

Recommended code of practice for the care and handling of pullets, layers and spent fowl

THE CODES OF PRACTICE:

The Codes of Practice are nationally developed guidelines for the care and handling of different species of farm animals. Codes are not intended to be used as production manuals but rather as an educational tool in the promotion of sound husbandry and welfare practices. The Codes contain recommendations to assist farmers and others in the agriculture and food sector to compare and improve their own management practices.

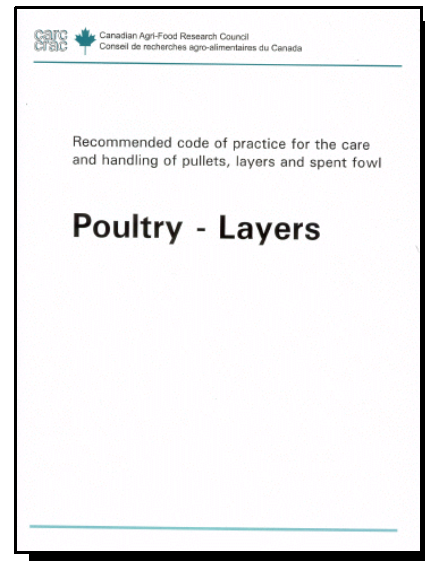
The Recommended code of practice for the care and handling of pullets, layers and spent fowl:

This voluntary code consists of recommended guidelines encouraging producers of eggs for consumption to adopt the best possible husbandry and welfare practices. As such, this code is not a standard.

There is an increasing awareness that currently accepted moral standards for our society call for the prevention of any avoidable suffering. Domestication and selective breeding have made farm animals dependent on humans. Consequently, according to ethical principles, humans must accept this domestication as a commitment for humane conduct toward chickens for their ultimate well-being.

This factsheet highlights a small amount of the information found in the complete Recommended code of practice for the care and handling of pullets, layers and spent fowl.

A copy of the complete Recommended Code of Practice can be found at the Canadian Agri-Food Research Council's web site:
www.carc-crac.ca



Highlights from the Recommended code of practice for the care and handling of pullets, layers and spent fowl

Introduction:

- This code provides recommendations on the care and handling of chickens raised specifically for the purpose of producing eggs for consumption. It includes recommendations for the following stages:
 - Ø following delivery of chicks to the farm premises
 - Ø during the lay cycle
 - Ø during depopulation of the layer barn
 - Ø loading and transportation to a slaughter facility.

Section 1: Attendants and Visitors

- Persons working with chickens must understand and accept their responsibility to prevent any form of avoidable suffering. All flock owners should ensure they and their workers have received instruction in and are knowledgeable of the basic needs of the birds entrusted to their care. Attendants should be able to recognize obvious behavioural signs that indicate health problems and discomfort.

Section 2: Supervision and Protection

- Flocks should be observed at least twice daily by trained individuals. The physical arrangement of housing should permit easy inspection of all birds.
- Sick or injured birds must be promptly treated or killed humanely, for example by cervical dislocation.
- Beak trimming should be carried out only by highly competent, trained individuals. Particular attention must be paid to selection and adjustment of the equipment and to its maintenance. Beak trimming should ideally take place prior to 14 days of age.

Section 3: Receiving New Birds

- Housing facilities should be cleaned, disinfected and prepared to receive the chickens at the time of their arrival
- Chickens should be carefully removed from the containers they were transported in.

Section 4: Housing

- Whatever housing system is utilized, producers should maintain records detailing space allocations provided to the birds, and in this way document that space allocations generally conform to the guidelines of the Code.

Cage systems:

- Space requirements increase as the birds approach their mature weight, and allowance must be made for this. Upon replacement of equipment, the following floor space recommendations apply to egg type birds housed in multiple bird cages (three or more adults).

Table 1 – Space requirements for laying hens, according to weight.

Age (weeks)	Maximum body weight (g)	Minimum cage floor space (cm ²) (sq.in.) ⁵	
0 - 6	400 (0.88 lb.)	150	(23)
6 - 12	950 (2.09 lb.)	270	(42)
12 - 18/19	1320 (2.91 lb.)	335	(52)
adult ¹	1700 (3.74 lb.)	432 ⁴	(67)
adult ²	1900 (4.18 lb.)	483 ³	(75)

¹ typical white-egg layer

² typical brown-egg layer

³ same allocation of cm²/g of body weight as⁴

⁴ UEP recommendation for 2008

⁵ rounded to nearest whole sq. in.

Free-run, indoor systems for commercial layers:

- Floor space requirements for free-run, indoor systems vary considerably depending on breed, ambient temperature and whether any or all of the floor consists of wire or wooden slats. In general, the most space is required in systems with 100% litter floors, and the least where the floor is entirely wire or slats. Producers should interpolate between the extremes in the following table based on individual circumstances.

Table 2 – Space requirements for free-run, indoor systems for commercial layers

Age(weeks)	Maximum body weight (g)	Minimum floor space (cm ²)	
		all litter	all wire/slats
0 - 6	400 (0.88 lb.)	500 (78 in ²)	250 (39 in ²)
6 -18/19	1320 (2.90 lb.)	1400 (217 in ²)	700 (109 in ²)
adult ¹	1700 (3.74 lb.)	1700 (264 in ²)	850 (132 in ²)
adult ²	1900 (4.18 lb.)	1900 (295 in ²)	950 (147 in ²)

¹ typical white-egg layer

² typical brown-egg layer

Free-range, Systems with Access to Outdoors:

- Land where free-range systems are constructed should be well drained and muddy conditions should be avoided, as this may lead to discomfort of the bird and increases the risk of disease.
- Perimeter fencing is required to protect pullets and layers against foxes, cats, dogs and other predators.

Section 5: Temperature, Lighting and Ventilation

- Layers and pullets should be protected against drafts and cold areas. In free-range systems with access to the outdoors, birds must be provided with a shaded area and shelter against adverse weather conditions.

Section 6: Nutrition

- Aggressive behaviour may occur when chickens are forced to compete for inadequate resources. To avoid this, make sure layers are provided with enough feeding and watering space and an adequate and predictable supply of feed and water. Feed formulations should reflect the different stage growth of birds and housing system used.
- Controlled moulting is not a common practice in Canada. Scientific evidence suggests this practice is stressful for birds. Consequently, controlled moulting by methods involving deprivation of feed is to be phased out by 2005.

Section 7: Handling and Transportation

- Successful humane transportation of birds depends upon good co-ordination among all involved parties (including producers). Transportation starts at the time of loading the first bird at the point of origin and ends after it is unloaded at the final destination. Confinement time should be as short as possible, consistent with humane handling and treatment.
- All members of catching and transporting crews should be properly instructed and knowledgeable about the basic aspects of animal welfare and in handling birds. An experienced supervisor should supervise all catching crews. Proper training and evaluation of personnel is the responsibility of the employer. Catching and loading should take place in a timely and efficient manner to prevent suffering.

All Recommended Codes of Practice are presently developed by a national committee consisting of representatives from farm groups, animal welfare groups, veterinarians, animals scientists, federal and provincial governments, industry and related agriculture sectors. The following are some of the organizations that provided input at various stages in the drafting of this Code:

- Canadian Food Inspection Agency
- Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada
- Canadian Federation of Humane Societies
- Canadian Veterinary Medical Association
- Canadian Egg Marketing Agency

In 1993, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada asked the Canadian Agri-Food Research Council (CARC) and its Canada Committee on Animals and Expert Committee on Farm Animal Welfare and Behaviour to take the lead in cooperation with the Canadian Federation of Humane Societies in updating existing Codes and developing new Codes. CARC officially agreed to take on this responsibility in February 1995.

Further information on the process of Code development can be obtained from the Canadian Agri-Food Research Council (CARC), Heritage House, Building 60, Central Experimental Farm, Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0C6.

This factsheet was prepared by Penny Lawlis, Animal Care Specialist, Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food with the assistance of an Editorial Committee. Animal welfare factsheets have been printed and distributed through the financial support of your provincial agriculture department.