

Daily routine: Basic checklist to ensure welfare in pullets

Problem

Frequent inspection of pullets is not always performed, possibly resulting in welfare issues 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 can detect problems at an early stage and prevent welfare problems.

Benefits

Apart from preventing welfare problems, frequent inspections also make the pullets more used to humans, resulting in less frequent panic reactions.

Practical recommendations

Daily inspections should be performed by walking slowly through the house. To prevent fear responses, knock on the door before entering the house so the pullets know someone is coming. Walk slowly through the aisles, frequently pausing to give the pullets the time to walk away. Check water lines to see if water is available. Check feeders to see if feed is available. Check for sick and dead birds on the slatted floors and litter. In multi-tier systems, check the upper levels of the systems as well. Check perches for the presence of red mites. Listen to the birds, they should produce calm sounds. Alarm sounds or screams may be an indication of injurious pecking behaviour.

Special attention is needed on specific moments: directly after arrival of chicks, feed and water should be easily accessible, and room temperature should be high enough to comfort the chicks. This is especially important for chicks that are beak trimmed, as they may experience discomfort due to the treatment and therefore may be reluctant to feed or drink. After each batch of vaccinations, special checks should be done to monitor the health of the birds. Supply the pullets with roughage to keep them busy, preventing injurious pecking behaviour. Pecking stones also serve as occupation and blunt beaks of chicks in case of intact beaks. Check the litter for the presence of feathers. Because of moulting, there should be feathers in the litter. Pullets may start eating feathers, which can be an indication of intestinal problems or the onset of feather pecking.

APPLICABILITY BOX

Theme

Animal husbandry

Keywords

Welfare, health, production, pullets

Context

Transition to and operating cage-free housing systems for pullets

Application time

Daily

Best in

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

Target audience

Farmers, farm advisors

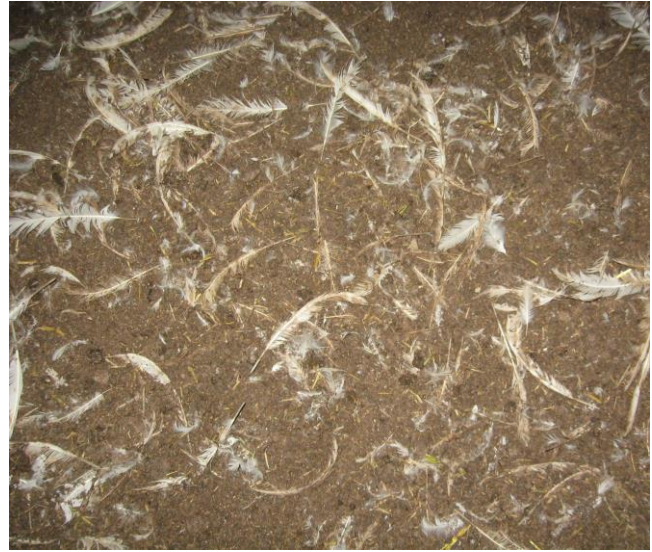


Figure 1 (Left): Providing pecking stones and roughage in buckets or nets give pullets occupation, preventing the start of feather pecking (Photo: WUR)

Figure 2 (Right): Check the litter for feathers, which is a good sign (no intestinal problems or feather pecking present (Source: WUR)

On-farm application

System approach

- Train the staff to ensure they are familiar with the daily routine and checklist.

Further information

Checklist example: <https://bestpracticehens.eu/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Checklist-daily-house-inspection-Pullets-EN.pdf>

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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