

Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

Consultation on the Code of Practice for the Welfare of Laying Hens

Summary of responses and government response

June 2018

Contents

Introduction	1
Overview of responses	1
Summary of responses to consultation questions.....	1
Government response	3
Annex 1: List of respondents	5

Introduction

1. This document summarises the responses we received to our consultation on a new statutory Code of Practice for the Welfare of Laying Hens, for England, and sets out the actions we will now take. The consultation started on 29 January 2018 and closed on 9 March 2018.

2. The statutory code provides owners and keepers of laying hens and pullets 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 owners and keepers with up-to-date and enhanced guidance on how to comply with the current legislation, 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 Laying Hens, 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 21 responses were received to the consultation. The largest number of responses (6) came from animal welfare organisations. Other responses were received from the livestock sector (5), universities (2), charities (2), the veterinary profession (1), local authorities (1) and members of the public (4).

Summary of responses to consultation questions

Q1. Do you agree that the new statutory code (provided in draft as part of this consultation) provides improved and up-to-date 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.

5. Fifteen respondents answered this question, of which thirteen agreed the updated code provides improved and up-to-date guidance to owners and keepers on how to comply with

the relevant farm animal welfare legislation, subject to some specific comments. Of the two respondents who did not agree that the updated code provides improved and up-to-date guidance, one felt the guidance fell short of the Animal Welfare Act.

6. Although they agreed the code provides improved and up-to-date guidance, two of the livestock sector groups felt the guidance exceeded the requirements of the legislation. One respondent from the livestock sector recommended the inclusion of a reference to the poultry register. The sections on welfare outcome assessments, injurious pecking, skeletal health and the rearing environment were welcomed by some of the animal welfare organisations and charities. 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.

7. Six respondents did not answer this question.

Q2. 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.

8. There were sixteen responses to this question. Thirteen of these agreed the updated code reflects the latest scientific and veterinary knowledge, subject to some specific comments. Of the three respondents who did not agree the updated code reflects the latest scientific and veterinary knowledge, one member of the public felt the guidance did not go far enough in protecting the hen's welfare.

9. There were specific comments on the sections on skeletal health, dark brooders, injurious pecking, integrated pullet rearing, lighting levels and the recommended maximum stocking density for pullets. One respondent from the livestock sector commented that the latest scientific and veterinary knowledge had not always been tested in commercial conditions over a sufficiently long period of time.

10. Five respondents did not answer this question.

Q3. In what ways do you think the new statutory code will reduce industry's ongoing costs in complying with legislation? Can you quantify this?

11. There were four responses to this question. Of these, two of the livestock sector bodies believed the updated code would increase the costs for producers, for example, by requiring catching of laying hens by both legs; another livestock sector body felt the new code was unlikely to have any significant impact on costs; and one animal welfare

organisation said cost saving was difficult to quantify, but by providing succinct guidance on how to comply with the legislation, it was possible that there would be a reduction in the number of farms at risk of non-compliance.

12. Seventeen respondents did not answer this question.

Q4. Do you agree with the estimate of three hours for owners and keepers of laying hens to become acquainted with the content of the new statutory code? If not, provide details of your reasoning.

13. Of the thirteen responses to this question, nine agreed with the estimate of three hours for owners and keepers of laying hens to become acquainted with the content of the new statutory code. One animal welfare organisation and one livestock sector body commented that, although three hours should be sufficient for producers to familiarise themselves with the code, there would be a need to refer back to the document as and when required.

14. Four respondents did not agree that three hours was sufficient time; of these, one of the charities recommended the guidance should be supported by an online training package and a photo guide. Eight respondents did not answer this question.

Q5. What do you think is the most effective way for Government to make owners and keepers of laying hens aware of the new statutory code?

15. The fifteen respondents to this question suggested a range of ways in which the Government could make owners and keepers of laying hens aware of the new statutory code. These included working with industry, trade bodies and farm assurance schemes to publicise the changes to the commercial sector, and with organisations such as the British Hen Welfare Trust to reach owners of smaller flocks. The Defra poultry register and the trade and farming press could also be used to raise awareness of the new code.

16. Six respondents did not answer this question.

Government response

17. Following the public consultation, the Government has carefully considered the comments received and has made some amendments to the draft code. These include a revised recommended stocking density for pullets; revised recommended lighting levels; and some amendments to the sections on biosecurity, inspections, skeletal health, dark brooders and injurious pecking. The title has been changed to the “Code of Practice for the Welfare of Laying Hens and Pullets” to make clear that it covers pullets as well.

18. The independent Farm Animal Welfare Committee has scrutinised the post consultation draft and has confirmed that the updated Code of Practice for the Welfare of Laying Hens and Pullets incorporates the latest scientific, veterinary and husbandry advice and provides clear guidance to owners and keepers to help ensure and enhance the welfare of their animals.

19. The new Code of Practice for the Welfare of Laying Hens and Pullets will be laid before Parliament for a period of 40 days before it can come into force.

20. Defra will work closely with key stakeholders, including the British Egg Industry Council, the British Free Range Egg Producers Association, the National Farmers Union and relevant charities, to ensure owners and keepers, including those with backyard flocks, 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.

21. Defra will keep the updated code under review.

Annex 1: List of respondents

British Egg Industry Council

British Free Range Egg Producers Association

British Hen Welfare Trust

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

Catholic Action for Animals

Compassion in World Farming

Conservative Animal Welfare Foundation

Humane Society International

National Animal Health and Welfare Panel

National Farmers Union (NFU)

National Farmers Union Scotland

Ridgeway Foods

RSPCA

Soil Association

Universities Federation for Animal Welfare (UFAW)

University of Bristol, Animal Welfare Research Network and Animal Welfare and Behaviour Group,

University of Bristol, Senior Research Fellow

Individual members of the public



© Crown copyright 2018

You may re-use this information (excluding logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence v.3. To view this licence visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/version/3/ or email PSI@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk

This publication is available at www.gov.uk/government/publications

Any enquiries regarding this publication should be sent to us at

animalwelfare.consultations@defra.gsi.gov.uk