



Free Range Meat Chickens

Farm Audit Checklist



Farm Audit Checklist for Free Range Meat Chickens

Version 1.1 – 2021



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Introduction

This document provides a summary of the relevant SPCA Certified standards for free range meat chickens and is intended to help members assess their farm and prepare for an audit.

It is not exhaustive and not intended as a replacement for the standards, which should be read and fully understood before this checklist is used.

In addition, while completing this checklist and addressing any problems it raises will increase the likelihood of a successful audit, it is not a guarantee of success.

Please do not send this document to SPCA Certified. It is provided purely for your own reference.

Date of assessment:		Flock ages:	
Overall comments:			

Reference Standard	Summarised standard	Check (Y/N)	Comments
	Good Nutrition		
	Feed		
N1 – N5	Birds have unrestricted access to a good diet, which is provided in a suitable way and does not contain pharmaceuticals, antibiotics (including zinc bacitracin), hormones, growth promoters or avian derived proteins.		
N6 & N7	Food is stored securely and enough is on hand to deal with emergencies.		

N8	Birds are weighed weekly, records kept and an investigation undertaken, if average flock weights deviate by more than 15 % from the standard growth curve.		
N9 & N10	Feed levels are monitored daily and any resulting bird health or welfare concerns are investigated.		
	Water		
N11 – N13 & N15	Birds have unrestricted access to clean water, which is provided in a suitable way and water consumption is monitored daily.		
N14	Pharmaceuticals are not used in the water supply without veterinary approval.		
N16 & N17	Water quality is tested at least annually (weekly if chemically treated) and the results recorded.		
N18	New water sources are tested before being given to the birds.		
N20	An emergency water supply is in place.		

Reference Standard	Summarised standard	Check (Y/N)	Comments
	Good Environment		
	Chick placement		
E1	Sheds and facilities are suitably prepared for chick arrival.		
E2 & E3	Chicks are not thermally stressed and ammonia levels are kept below 10 ppm.		
E4	Chicks are not moved after placement.		
E5 & E6	23-hour light periods (at 30 lux) are only used for a maximum of four days following placement. Continuous light is not used.		
	Shed and housing standards		
E7	A detailed site plan is available for viewing.		

E8 & E9	The shed does not pose an injury risk to the animals and all internal surfaces can be easily cleaned, sanitised and replaced if needed.		
E10 & E11	Equipment is maintained and regularly checked. Alarms are in place to warn staff of problems and are checked weekly.		
E12	An auxiliary power supply is in place and is tested under load, at least monthly.		
E13	A contingency plan is in place to manage feed, water and the internal environment, in the case of mechanical breakdown or computer failure.		
	Flooring		
E14 – E17	Floors are even, smooth, solid and maintained to avoid injury. They are also easy to clean. Fully slatted or meshed floors are not used and rising moisture is prevented.		
	Litter		
E18 – E21	Good quality litter, which covers the entire usable floor area, is available at all times and is managed to keep it dry and friable. Litter depth is not less than 5 cm.		

E22	Starting 14 days after placement, litter condition is assessed daily and action taken if quality is poor.		
E23 & E24	Extra litter is uncontaminated and all litter is replaced between flocks.		
E25	Birds are scored weekly for feather cleanliness after the third week of life.		
	Lighting		
E26 – E28	The lighting programme is recorded, controlled by a timer and a dimmer is used to raise/lower light levels gradually		
E29 & E30	From five days after placement, light intensity at bird head height is not lower than 20 lux and light meters are available to measure it.		
E31	Birds have eight hours of continuous light and six hours of darkness in every 24 hour period, from five days after placement.		
	Temperature		
E32 & E33	Birds are kept in a comfortable environment and protected from extreme weather conditions.		

E34	Minimum and maximum temperatures are recorded daily.		
	Ventilation and air quality		
E35, E36 & E38	Condensation, heat, humidity, dust and noxious gases are not allowed to accumulate or contaminate other sheds.		
E37	Ammonia levels are measured every day and kept below 15 ppm.		
	Outdoor environment		
E39	The minimum range size is 1.5 times the total floor area of the shed and birds have access to it for at least eight hours each day.		
E40	Birds have access to the range no later than three weeks after placement.		
E41	Birds slaughtered at or before four weeks of age have access to the range for at least one week before slaughter.		

E42	Access to the range is only prevented in exceptional circumstances.		
E43 – E45	Birds and the range are inspected daily and records of range access kept.		
E46 – E49	The range, especially around pop holes, is managed in a way that avoids mud and standing water accumulation, while encouraging hen movement. Natural ground cover accounts for at least 70 % of the range.		
E50	Shade and shelter covers at least 20 % of the range, is safe and suitable for birds to use and encourages full use of the range. At least half of the shade and shelter is within 5 m of pop holes		
E51	Deciduous and growing trees are supplemented with other forms of shade and shelter.		
E52	The range area and entire farm are properly fenced.		

	Pop holes		
E53 & E54	Pop holes make it easy for birds to see and access the range, and minimise negative impacts on the surrounding litter.		
E55	There are at least 2 m of pop holes, measuring at least 40 x 35 cm, for every 1000 birds.		
E56	Birds do not have to travel more than 13 m to reach a pop hole in new sheds and 16 m in existing sheds.		
	Transport		
E57 & E58	Flocks are assessed before transport and any birds found to be unfit are euthanased.		
E59	Detailed transport records are kept.		
E60 & E61	Transport vehicles are ventilated and a contingency plan is in place for when conditions are hot and humid.		

E62	Transport vehicles are not left standing, except when loading and unloading.		
E63	Any bird mortality above 0.3 % is investigated.		
E64 & E65	Journey durations do not exceed four hours and drivers are aware of the possible delays along the route.		
	Emergency preparedness		
E66	An emergency response and preparedness plan is in place.		
E67	Management practices to reduce the risk of fire are in place and fire-fighting equipment is maintained and tested.		

Reference Standard	Summarised standard	Check (Y/N)	Comments
	Good Health		
	Animal health plan		

H1 & H3	A detailed animal health plan, which is regularly reviewed and which covers major health, welfare and biosecurity issues, is in place and records are kept for a minimum of three years.		
	Pharmaceutical use		
H4 – H6	Staff are properly trained and pharmaceuticals are only used when prescribed and then only following the manufacturers guidelines, unless otherwise authorised by a veterinarian.		
H7	Detailed records of pharmaceutical administration are kept.		
	Inspection and general health		
H8 & H9	Flocks are inspected at least three times each day and records kept. Sick birds are separated from the main flock for treatment or else euthanased.		
H10 & H11	Inspections are done calmly and increased when there are welfare concerns or during bad weather.		
H12	The flock is gait scored the week before catching and any birds with severe lameness are promptly euthanased.		

H13	Weekly foot pad checks are done on birds from fourteen days of age and action taken if foot pad health is poor.		
	Euthanasia		
H14 – H18	Euthanasia is performed by cervical dislocation or other SPCA approved method, using properly maintained and appropriate equipment and methods (not killing pliers or spinning/flicking), as soon as untreatable pain, distress, injury or disease is detected.		
H19 & H20	Staff conducting euthanasia are properly trained and inspect all euthanased birds to confirm death.		
	Mortality		
H21 & H22	Daily mortality rates are recorded and investigated if they exceed 0.8 % in week one and 1 % in any subsequent week.		
H23	Carcasses are disposed of safely and according to local regulations.		
	Biosecurity		
H24 & H25	A detailed biosecurity plan is in place and pest control programmes are reviewed annually.		

Reference Standard	Summarised standard	Check (Y/N)	Comments
	Appropriate Behaviour		
	Care of chicks		
B2	A plan is in place to ensure chick welfare if they cannot be placed immediately upon arrival at the farm.		
B3 – B5	Chicks are handled with care and inspected three times each day. Any problems are immediately addressed and placement records are kept.		
	Platforms		
B6 & B8	Birds have access to 3 m of platform space/1000 birds from seven days of age.		
B7, B9 & B10	Platforms are suitable for the birds to use and a distributed appropriately throughout the shed.		
B11	Platforms are put back immediately after thinning or depopulation.		
	Behavioural enrichment		

B12 – B14	Enrichment, spread evenly through the shed, is available to all birds and cleaned or disposed of between flocks.		
B15	Use of the enrichment by birds is recorded every week.		
	Stocking densities		
B16	All birds have enough space to move freely, turn around and perform normal/natural behaviours.		
B17 & B19	Birds are not stocked at more than 34 kg/m ² indoors and 10 birds/m ² outdoors.		
	Managers, stock-keepers and other personnel		
B21	All staff understand and comply with the latest version of the standards and relevant Codes of Welfare.		
B22 & B23	Policies covering staff negligence and whistleblowing around bird welfare are in place and complaints followed up.		
B24 – B26	There are enough staff to care for the birds and they are appropriately trained, with training records kept on file.		

B27 – B29	Staff are aware of their animal welfare responsibilities, do not undertake unsupervised tasks until fully trained and know who to report problems/issues to.		
	Catching		
B30 & B31	Birds are caught in a calm and careful manner, with individual birds being caught and carried upright.		
B32	No more than three birds are carried per hand, during catching for slaughter and never by their wings, tails, necks or head.		
B33	Birds are never caught or handled in a way that causes injury or pain.		
B34	Migration barriers are used, when needed, to prevent smothering and over-crowding.		
B35 & B36	Catching is done under low/blue light conditions and at a speed that does not compromise welfare.		
B37	Birds that are injured during catching are promptly treated or else euthanased to minimise suffering.		
	Depopulation		

B38 & B39	Staff are properly trained in bird depopulation and work according to a depopulation plan.		
B40	Birds have access to the range until the day before depopulation.		
B41 – B43	The indoor environment is controlled and where enrichment is removed, it is done at the same time as feed withdrawal, which must not be longer than twelve hours before catching.		
B44	Birds have access to water until immediately before catching begins.		
B45 & B46	A nominated catching supervisor is in place and all noise is kept to a minimum.		
B47	Anyone breaching the standards is stopped, appropriate action taken and the incident documented.		
B48	Birds that are injured during depopulation are promptly treated or else euthanased to minimise suffering.		

B49	Thinning/cuts are done in a way that maximises bird welfare, with food, water and any enrichment being provided to the remaining birds as soon as the procedure is completed.		
B50	Auditable records are kept of each depopulation.		
	Loading and unloading		
B51	Only properly trained people load and unload birds.		
B52 & B53	Birds are put in transport containers inside the shed and transport vehicles are parked as close to the shed as possible.		
B54	Birds are put into transport containers upright and are not dropped/thrown into them.		
B55	All transport equipment is inspected before loading and is deemed appropriate for the task.		
B56	Transport containers are at least 22 cm high, not stocked at more than 57 kg/m ² and provide sufficient ventilation/space for the birds.		
B57	Birds are loaded into containers with care and containers are handled gently.		

B58 & B59	Transport containers are safely secured on the vehicle and are not thrown or dropped during handling.		
B60	Containers and vehicles have enough ventilation to avoid exposing the birds to harm.		
B61	Birds injured during loading are treated or else euthanased to minimise suffering.		

END OF ASSESSMENT



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