

## Daily routine: Basic checklist to ensure production and welfare in laying hens

### Problem

Delayed detection of system malfunctioning, disease or unwanted behaviour can lead to negative welfare consequences and significant production losses. This situation can be worsened during the transition phase from cages to cage-free housing systems.

### Solution

Frequent and regular inspections of the hens, environment and automated systems can allow for early detection of potential problems.

### Benefits

Early detection of problems allows for early intervention, thus reducing production losses and improving hen welfare. Walking the house often can encourage nest laying reducing the number of floor eggs, and reduce fear of humans lowering the risk of panic and injury.

### Practical recommendations

Walk through the house in a pattern that allows for visual inspection of all areas (including the wintergarden if present). Do this at least twice daily (more often when birds are young). Observe the distribution of hens within the house and look for any sick, injured or dead birds. Pause for a few minutes to allow birds to relax and resume their activities. Note any abnormal behaviour. Listen for signs of respiratory illness. Pick up and inspect individual hens' bodies and plumage conditions. Look for signs of parasites or indications of head or vent pecking. Check the condition of the hen's eyes, skin, beak, legs, feet and claws. Monitor the condition of the litter, feed and water consumption and hen body weights. Ensure all automatic supply and ventilation systems are functioning properly. In multi-tier systems, all levels should be inspected. Varying the time, route or personnel can help birds become more robust to human presence.

### APPLICABILITY BOX

#### Theme

Animal husbandry

#### Keywords

Welfare, production, health, feather pecking, floor eggs

#### Context

Transition to and operating cage-free housing systems for laying hens

#### Application time

Twice daily (minimum)

#### Required time

1 hour (minimum)

#### Equipment

Scales, ammonia test strips, and light or other environmental meters (optional)

#### Best in

All cage-free housing systems: barn, free-range and organic production

#### Target audience

Farmers, farm advisors



**Figure 1: Demonstrating handling of a hen. (Photo: Vera Bavinck, Fair Poultry)**



**Figure 2: Flock inspection (Source: Vera Bavinck, Fair Poultry)**



**Figure 3: A – Poor distribution of hens within the house. B – Good distribution of hens within the house (Source: Vera Bavinck, Fair Poultry)**

## On-farm application

Train the staff to ensure they are familiar with the daily routine and checklist. Inspections performed by two different people each day increase the likelihood of detecting conditions requiring attention.

## Further information

### Checklist example:

<https://bestpracticehens.eu/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/3-Annex-Checklist-daily-house-inspection-Hen.pdf>

### Further readings

Bestman, M., Heijmans, J., van Middelkoop, K., Ruis, M. Poultry Signals - A practical guide for poultry-oriented management. Roodbont Publishers. Zuthphen, Netherlands. 112 p.

[https://www.roodbont.nl/en/poultry/poultry-signals/100-286\\_Layer-Signals](https://www.roodbont.nl/en/poultry/poultry-signals/100-286_Layer-Signals)

## About this practice abstract and Best Practice Hens

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**Best Practice Hens:** To support egg production in non-cage systems and improve animal welfare, a consortium consisting of 7 partners will develop Best Practices for Non-cage Egg Production Systems as a European Commission, DG SANTE pilot project. These Best Practices will provide practical support to egg producers to encourage them to convert from cage to non-cage systems, including organic production.

**Project website:** [www.bestpracticehens.eu/](http://www.bestpracticehens.eu/)

**Social media:** Facebook and LinkedIn (@bestpracticehens) & Twitter (@BestHens)

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