures) (England) Regulations 2007*. However, following a recommendation from the Farm Animal Welfare Council in 2009 that routine beak trimming of laying hens should not be banned until an alternative means of controlling feather pecking and cannibalism in laying flocks could be introduced. On 8 November 2010 the Government laid before Parliament *The Mutilations (Permitted Procedures) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2010 on the Beak Trimming of Laying Hens*. These Regulations remove the ban on routine beak trimming, but restrict the method used to the infra-red technology only.

The Beak Trimming Action Group has been tasked with establishing an action plan, to work towards a future ban on beak trimming. A review will take place in 2015 to assess the achievements on the elimination of beak trimming to date, with a view to reinstating the ban in 2016.

The Government justify the lifting of a ban on beak trimming on grounds that the alternative will lead to greater welfare problems. However the failure to include a new commencement date in the Regulations that lift the ban has been criticised by farm animal welfare

charity, Compassion in World Farming (CIWF) which comments that *'Beak trimming has traditionally been carried out to prevent feather pecking and cannibalism. However, scientific research shows that the correct way to prevent these problems is not to beak trim the birds, but to keep them in good conditions – in particular to provide opportunities for them to forage and ground-peck - and to select for birds that are less prone to feather pecking and cannibalism.*

*The Government (and the previous Government) takes the view that farmers are not ready to prevent these problems without beak trimming and thus the draft Regulations remove the ban on beak trimming. Compassion in World*

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*Farming's principal concern is that the draft Regulations do not set a new commencement date. We believe that stakeholders involved in developing and implementing a strategy to manage laying hens without beak trimming are more*

*likely to be successful if they have a legally binding date to work toward.*

*This said, we welcome the statement by the Defra Minister of State, Jim Paice MP, that he is “absolutely committed to banning beak trimming in the long term” and that “the Government see the proposed removal of the ban as very much an interim solution”. Also welcome is his commitment to working with the Beak Trimming Action Group to find solutions to this issue and to establish an action plan, which will include a number of key milestones “leading up to a full review of beak trimming policy in 2015”. In his Written Statement to the House the Minister gave 2016 as the “provisional date for the ban on routine beak trimming of laying hens”. Whilst we welcome the setting out of key milestones, we believe that the new commencement date of 2016 should be included in the draft Regulations.’*

## Welfare of chickens raised for meat

The government has set down regulations (*The Welfare of Farmed Animals (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2010*)<sup>1</sup> to implement Council Directive 2007/43 which sets a maximum stocking density and defines minimum management and training requirements for chickens raised for meat.

Both regulations will be debated in the House of Commons and House

of Lords before they can be made and come into force.

## Welfare of dairy cows kept housed indoors and /or in very large herds

On 4 August 2010 Professor Christopher Wathes of the FAWC wrote to the Minister, Jim Paice following publicity about the welfare of dairy cows housed all year round with little or no access to grazing and/or kept in very large herds. The letter considers whether a dairy cow can be kept in such conditions in compliance with British law, having a 'satisfactory' standard of welfare. The letter purports to consider this question having regard to the concept of whether the dairy cow can have a 'life worth living,' a concept introduced in its 2009 report 'Farm Animal Welfare in Great Britain: Past, Present and Future' (see above).

The report acknowledges that the number of dairy cows housed all year round in Great Britain is increasing and that management of dairy cows that are housed is easier for the farmer. The letter lists a number of advantages and disadvantages to the dairy cow from a welfare standpoint in this form of husbandry.

The letter suggests further research on how all year housing affects the ability of dairy cows to express normal behavior and the extent to which impediments affect welfare. However pending this evidence, the FAWC's advice is that a cow housed all the year round with little or no access to grazing can have a satisfactory standard of welfare, provided that housing and general facilities are appropriate.

In relation to very large herds, the FAWC also acknowledges that the size of dairy herds in the UK is continuing to rise and that cows in very large herds are often housed all year round because of the difficulties of access to pasture. The FAWC suggest that very large herds can benefit from economies of scale, such as the employment of a nutritionist or specialist veterinarian and may benefit from

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improved training, staff development and staff motivation offered through larger enterprises. It identifies 'few disadvantages' provided the herd is divided into appropriate groups which are as 'small as practicable.' If appropriate management is not provided the main disadvantages identified include insufficient intake of feed and water and bullying in unstable groups.

The FAWC acknowledge that 'in the time available' they have not considered the views of consumers about labeling, but anticipate that 'their objections to highly intensive farming practices will continue unless significant steps are taken to ensure that consumers become adequately and appropriately 'informed' about animal welfare issues.'

ALAW notes that Compassion in World Farming (CIWF) disagrees with the views expressed by the FAWC. CIWF point out that for dairy cows to express normal behavior they require the opportunity for grazing which is not possible in year-round housing. They cite the 2009 the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA), which conducted a major review of the scientific literature and concluded that: *'If dairy cows are not kept on pasture for parts of the year, i.e. they are permanently on a zero-grazing system, there is an increased risk of lameness, hoof problems, teat tramp, mastitis, metritis, dystocia, ketosis, retained placenta and some bacterial infections.'*

CIWF also point out that cows naturally live in relatively small stable groups of animals which are generally related to one another and form a stable hierarchy. It is thought that cows can recognize up to 60-80 other individuals and it is best to keep them in groups which are no larger than this. Clearly it is possible to keep more than one such group of cows in fields around a central milking parlour, but the larger the number of cows in all these groups, the further they will have to walk to obtain grazing. Furthermore, they observe that transferring cows between groups breaks social bonds and results in aggression as new hierarchies form.

CIWF responds to FAWC's argument that housing cows indoors in large herds may benefit welfare as it enables cows to be given feed that responds to the needs of high yielding cows, which CIWF says ignores the fact that the need to provide such feed only arises because cows have been bred to produce yields that they cannot sustain through their natural fibrous diet.

<sup>1</sup> With equivalents in the devolved jurisdictions

CIWF suggests that the proper solution is to breed a more sustainable cow. Cows' level of milk yield should be such that it can be sustained on a pasture-based diet with the animals being given access to pasture during the grass-growing season and kept in moderate-sized groups.

CIWF comments that 'UK dairy farming is already becoming increasingly industrial, with a growing number of cows being 'zero-grazed' (kept indoors all or the vast majority of the year) and being bred to produce excessive milk yields that undermine their health and welfare. Compassion in World Farming is strongly opposed to this development and to attempts to intensify this process by establishing huge dairy farms in which thousands of cows will be kept indoors for all or most of the year while being pushed to even higher milk yields. There is a real danger that the UK dairy sector will regress to US standards where only a quarter of cows have access to pasture.'

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New steps to improve the welfare of gamebirds scrapped  
*The Code of Practice for the Welfare*

*of Gamebirds Reared for Sporting Purposes*, which was placed before Parliament in May this year under powers conferred by section 14 of the *Animal Welfare Act 2006* was due to come into effect on 1 October 2010. It was withdrawn however by the new farming minister, Jim Paice, allegedly after pressure from country sports organisations.

The code was drawn up under the previous government and relates to the welfare of birds produced as quarry for shooting enthusiasts and sets out how keepers can best meet the welfare needs of gamebirds, including recommendations on providing food and water and the use of certain types of equipment, as well as setting out minimum space requirements for housing breeding pheasants and partridges to ensure the birds are not kept in overcrowded conditions. Evidence of failure to follow the Code may be used in court to support a prosecution under the *Animal Welfare Act*.

It has been reported<sup>2</sup> that a revised code is expected to be introduced within two months, without rules that would require farmers to use larger ground pens instead of raised wire cages.

## Marine Management Organisation

The Marine Management Organisation (MMO) was established on 1 April 2010 as an executive non-departmental public body under the *Marine and Coastal Access Act*. It brings together, in one

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organisation, the majority of marine decision-making and delivery mechanisms. It has incorporated the work of the Marine and Fisheries Agency and has acquired several new roles. It will work closely with a range of stakeholders in delivering functions on marine planning, marine licensing, nature conservation and fisheries management and enforcement issues.

<sup>2</sup> Independent, 5 July 2010