

Training for farmers and staff to handle and care for hens in cage-free housing systems

Problem

The care for pullets and laying hens in cage-free housing systems places high demands on farmers and staff. Caretakers who have only experience with managing hens in cages are often not sufficiently trained for this new task. Therefore, problems may arise particularly during the transition phase from cages to cage-free systems.

Solution

Farmers and staff having the daily responsibility for pullets and laying hens in cage-free systems need to receive appropriate training, tailored to the specific cage-free system and adapted to the context of the farmer.

Benefits

Competent handling and management of hens in cage-free systems improve production performance, animal health and welfare. This leads to economic benefits and job satisfaction.

Practical recommendations

Farmers need to ensure that they and their staff, who have the daily responsibility for the pullets and laying hens in cage-free housing systems, have the necessary knowledge and skills in good management procedures regarding these systems. They need to have a proper understanding of the welfare, including the health and the behaviour, of pullets and laying hens. These skills can be acquired and maintained by appropriate training, tailored to the cage-free housing system in place (barn, free-range, organic production). Training should cover the following aspects:

- How to comply with relevant (local) legislation
- How to recognize normal behaviour and signs of good health
- How to recognize abnormal behaviour and signs of disease
- How to quickly take effective corrective measures
- How to seek additional help from experts (e.g. veterinarian, feed advisor) if necessary

APPLICABILITY BOX

Theme

Training of farmer and staff, animal husbandry

Keywords

Farmer, personnel, caretaker, education, laying hens, and pullets.

Context

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

Best in

All cage-free housing systems (barn, free-range, organic production) for pullets and laying hens

Target audience

Farmers, farm advisors, policy makers



Figure 1: Veterinarian training the Caretakers (Source: Fair Poultry)

On-farm application

System approach

- Depending on the local situation, adequate trainings are offered by chambers of agriculture, integrations, breeding- and barn equipment companies, farmers' associations and others. Contact these local organizations for more information.

Evaluation

- Farmers should keep records of their own training and staff training.
- Make sure everyone is up-to-date trained.

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/

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