

**Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs**

# **Consultation on the Code of Practice for the Welfare of Meat Chickens and Meat Breeding Chickens**

## **Summary of responses and government response**

**January 2018**

### **Contents**

Introduction .....	1
Overview of responses .....	1
Summary of responses to consultation questions.....	2
Government response .....	5
Annex 1: List of respondents .....	6

# Introduction

1. This document summarises the responses we received to our consultation on a new statutory Code of Practice for the Welfare of Meat Chickens and Meat Breeding Chickens, for England, and sets out the actions we will now take. The consultation started on 11 August 2017 and closed on 6 October 2017.

2. The statutory code provides owners and keepers of meat chickens and meat breeding chickens with guidance on how to comply with relevant welfare legislation. The purpose of the consultation was to seek views on whether and how well the new statutory code achieved its aims of providing clear up-to-date guidance on how to comply with the current legislation, whether it maintained animal welfare standards and whether it reflected the latest scientific and veterinary knowledge.

3. The consultation related solely to a new statutory Code of Practice for the Welfare of Meat Chickens and Meat Breeding Chickens, for England, as animal welfare policy is devolved. The Northern Irish, Scottish and Welsh Governments issue their own farm animal welfare codes.

## Overview of responses

4. A total of 13 responses were received to the consultation. The largest number of responses (4) came from animal welfare organisations. Other responses were received from the livestock sector (2), the veterinary profession (2), charities (2), a training provider (1) and members of the public (2).

5. Many respondents welcomed the fact that the statutory code was being updated and there was a consistent view that the code should be regularly updated.

# Summary of responses to consultation questions

**Q1. Do you agree that the new statutory code (provided in draft as part of this consultation) provides clear guidance to owners and keepers on how to comply with the relevant farm animal welfare legislation? If you wish to comment on specific sections of the code, please provide the relevant paragraph number and cite references to any relevant evidence.**

6. Eleven respondents answered this question; all of these agreed the updated code provides clear guidance to owners and keepers on how to comply with the relevant farm animal welfare legislation, subject to some specific comments. These included comments on the legislation referred to in the code; a request that the code should provide best practice recommendations rather than guidance on how to comply with the law; a request that trigger levels measured at the slaughterhouse should be reviewed; and that the use of welfare outcome assessment be included in the code as a proactive method of on-farm welfare monitoring. The veterinary profession welcomed the code's recommendations to seek appropriate veterinary advice where relevant and to ensure that veterinary advice is available when needed.

**Q2. Do you agree that the new statutory code (provided in draft as part of this consultation) maintains animal welfare standards as set out in the existing statutory code and the interim guidance? If you wish to comment on specific sections of the code, please provide the relevant paragraph number and cite references to any relevant evidence.**

7. Ten respondents answered this question; all of these agreed the updated code maintains animal welfare standards as set out in the existing statutory code and the interim guidance, subject to some specific comments. These included comments from five respondents on the section on catching and handling. One animal welfare organisation and the veterinary profession strongly supported the recommendation to hold birds by both legs. Another animal welfare organisation would prefer to see birds held only by their bodies, not their legs.

8. On the other hand, the two livestock sector bodies felt that the recommendation to catch birds with two legs did not follow current industry practice which was to catch with one leg and this did not compromise the welfare of the bird.

**Q3. Do you agree that the new statutory code (provided in draft as part of this consultation) reflects the latest scientific and veterinary knowledge? If you wish to comment on specific sections of the code, please provide the relevant paragraph number and cite references to any relevant evidence.**

9. There were nine responses to this question. Seven of these agreed the updated code reflects the latest scientific and veterinary knowledge, subject to some specific comments. These included concern over the legally permitted stocking density for meat chickens being too high and a desire for a reference in the code to the use of slower growing breeds as a method of improving bird welfare.

10. One of the livestock sector bodies did not agree that the updated statutory code reflects the latest scientific and veterinary knowledge, in the areas of catching and handling or in the recommended stocking density for meat breeding birds which the respondent recommended should be revised.

11. One respondent commented they would be surprised if the code did not incorporate the latest scientific and veterinary knowledge, but they had been unable to conduct a full review.

**Q4. In what ways do you think the new statutory code will reduce industry's ongoing costs in complying with legislation? Can you quantify this?**

12. Of the five responses to this question, one of the livestock sector bodies and one member of the public did not believe the updated code would reduce industry's costs in complying with the legislation; one animal welfare organisation found any cost saving difficult to quantify; the training provider thought the updated code should prove easier for producers to understand and one of the animal welfare organisations presumed there was strong independent evidence that costs would be reduced. Eight respondents did not answer this question.

**Q5. Do you agree that the requirement to be acquainted with a single document rather than two will assist new owners and keepers, saving them time? Can you quantify this saving?**

13. Of the nine responses to this question, eight agreed the requirement to be acquainted with a single document rather than two will assist new owners and keepers, saving them time, although one of the livestock organisations thought the saving would be minimal. One respondent thought there would be no significant impact and four did not answer this question. No respondents attempted to quantify the saving.

**Q6. Do you agree with the estimate of three hours for owners and keepers of meat chickens and meat breeding chickens to become acquainted with the content of the new statutory code? If not, provide details of your reasoning.**

14. Of the six responses to this question, five agreed with the estimate of three hours for owners and keepers of meat chickens and meat breeding chickens to become acquainted with the content of the new statutory code. One of the charities thought this estimate to be very minimal, but did not suggest an alternative estimate. There were additional comments from two animal welfare organisations and one livestock sector body that this should not be seen as a one-off exercise as keepers will need to refer back to the document as required. One respondent also commented on the importance of ongoing training to complement the code. Seven respondents did not answer this question.

**Q7. What do you think is the most effective way for Government to make owners and keepers of meat chickens and meat breeding chickens aware of the new statutory code?**

15. The eight respondents to this question suggested a range of ways in which the Government could make owners and keepers of meat chickens and meat breeding chickens aware of the new statutory code. These included working with industry, farming organisations and farm assurance schemes to publicise the changes and communicating with owners and keepers via the Defra poultry register or a communications campaign. Five respondents did not answer this question.

## Government response

16. Following the public consultation, the Government has carefully considered the comments received and has made some amendments to the draft code. These include a recommendation that welfare outcomes should be used to assess and monitor the ongoing welfare of the birds as part of the farm health and welfare plan; and further references to the importance of seeking veterinary advice.

17. The independent Farm Animal Welfare Committee (FAWC) has scrutinised the post consultation draft and has confirmed that the updated Code of Practice explains how owners and keepers can comply with animal welfare legislation through good practice; that it reflects the most recent scientific and veterinary knowledge; and that it does not reduce welfare standards contained in the existing Code of Recommendations for the Welfare of Livestock: Meat Chickens and Breeding Chickens (2002) and the interim guidance (2011).

18. The replacement Code of Practice will be laid before Parliament for a period of 40 days before it can come into force.

19. Defra will work closely with key stakeholders, including the British Poultry Council and the National Farmers Union, to ensure keepers are fully aware of the updated statutory code. Defra will work with its enforcement body, the Animal and Plant Health Agency, to ensure that, in future, its inspectors will make an assessment on whether the provisions of the legislation and the updated code are being met. Defra will also work with local authorities in order to ensure that they are fully aware of the updated code.

20. Defra will keep the updated code under review.

# Annex 1: List of respondents

Animal Aid

British Poultry Council

British Veterinary Association (BVA), British Veterinary Poultry Association (BVPA) and  
Veterinary Public Health Association (VPHA)

Compassion in World Farming

National Farmers Union (NFU)

Poultec

RSPCA

Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS)

Soil Association

Universities Federation for Animal Welfare (UFAW)

World Animal Protection

Individual member of the public

Individual poultry veterinarian



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