

# SHOULD THIS BIRD BE LOADED?

*A guide for preparing, loading,  
and transporting poultry*



# Introduction

*Farmers work hard to ensure their animals are properly cared for 365 days of the year. In order to ensure good welfare throughout the birds' life, it is also important to ensure proper care during catching and loading onto trucks leaving the farm, until the birds arrive at the processing plant.*

*This guide is designed to assist poultry farmers, catching crews, and haulers in making decisions about which birds should be loaded for transportation.*

*This handbook provides additional details for the information provided within the **"Should This Bird be Loaded?"** decision tree and poster. Only healthy birds that are fit to withstand the journey to the final destination should be loaded and transported.*



***This project was possible due to the following partnerships:***

*Ontario Ministry of Agriculture  
Food and Rural Affairs*

*Poultry Industry Council*

*University of Guelph*

*Ontario Farm Animal Council*

*Chicken Farmers of Ontario*

*Egg Farmers of Ontario*

*Turkey Farmers of Ontario*

*Ontario Broiler Hatching Egg  
and Chick Commission*

*Association of Ontario Chicken  
Processors*

**www.livestockwelfare.com**

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To order additional copies of any of the **Poultry Decision Tree** materials, please contact OFAC or Poultry Industry Council.

*This guide is intended to assist producers in making ethical and responsible decisions regarding poultry transportation. The authors do not make any representations, warranties or conditions, either express or implied, with respect to any of the information contained in this guide. This information is offered entirely at the risk of the recipient and as the recipient assumes full responsibility, the authors shall not be liable for any claims, damages, or losses of any kind based on any theory of liability arising out of the use of, or reliance upon, the information (including omissions, inaccuracies, typographical errors, and infringement of third party rights).*

# SHOULD THIS BIRD BE LOADED?

## Guidelines for Transporting Poultry

### LOAD & TRANSPORT HEALTHY BIRDS

#### DO NOT LOAD DO NOT TRANSPORT

- Weak and/or not alert
- Dark red, purple, or black combs or wattles
- Discharge from eyes/nostrials
- Swollen head/neck
- Skin on head or neck is dark red or very pale (**Exception: toms can have bright blue skin in this area**)
- Bloody and/or prolapsed vents
- Emaciated and weak: very thin, easily felt breastbone (**Exception: end-of-lay hens may have pronounced breastbones but if emaciated they must not be loaded**)
- Dislocated, broken or exposed bones (**including injury due to handling**)
- Unable to rise or walk due to physical abnormality or injury

*Birds not loaded should be segregated according to on-farm protocol.*

*Notify farm manager of birds left on the farm before leaving.*

#### CAUTION

Conditions requiring assessment before loading

##### Environmental

- Wet birds in cool or cold weather
- Heat and/or humidity
- Cold and/or wind chill
- Road closures

##### Individual Bird

- Minor trauma, wounds or bleeding (**including injury due to handling**)

##### Flock

- Diarrhea
- Coughing and sneezing - "snickering"
- If a flock is diagnosed with a disease by a veterinarian or laboratory special provisions for loading may be required.

**Assessment and joint decisions should be made by the producer, catching crew, transporter and processing plant when faced with**

**CAUTION conditions**

#### Regulations

No person shall load or cause to be loaded... an animal that by reason of infirmity, illness, injury, fatigue or any other cause cannot be transported without undue suffering during the expected journey.

Health of Animals Regulations, Part XII, 136, 2a

#### DO NOT

- Transport a sick or injured bird
- Load or unload a bird in a way likely to cause injury or suffering
- Crowd birds to such an extent as to cause injury or undue suffering

[www.inspection.gc.ca](http://www.inspection.gc.ca)

#### Violators of the Health of Animals Act:

- ⇒ Fines up to \$10,000
- ⇒ Increased fines for repeat offenders
- ⇒ Repeat offenders posted on CFIA website

# Guidelines for Dealing with Poultry

## LOAD & TRANSPORT HEALTHY

1. Identify
2. Cull
3. Dispose

### CFIA

### Livestock Emergency Transport Line

1-877-814-2342  
(Ontario only)

## Identification of Sick or Injured Birds



Weak, not alert



Emaciated



Unable to walk



Unable to rise/ walk  
due to physical  
abnormality



Swollen head



Discoloured comb



Broken leg

(Do not confuse with fatigue)

## Environmental Considerations

### Factors to Consider

- Duration of travel (including loading and unloading)
- Weather at load-out, along route and at processing plant
- Time of day of load-out
- Number of birds in the barn
- Ventilation in barn
- Condition of barn (e.g. litter)

Maximum Loading & Transport Densities	Moderate	Extreme Heat
Broiler Chickens	63 kg/m <sup>2</sup>	54 kg/m <sup>2</sup>
Broiler Breeders	66 kg/m <sup>2</sup>	56 kg/m <sup>2</sup>
Turkeys	98 kg/m <sup>2</sup>	83 kg/m <sup>2</sup>
End-of-Lay Hens	63 kg/m <sup>2</sup>	54 kg/m <sup>2</sup>

Reference: The Recommended Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Farm Animals - Poultry

### Recommended Code of Practice for the Care & Handling of Farm Animals

Air temperature in load should be maintained at 5°C to 30°C for all birds, except end-of-lay hens, which should be maintained at 13°C to 30°C.

Recent research (Mitchell and Kettlewell, 2008) recommends for broilers, an upper in load temperature limit of 24°C.



# Poultry Welfare

*It's everyone's responsibility!*

## Definition

The welfare of a bird includes its physical and mental state. Good welfare implies both fitness and a sense of well-being. All birds must be protected from undue suffering.



**Bird welfare starts in the barn and continues through loading, transportation, and slaughter at the processing plant. Everyone who works with birds is responsible for maintaining bird welfare.**



# Federal Regulations



CFIA Health of Animals Regulations [www.inspection.gc.ca](http://www.inspection.gc.ca)

## What is your responsibility in the Health of Animals Regulations?

### DO:

- Load or transport birds that are **free from infirmity, illness, injury, fatigue or any other cause** which may induce undue suffering during the expected journey
- Load or unload the birds in a way that **prevents injury or undue suffering**
- Load or transport birds using densities which **minimize crowding**. For more information reference the Transportation Codes of Practice
- **Minimize transport times** (less than 36 hours)
- Transport birds in a manner that they are **unlikely to suffer due to exposure to the weather or inadequate ventilation**

### Violators may receive Administrative Monetary Penalties (AMPs)

Notice of violation:

- With warning
- With penalty

**\$1,300 - \$10,000**

Up to **\$15,000** based on the severity of the violation and the history of the offender

CFIA posts repeat offenders (multiple offenses within 5 years) on their website

**Did you know?** *CFIA has the authority to inspect birds during loading, and to stop and inspect trucks during transit.*



# Identify - Cull - Dispose (ICD)

## *Producer practices prior to loading.*

*Load Healthy Birds.*

*Refer to your **On-Farm Animal Care Program** for details.*

### **I**dentify

As part of your daily routine, identify birds that have **DO NOT LOAD** conditions. Refer to pages **12 - 17** for guidelines.

### **C**ull

Adopting a daily culling program will minimize the number of **DO NOT LOAD** birds left in the barn after a load-out. This will improve load-out efficiency and eliminate the need to euthanize a large number of birds left on the farm.

Euthanasia must result in a **quick death without pain or distress**. The method depends on the number and type of birds being culled and it must be performed by **competent personnel**.



# Identify - Cull - Dispose (ICD)

## *Producer practices prior to loading.*

**Cull** - Euthanasia results in a **quick death without pain or distress.**

### **Acceptable Euthanasia Methods**

- Blunt force trauma to the head
- Non-penetrating captive bolt
- Cervical dislocation

#### **For Large Numbers of Birds:**

- CO<sub>2</sub> gas administered at appropriate concentrations
- Other inert gases such as argon

*\*All euthanasia methods must be performed by competent personnel.*

### **Unacceptable Euthanasia Methods**

- Physical trauma not listed under "acceptable methods"
- Suffocation
- Drowning
- Rapid freezing
- Injecting household products or solvents, or chemical irritants
- Maceration for birds older than 72 hours
- Poisons
- Burdizzo/Castration forceps

Reference: "AVMA Guidelines on Euthanasia"

## **Dispose**

Refer to provincial regulations for guidelines on disposal.

# Handling Guidelines for Catching Crews

Proper handling will minimize injuries during catching & loading

## Caged end-of-lay hens

### DO

- Remove birds from cages using two legs
- Remove only one or two birds from a cage at a time (depending on the size of the cage door)
- Minimize passing of birds between people
- End-of-lay hens are more fragile than other poultry
- Place birds gently and upright in the liner

### DO NOT

- Carry the birds by the wings or neck
- Load birds with **"DO NOT LOAD"** conditions
- Swing, throw or drop the birds
- Squeeze the legs

## Turkeys

### DO

- Minimize passing of birds between people
- Place birds gently and upright in the liner
- Ensure no part of the bird is protruding from the liner before closing the door

### DO NOT

- Herd birds in a way likely to cause smothering or piling
- Carry the birds by the wings or neck
- Load birds with **"DO NOT LOAD"** conditions
- Swing, throw, or drop the birds

# Handling Guidelines for Catching Crews

Proper handling will minimize injuries during catching & loading

## Floor birds – chickens

### DO

- Minimize passing of birds between people
- Place birds upright and gently inside the crates

### DO NOT

- Herd birds in a way likely to cause smothering or piling
- Carry the birds by the wings or neck
- Load birds with **"DO NOT LOAD"** conditions
- Swing, throw, or drop the birds

## Humane Broiler Catching

For Catching Crews



Produced by  
Ontario Ministry of Agriculture Food and Rural Affairs  
Association of Ontario Chicken Processors  
Chicken Farmers of Ontario  
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## OMAFRA offers Humane Handling courses for:

- Broilers
- Layers & Pullets
- Turkeys

*These train-the-trainer sessions are offered free of charge. If you are interested please contact the OMAFRA Poultry Specialist.*

# DO NOT LOAD

Segregate and notify the Farm Manager

## **Weak and/or not alert**

These birds might not run away from you when approached (floor chickens), or might move with the group when being herded (turkeys). They might have their heads on the litter and their feathers fluffed up.



**These birds should not be confused with large tom turkeys that become fatigued during herding!**

# DO NOT LOAD

Segregate and notify the Farm Manager

**Skin on head or neck is dark red or very pale**

Compared to other birds in the flock, these birds will have discoloured faces. They might also show other **DO NOT LOAD** symptoms.



**Mature male turkeys (Toms) can have vibrant blue, red, or purple on the face or neck**



**WE ARE HEALTHY!**



*Should this bird be loaded?*

*Pg 13*

# DO NOT LOAD

Segregate and notify the Farm Manager

## Swollen head and/or neck

The face or head will be puffy and eyes might be swollen shut. These birds might also have wounds on their heads.



## Discharge from eyes and/or nostrils





# DO NOT LOAD

Segregate and notify the Farm Manager

## Dark red, purple, or black combs and wattles

Discoloured combs or wattles indicate that a bird is sick.

The bird might also be compromised (weak, not alert, and thin).



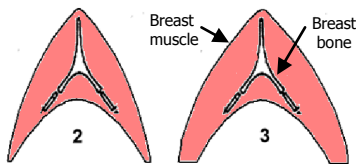
## Bloody and/or prolapsed vents

The area under the tail will have exposed red tissue that appears to stick out. There can also be blood in the area. Prolapsed vents are painful and hens can bleed out and die if the prolapse is pecked or stepped on.

**Look for this in end-of-lay hens and broiler breeders.**

# DO NOT LOAD

Segregate and notify the Farm Manager



**Body Condition Scores of 2 or 3** reflect healthy birds with good muscle tone. **LOAD THESE BIRDS!**



A **Body Condition Score of 1** can reflect a compromised broiler chicken or turkey. Segregate these birds and notify the farm manager.

**Thin End-of-lay hens SHOULD NOT be confused with emaciated birds.**

End-of-lay hens will be less muscular than broilers or breeders due to their production cycle and genetics. End-of-lay hens may receive a body condition score of 1 and still be loaded. Cautionary measures might be needed (E.g. adjustment of loading densities, tarping).



A **Body Condition Score of 0** reflects an emaciated, very thin and weak bird. The breastbone is very easy to feel. The muscles dip into the breastbone on the side (concave breast muscle). Emaciated birds will be weak and

**MUST NOT BE LOADED**

These birds do not have the energy reserves to withstand the stress of catching and transportation, and will likely be dead-on-arrival (DOA).

# DO NOT LOAD

Segregate and notify the Farm Manager

## Dislocated, broken and/or exposed bones

These injuries are painful. Wings might droop on the ground and legs might stick out at odd angles. Legs might also be discoloured with bruises.

### **DO NOT LOAD** birds with broken and/or exposed bones!

Dislocated and broken bones are painful during catching and transport due to handling bumps and motion. Broken bones can also limit the birds ability to move around in the crate or liner.



*Birds unable to rise or walk due to physical abnormality or injury should not be confused with turkeys that become fatigued during herding!*

# CAUTION

Conditions requiring assessment

## Environmental Cautions

### Wet Birds

- **DO NOT LOAD** wet birds in cool or cold weather.
- Protect birds from getting wet during loading by using tarps and eaves troughs.
- Use *caution* when loading wet birds in moderate conditions.



See **page 21** for loading and transportation temperature guidelines.

**Wet birds cannot maintain their body temperature in cool or cold weather and are more likely to freeze to death during transport (DOAs).**

**Wet birds that are loaded in cool or cold weather are a significant cause of DOAs and every effort should be taken to ensure the birds are dry when they are loaded and stay dry during transport.**

# CAUTION

Conditions requiring assessment

## Environmental Cautions

### Road Closures



- Be aware of road closures prior to loading so that alternative routes or loading times can be established.
- Listen for current updates and look for alternate routes when necessary.

### Be Aware of...

1. Snow Storms
2. Weather Conditions & Road Closures
3. Accidents
4. Roll Overs/Crashes
5. Construction



# CAUTION

Conditions requiring assessment

## Temperature, Humidity and Wind Chill

When determining whether a flock should be loaded during adverse weather conditions a joint decision should be made by the producer, catching company, hauling company, and processing plant **prior** to load-out.

### Have you considered...

- ☒ Condition of birds & barn
- ☒ Weather & travel conditions
- ☒ Duration of travel
- ☒ Time of loading
- ☒ Tarps on trucks
- ☒ Wind chill or humidity

### ***Recommended Code of Practice for Poor Weather Conditions***

Air temperature **in the load** should be maintained between 5°C (43°F) and 30°C (86°F) for all birds, **except** end-of-lay hens in which the load should be maintained between 13°C (55°F) and 30°C (86°F)

**DO NOT LOAD WET BIRDS IN COOL OR COLD WEATHER!**

Recent research (Mitchell and Kettlewell, 2008) recommends for broilers, an upper **in load** temperature limit of 24°C.



# CAUTION

Conditions requiring assessment

## Air Temperature

Maximum Loading & Transport Guidelines	Moderate	Extreme Heat Density
Broiler Chickens	63 kg/m <sup>2</sup>	54 kg/m <sup>2</sup>
Broiler Breeders	66 kg/m <sup>2</sup>	56 kg/m <sup>2</sup>
Turkeys	98 kg/m <sup>2</sup>	83 kg/m <sup>2</sup>
End-of-Lay Hens	63 kg/m <sup>2</sup>	54 kg/m <sup>2</sup>

Reference: The Recommended Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Farm Animals - Poultry

When transporting birds during extreme temperatures discussions between all stakeholders should occur to assess whether or not birds should be loaded and if the truck can be delayed until better conditions are available.

The above chart provides guidelines regarding stocking densities at different temperatures however these do not consider wind chill or humidity. Additionally, across Canada these temperatures and guidelines might differ due to moisture levels in the air.

# CAUTION

Conditions requiring assessment



***How many  
birds  
per crate?***

**The following charts can be used as a guide for deciding how many birds should be loaded per crate .**

*The charts are based on the Recommended Codes of Practice, and provide **maximum** bird numbers.*

When deciding to transport, consider: temperature (in load), wind chill, humidity level and precipitation

Adjust tarps and include strategically placed empty crates to improve air movement and ventilation.

# CAUTION

Conditions requiring assessment

## Guideline for Loading Broiler Chickens into 44" x 28" Anglia Modules Drawers (0.79m<sup>2</sup>)

Weight (kg)	1.75kg	2.00kg	2.25kg	2.50kg	2.80kg	3.50kg
	Maximum Number of Birds / Drawer					
Moderate (63 kg/m <sup>2</sup> )	28	25	22	20	18	14
Extreme Heat (54 kg/m <sup>2</sup> )	24	21	19	17	15	12

## Guideline for Loading Broiler Chickens into 44" x 47" Linco Module Drawers (1.3m<sup>2</sup>)

Weight (kg)	1.75kg	2.00kg	2.25kg	2.50kg	2.80kg	3.50kg
	Maximum Number of Birds / Drawer					
Moderate (63 kg/m <sup>2</sup> )	48	42	37	34	30	24
Extreme Heat (54 kg/m <sup>2</sup> )	41	36	32	29	26	21

# CAUTION

Conditions requiring assessment

## Guideline for Loading Broiler Chickens into 23" x 34" Chicken Crates (0.50m<sup>2</sup>)

Weight (kg)	1.75kg	2.00kg	2.25kg	2.50kg	2.80kg	3.50kg
	Maximum Number of Birds / Crate					
Moderate (63 kg/m <sup>2</sup> )	18	16	14	13	11	9
Extreme Heat (54 kg/m <sup>2</sup> )	15	14	12	11	10	8

## Guideline for Loading End-of-lay hens into 45" x 16" End-of-lay hen Baskets (0.46m<sup>2</sup>)

Weight (kg)	1.50kg	1.70kg	1.80kg	2.00kg	2.50kg	2.70kg
	Maximum Number of Birds / Basket					
Moderate (63 kg/m <sup>2</sup> )	19	17	16	14	12	11
Extreme Heat (54 kg/m <sup>2</sup> )	17	15	14	12	10	9

# CAUTION

Conditions requiring assessment

## Guideline for Loading Turkeys into 45" x 45" Large Liners (1.32m<sup>2</sup>)

Weight (kg)	5.29kg	6.50kg	7.87kg	10.00kg	15.00kg	20.00kg
	Maximum Number of Birds / Liner					
Moderate (98 kg/m <sup>2</sup> )	24	20	16	13	9	6
Extreme Heat (83 kg/m <sup>2</sup> )	21	17	14	11	7	5

## Guidelines for Loading Turkeys into 45" x 37" Small Liners (1.09m<sup>2</sup>)

Weights (Kg)	5.29kg	6.50kg	7.87kg	10.00kg	15.00kg	20.00kg
	Maximum Number of Birds / Liner					
Moderate (98 kg/m <sup>2</sup> )	20	16	14	11	7	5
Extreme Heat (83 kg/m <sup>2</sup> )	17	14	11	9	6	5

# CAUTION

Conditions requiring assessment

**Humidex = "Feels Like" Temperature**

**Source:**  
**Environment Canada**

Temperatures are listed across the top and humidity down the side. The temperature that correlates with each level of humidity combine to make a humidex value (or "feels like" temperature).

		Temperature			
		20 C	25 C	30 C	35 C
Humidity	50%	22	28	36	45
	60%	24	30	38	46
	70%	25	32	41	49
	75%	26	33	42	50
	80%	26	33	43	52
	85%	27	34	44	53

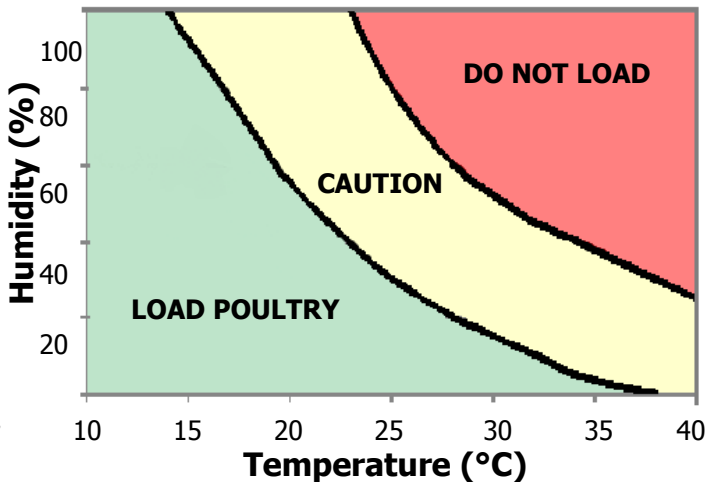
**For more information:**

Classen H.L., Knezacek T., Audren G.P., Stephens S., Crowe, T., Barber E.M., Olkowski A.A., Mitchell, M.A. Kettlewell P.J. (2002): Final Report : Studies on Broiler Chicken Transportation in Saskatchewan; Project SDAF# 19990246-24BX

Mitchell, MA, and PJ Kettlewell, 1998. Physiological stress and welfare of broiler chickens in transit: solutions not problems! Poultry Science, 77: pp. 1803-1814.

Mitchel, MA, Kettlewell, PJ, Carlisle, AJ and Matheu, C. 1996. The use of apparent equivalent temperature (AET) to define the optimum thermal environment for broilers in transit. Poultry Science 75, supplement : p. 18

**Humidex Guidelines for Loading Poultry**





# CAUTION

Conditions requiring assessment

## Individual Bird

- Cuts and lesions on the skin will vary in severity.
- The size of the injury should be considered, as well as its location and how the bird appears.
- If unsure whether a wound is severe enough to cause undue suffering during transport, speak to a supervisor.



### **Identify - Cull - Dispose**

*The farm manager should ensure birds are ready to load before crews arrive and euthanize ALL birds that **SHOULD NOT BE LOADED***

## Be aware...

If vet or lab diagnosis confirms disease, the flock may be deemed fit for transport despite the condition of the birds. In this case, special transport provisions may need to be considered, such as:

**Density**  
**Biosecurity**  
**Handling**  
**Loading times**  
**Transport Time**  
**Weather Conditions**



## Flock

**Diarrhea** can be due to diet or illness. An individual bird with diarrhea is unfit if it also shows symptoms listed under **DO NOT LOAD**. A flock with diarrhea might be wet, and wet birds should not be transported in cold weather.

# CTIONARY

## Definitions

### Compromised Bird

A bird with reduced capacity to withstand the stress of transportation, due to injury, fatigue, infirmity, poor health, distress, or any other cause *(Adapted from CFIA Compromised Animals Policy)*

### Distress

An aversive, negative state in which coping and adaptation processes fail to return an organism to a normal physiological and/or psychological state *(Adapted from Carstens and Moberg 2000; Moberg 1987; NRC 1992)*

### Euthanasia

The humane destruction of an animal accomplished by a method that produces rapid unconsciousness and subsequent death without evidence of pain or distress, or a method that utilizes anaesthesia produced by an agent that causes loss of consciousness and subsequent death. "Euthanasia" originates from the Greek language: **eu** meaning "**good**" and **thanatos** meaning "**death**".

### Fatigue

Extreme tiredness/weakness, typically resulting from mental or physical exertion or illness.



## Definitions

### **Prolapse**

Also known as “prolapsed oviduct”, “prolapsed vent”, or “blowout”. Occurs when the lower part of the hen's oviduct (egg duct) protrudes through the vent. A prolapse often leads to pecking, meaning the bird can also be injured/bleeding.

### **Segregate**

To set apart from the rest or from each other; isolate or divide.

### **Suffering**

To submit to or be forced to endure something that causes pain or distress.

### **Transportation Time**

The time from when the first bird is loaded to when the last bird is unloaded.

### **Welfare**

How an animal is coping with the conditions in which it lives. An animal is in a good state of welfare if (as indicated by scientific evidence) it is healthy, comfortable, well-nourished, safe, able to express innate behaviour, and is not suffering from unpleasant states, such as pain, fear, and distress.

(Source: American Veterinary Medical Association)



## References

1. **FAWC: Farm Animal Welfare Council. *5 Freedoms***  
<http://www.fawc.org.uk>
2. **Agriculture and Agri-Food Administrative Monetary Penalties Act 2010**  
*Regulations Amending the Agriculture and Agri-Food Administrative Monetary Penalties Regulations.* <http://www.gazette.gc.ca>
3. **National Farm Animal Care Council 2003**  
***Recommended Code of Practice***  
*for the care and handling of pullets, layers and spent fowl.*  
<http://www.nfacc.ca/>
4. **AVMA Guidelines on Euthanasia**  
[http://www.avma.org/issues/animal\\_welfare/euthanasia.pdf](http://www.avma.org/issues/animal_welfare/euthanasia.pdf)
5. **CFIA Health of Animals Regulations**  
[http://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/PDF/C.R.C.,\\_c.\\_296.pdf](http://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/PDF/C.R.C.,_c._296.pdf)
6. **Loading Densities**  
<http://www.nfacc.ca/codes-of-practice/chicken-turkeys-and-breeders>



# Contacts



**Ontario Farm Animal Council (OFAC)**  
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**Ontario**

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LOADED" information**

