



Turkeys

RSPCA APPROVED FARMING SCHEME STANDARDS

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Overview

Introduction

RSPCA Australia seeks to ensure high animal welfare standards through its RSPCA Approved Farming Scheme.

The RSPCA Approved Farming Scheme Standards – Turkeys, set standards that are designed to assist the industry to continually improve and demonstrate high animal welfare outcomes for turkey meat production.

RSPCA Australia believes that the adoption of these Standards will improve the welfare of all birds in turkey production systems through the application of production practices that will meet their behavioural and physiological needs.

RSPCA Australia recognises that industry already addresses issues associated with food safety, traceability, occupational health and safety, and the environment through a variety of quality assurance (QA) programs, thus these Standards are expected to be integrated with existing industry and/or retail QA programs and practices.

These Standards are based upon RSPCA policy, available scientific research, current legislation applied in Australia, codes of practice and standards and guidelines for animal welfare, veterinary and technical advice, and current industry good practice.

Principles underpinning the RSPCA Approved Farming Scheme Standards

The Standards are based on the 'Five Freedoms':

- Freedom from hunger and thirst: by ready access to fresh water and a diet to maintain full health and vigour.
- Freedom from discomfort: by providing an appropriate environment including shelter and a comfortable resting area.
- Freedom from pain, injury or disease: by prevention, rapid diagnosis and treatment.
- Freedom to express normal behaviour: by providing sufficient space, proper facilities and company of the animal's own kind.
- Freedom from fear and distress: by ensuring conditions and treatment which avoid mental suffering.

Although these 'freedoms' define ideal states, they provide a comprehensive framework for the assessment of animal welfare on farm, during transport and for slaughter. These 'freedoms' provide the framework for the standards in this scheme, presented as follows:

- sourcing and management of poults
- food and water
- environment, housing and accommodation
- management
- health
- pick-up and transport
- slaughter.

RSPCA Australia considers that these 'freedoms' will be better provided for if those responsible for the care of turkeys provide:

- caring and responsible planning and management
- skilled, knowledgeable and conscientious husbandry staff
- appropriate environmental design
- considerate handling and transport
- humane slaughter.

Overview

Scope

These Standards apply to turkeys kept in eligible systems in Australia.

Eligibility

Products that are eligible for approval under the RSPCA Approved Farming Scheme must be derived from turkeys housed in systems which meet the provisions of these Standards.

Definitions of eligible housing systems under the scheme include:

- Indoor systems where turkeys are free to roam within a shed which meets the specifications of these Standards.
- Free-range systems (turkey meat is marketed as 'free range'), where turkeys are housed in sheds, but have, by choice, access to an outdoor range. Both the shed and outdoor range must meet the specifications of these Standards.

Application

The documentation that supports the RSPCA Approved Farming Scheme consists of:

- *Operations Manual* - details the operation of the Scheme for both Approved Producers and Licensees, including the application process and the assessment procedures.
- *Standards* (specific to each species) - provide the requirements for the rearing, handling, transport and/or slaughter of the species.
- *Templates* - for assessment and reporting.

While these Standards may contain provisions that are of a more rigorous level than those applied in the current Model Codes of Practice or relevant animal welfare Act(s), these Standards do not necessarily repeat all provisions in the legislation.

It is expected that producers are aware of and comply with animal welfare and other requirements in all State/Territory legislation relevant to the farming enterprise.

Unless otherwise stated in these Standards, compliance is also expected with the latest edition of:

- *Australian Model Code of Practice for the Welfare of Animals—Domestic Poultry* (or equivalent Australian Standard or State code where one exists).
- *Australian Standards and Guidelines for the Welfare of Animals—Land Transport of Livestock* (or equivalent Code of Practice where one exists).
- *Australian Model Code of Practice for the Welfare of Animals—Livestock at Slaughtering Establishments* (or equivalent Australian Standard or State code where one exists).

Requirements of the RSPCA Approved Farming Scheme

Specific requirements of the scheme are detailed in the Operations Manual.

Note: The Operations Manual is available to RSPCA Approved Producers and to those intending to apply for RSPCA approval. Contact RSPCA Australia for further details.

It is a requirement of the RSPCA Approved Farming Scheme that the following are completed and kept up to date:

- The Animal Care Statement including the Veterinary Health Plan (as provided in the Operations Manual) and other relevant documents that specify particular management and standard operating procedures.
- Records to support production activities as indicated in the Operations Manual.

Note: Existing QA manuals for other programs or accreditation schemes and/or existing standard operating procedures, HACCP tables or records may be utilised to meet the requirements of these Standards, provided the specific provisions and targets in these Standards are demonstrated. Equivalence, on this basis, is determined by RSPCA Australia.

It is a requirement of the RSPCA Approved Farming Scheme that each enterprise nominate a dedicated person who has:

- Responsibility and accountability for the operation of the unit.
- Responsibility for overseeing the management and application of the requirements of the scheme.

The Standards

All personnel involved in the supply, rearing, pick-up, transport and slaughter of turkeys are expected to be aware of and comply with the animal welfare requirements (specific to their role) in the relevant State/Territory legislation and, unless otherwise stated, the Australian codes or standards including:

- *Australian Model Code of Practice for the Welfare of Animals—Domestic Poultry* (or equivalent Australian standard or State code where one exists).
- *Australian Standards and Guidelines for the Welfare of Animals—Land Transport of Livestock*.
- *Australian Model Code of Practice for the Welfare of Animals—Livestock at Slaughtering Establishments* (or equivalent Australian standard or State code where one exists).

1 Sourcing and management of poults

Note: Poults to be grown out on RSPCA-Approved turkey farms should be sourced from breeder farms and hatcheries that operate in accordance with the animal welfare requirements in the *Model Code of Practice for the Welfare of Animals—Domestic Poultry* and the relevant breed standards. RSPCA Australia may request to visit the breeder farm or hatchery from which poults are sourced to ensure that these facilities operate according to procedures that aim to reduce the risk to bird welfare.

Breeding farm (parent flock)

Note: The fast growth rate of commercial turkeys can lead to physical and metabolic disorders. Poults should be sourced from slower-growing turkey breeds and from breeding farms that actively address the welfare issues associated with fast growth rate. The sourcing of less aggressive turkey strains will assist in reducing the incidence of injurious pecking.

- 1.1 Shed conditions (including lighting, ventilation, temperature and humidity), facilities, space allowance, food and water, level of inspections, health and distress, and husbandry practices should be managed at the very minimum in accordance with the animal welfare requirements in the *Model Code of Practice for the Welfare of Animals—Domestic Poultry* and the relevant breed standards.
- 1.2 All breeding farm staff should understand and apply the content of the animal welfare requirements in the *Model Code of Practice for the Welfare of Animals—Domestic Poultry* and the relevant breed standards.
- 1.3 Poults must not be sourced from breeding farms that practice induced moulting unless prior permission has been obtained from RSPCA Australia. Permission will depend on the breeding farm being able to demonstrate that the induced moult is conducted using methods that do not withdraw feed and water and that have no adverse effect on the welfare of the bird.

Hatchery

- 1.4 Hatcheries should be managed at the very minimum in accordance with the animal welfare requirements in the *Model Code of Practice for the Welfare of Animals—Domestic Poultry* and the relevant breed standards.
- 1.5 All hatchery staff should understand and apply the content of the animal welfare requirements in the *Model Code of Practice for the Welfare of Animals—Domestic Poultry* and the relevant breed standards.

- 1.6 Toe trimming of poults is not permitted.
- 1.7 Beak trimming must not be performed routinely. Where beak trimming is considered necessary, it must be performed by a competent operator using an infrared technique (see section 6.8 – 6.14).

Transport from the hatchery to the grower farm

- 1.8 Transport from the hatchery to the grower farm should be managed at the very minimum in accordance with the animal welfare requirements in the *Australian Standards and Guidelines for the Welfare of Animals—Land Transport of Livestock* and, for poults travelling by air, the International Air Transport Association's *Live Animals Regulations*.
- 1.9 The scheduling and management of poults during transport should be designed to minimise risk to their welfare. This includes ensuring that:
 - Transport is scheduled in accordance with permitted times off feed and water.
 - Transport is avoided during extreme temperatures, where this is not managed by environmentally controlled vehicles.
- 1.10 Temperature during transport of poults must be monitored and kept within targets (25-28°C) and action taken to prevent poults being exposed to heat or cold stress.

Poult placement

- 1.11 All poults must be placed within their new housing facilities as soon as possible after arrival.
- 1.12 The number of poults delivered by the hatchery must be recorded.
- 1.13 Poult transport mortalities ('dead-on-arrivals') must be recorded and reported to the hatchery.
- 1.14 The shed must be appropriately prepared prior to the arrival of the poults. Producers should refer to the relevant breed standards for guidance on specific targets. Preparation activities include:
 - flushing of water lines
 - checking water and feed availability and quality
 - cleaning and sanitation
 - litter provision
 - demarcation of the brooder area
 - appropriate temperature and ventilation settings.
- 1.15 Poults must be observed at least four times per day in the first three days following placement to ensure that their appearance, vocalisations and behaviour are normal.
- 1.16 Signs to check for include uneven distribution of the poults throughout the brooder area (e.g. huddling from being cold or spreading towards the brooder area perimeter from being hot). If these signs are observed, action must be taken to adjust temperature for the poults. Any other abnormal behaviours should be identified and action taken accordingly.

Rearing of poults (brooding)

- 1.17 Poults should gain weight, or at least maintain their bodyweight, immediately after placement and, particularly, in the first seven days of life. Producers should refer to the relevant breed standards for guidance on specific growth rate targets.

Sourcing and management of poults

- 1.18 Poults mortality must be recorded daily and identified as 'deaths' or 'culls'. A flock mortality rate of greater than 2.5% in the first seven days of life must trigger appropriate diagnostic and corrective action (see section 5.5).
- 1.19 Feed and watering facilities must be well spaced within the brooding area to enable easy access by birds.
- 1.20 Throughout the brooding period, poult behaviour and distribution across the brooding area must be closely monitored and action taken to adjust the shed temperature, ventilation or lighting regime accordingly. Producers should refer to the relevant breed standards for guidance on specific targets relating to the rearing environment.
- 1.21 Poults require a minimum light intensity of 50-100 lux on the first day of placement, after which sufficient light intensity must be provided in order to stimulate activity and avoid developmental eye abnormalities (see section 3.17). Producers should refer to the relevant breed standards for guidance on specific light intensity targets for brooding poults.
- 1.22 Poults on their first day of placement are permitted to have a longer lighting period than those specified in section 3.16. Poults should initially be monitored in the transition period between light and dark to ensure they are adjusting and their welfare is not compromised.
- 1.23 Brooder barriers must be moved gradually over the period following placement to allow poults to access the rest of the shed/enclosure.

Introduction to range areas

Note: RSPCA Standards do not require that turkeys have access to an outdoor range. However, where turkey meat is marketed as 'free range', the following additional standard must be met.

- 1.24 Young birds must be introduced to outdoor range areas as soon as they are reasonably feathered and at the latest between 6 to 8 weeks of age (depending on prevailing temperature). Care should be taken to closely observe birds, particularly their body condition during introduction to range areas. See section 3.21 - 3.30.

2 Food and water

- 2.1 Feeding and watering equipment design, position and height must allow all birds to access feed and water with minimal effort and using normal posture.
- 2.2 All feeding and watering systems and equipment must be checked for efficient operation at least once each day to ensure all birds have access to feed and water.
- Water pressure gauges should be checked to be set accurately, to ensure they are operational and that water is available to birds at all times.
 - Feeder adjustment devices should be checked to be operational and that feed is available and accessible at all times.
 - Drinker and feeder lines and individual drinkers and feeders should be inspected at specific sites on a daily basis, in a pattern that covers the whole shed on a weekly basis to ensure water and feed availability/accessibility as required.

Feed and feeding equipment

- 2.3 Feed must provide nutrients that meet the birds' requirements. The provision of whole grain as part of the grower/finisher ration is recommended to aid with digestion and redirect pecking behaviour.
- Any poultry feed on the farm must be made available for testing if required.
- 2.4 Birds must have unrestricted access to food, with the exception of birds being treated under veterinary advice or birds being prepared for pick-up (see section 9.1).
- 2.5 Feed distribution must ensure that a uniform feed supply is available within the shed and is accessible to all birds.
- Providing a ration which takes longer to eat, e.g. mash rather than pellets, may reduce feather pecking.
- 2.6 Feed must be delivered at least once daily to feeders and birds should be observed to be eating.

Note: RSPCA Australia is concerned about the reliance on in-feed antibiotics to maintain bird gut health and reduce overall flock mortality. Producers should be monitoring the potential for alternative strategies to replace antibiotic use in the near future. The preferred strategy for preventing disease is a combination of good shed hygiene and farm biosecurity, vaccination (where available), diet composition, and the use of antibiotic alternatives (e.g. prebiotics, probiotics, organic acids, and essential oils).

- 2.7 Antibiotics must only be administered under veterinary advice. Where it is considered necessary to use antibiotics for prophylactic purposes, producers must seek prior approval from RSPCA Australia. The use of coccidiostats is permitted.

Water and watering equipment

Note: For further information on water quality, refer to the *Australian and New Zealand Guidelines for Fresh and Marine Water Quality*, Volume 3, Primary Industries. Additionally, estimates of average daily water consumption are available from the *Australian Model Code of Practice for the Welfare of Animals—Domestic Poultry* or the breed standards. For a description of water sources and water sanitation systems for poultry farms see *National water biosecurity manual: Poultry production*, Commonwealth of Australia, August 2009.

- 2.8 Water that is clean, safe and suitable for birds must be available in sufficient quantity.
- 2.9 Each bird must be able to easily access watering points without undue competition.
- Producers should consult equipment manufacturer and breed specifications for guidance on specific targets relating to the birds per drinker ratio. This ratio must be adjusted in areas subject to high temperature and humidity.
- 2.10 Birds must be observed to be drinking. If drinking is insufficient or excessive, action must be taken to investigate the cause(s).
- Observations of the shed will assist in determining if excessive water consumption is occurring or there is competition for drinkers resulting in water splash and wet litter.
 - Observations of the watering line will assist in determining if excessive water usage is due to leakage.
 - If there are adequate watering points and birds are not drinking, water quality may be suspect. Testing of water supply/source must be carried out accordingly.
 - Investigations to determine other possible causes must also be carried out.
- 2.11 Water supply on the farm must be made available for testing if required.

3 Environment, housing and accommodation

- 3.1 All floors, surfaces, fittings and equipment in sheds must be designed, constructed and maintained to minimise the risk of injury or disease in birds, and to facilitate cleaning regimes (see section 7).
- 3.2 Housing design and stocking density must allow sufficient space for exercise, exploration and social behaviour (see section 4).
- 3.3 The shed and range areas must be free of any items or objects that could injure birds.

Barn/shed facilities

- 3.4 Facilities must be constructed, maintained and operated to discourage and restrict the presence or entry of wild birds, rodents, predators and other pests that could cause distress or transmit diseases to birds. Aspects to consider include:
 - The presence of dams and streams which may increase the on-farm biosecurity risk due to their attractiveness to wild birds.
 - The provision of feed and water indoors (where birds have access to a range area) to avoid attracting pests.
- 3.5 The principal consideration in planning the layout of the equipment in the shed must be accessibility and ease of use by the birds. Difficulties in access or use will lead to restrictions in feed and water consumption, causing loss of production and reduced welfare. Important aspects to consider for all buildings are:
 - Are the equipment and birds spaced evenly throughout the shed?
 - Is the equipment adjustable to meet the needs of the birds?
 - Does the shed design allow easy observation of all birds?
- 3.6 Where present, alarms and other controls for ventilation, heating and cooling must be fully operational and maintained as required. Alarms must be checked regularly to ensure they are working. Personnel should be available to respond to alarms at all times.
- 3.7 Pest control programs must use the most humane effective techniques available.
- 3.8 There must be contingencies in place in the event of mechanical failure (i.e. temperature and ventilation controls), extreme temperatures, break down (feeding equipment), fire, delays in delivery of farm inputs, or natural disasters. Contingencies should ensure that shed conditions can be managed and feed and water can be provided to birds at all times.
- 3.9 Overall shed conditions, including temperature, ventilation, facilities and lighting must be observed daily and adjusted to optimise bird welfare. A record of maintenance/repairs must be maintained.

Temperature and humidity

- 3.10 Daily records of minimum and maximum temperature must be kept at all times. Where possible, daily relative humidity should also be recorded.
- 3.11 Shed temperatures should meet recommended targets for birds at each stage of production. Where extremes of temperature and humidity cause deviation from targets, action must be taken as far as practicable and as soon as possible to prevent impact on birds (e.g. severe panting is stressful and should be avoided).
- 3.12 There must be a maintenance program in place to ensure that facility defects are identified and prompt action is taken to ensure their operation.

Litter

Note: Turkey health and welfare is strongly linked to litter quality. If litter is managed well, conditions including lameness, footpad burn, breast buttons, breast blisters and bacterial infection can be minimised.

- 3.13 The floor of the shed must be completely covered in litter of an appropriate material (e.g. soft wood shavings, rice hulls, chopped straw) to a minimum average depth of 100mm during brooding and 75mm during the grower phase.
- 3.14 Litter must be of good quality, clean and mould-free and maintained in a dry and friable condition. Consideration must be given to the management of temperature, ventilation and humidity and consequent effects on litter condition.
- Wet areas around or under the drinkers should be avoided.
 - Careful monitoring of ventilation should occur when using foggers.
 - The birds' feathers should appear clean and dry.

Ventilation

- 3.15 Natural or mechanical ventilation systems must be operational and effective to provide adequate air exchange for the age/weight and number of birds.
- If ammonia levels exceed 15ppm at bird height, appropriate diagnostic and corrective action must be taken (ammonia can normally be smelled at 10-15ppm by humans).
 - Dust levels must be managed to avoid negative impacts on bird welfare.

Lighting

- 3.16 The lighting system in the shed must provide a minimum period of 8 hours continuous artificial lighting per day (unless birds have access to natural daylight) and a minimum period of 8 hours continuous darkness (to be provided at night to ensure full darkness) in every 24-hour period.
- Provision of daylight is strongly recommended as it prevents eye abnormalities and can reduce the incidence of injurious pecking by encouraging foraging, exploration, and a range of social behaviours.
 - Provision of UV light - either from a natural or artificial source - is recommended as it can reduce injurious pecking. Seek advice from the supplier or manufacturer regarding UV radiation levels from artificial sources and safe human exposure times.
 - Where artificial lighting is used, birds should initially be monitored in the transition period between light and dark to ensure they are adjusting and their welfare is not compromised.
- 3.17 The light levels in the shed (measured at bird head height) must be sufficient to allow birds to see without difficulty and to be properly inspected and any problems identified. In each 24-hour period, and outside the 8-hour dark period,
- at least half the shed must be lit at a minimum of 20 lux (except during pick-up; see section 9.2).
 - no area of the shed must be lit at less than 6 lux.

Environmental enrichment

Note: RSPCA Australia strongly encourages the use of all forms of environmental enrichment that stimulate activity, promote leg health and help redirect pecking behaviour. Introducing novel items as needed throughout the growing phase, in addition to the required enrichment, will assist in maintaining interest in pecking objects. Such items may include plastic bottles filled with coloured water, chains, aluminium foil, cabbages, and hanging CDs. The provision of perching space is recommended from end of brooding to ensure that birds can roost as necessary. Perches should be:

- designed to avoid injury to the bird
- fully support the bird's foot
- constructed of non-slip material
- elevated off the ground
- easily accessible and visible to the birds.

- 3.18 The provision (inside the shed) of at least 4 small bales of clean, mould-free straw per 1000 birds is required from end of brooding. The size of a small bale is approximately 900mm long x 450mm deep x 350mm high. Straw bales must be replaced as they are broken down to ensure birds have continuous access to perching space and a pecking object.
- 3.19 The provision (inside the shed) of at least 4 lengths of rope (approximately 30cm each) per 1000 birds is required from end of brooding to satisfy the bird's naturally inquisitive nature and desire to peck at objects. The rope must not be hung but provided to the birds on the ground. The rope must be non-fraying and have a secure knot tied at each end.
- 3.20 Inside the shed, birds must be provided with visual barriers behind which they can seek refuge and rest from other birds. Visual barriers may include straw bales, free-standing boards, etc.

Free-range facilities

Note: RSPCA Standards do not require that birds have access to an outdoor range. However, where turkey meat is marketed as 'free range', the following additional standards must be met. Producers must be able to demonstrate compliance with local council regulations regarding free-range turkey production.

- 3.21 The range area must be situated and managed to control disease, avoid contamination of surface/ground water, and minimise land degradation (this may require the use of rotational range areas). The total available range area is calculated on the basis of the total floor area in the shed in which the flock is housed and must be
- at least 1.5 times the size of the total shed floor area for new sheds and for existing sheds where the available range area is not limited by the overall farm footprint;
 - at least 1 times the size of the total shed floor area for existing sheds where the available range area is limited by the overall farm footprint.
- 3.22 Maintenance and management of the range must ensure that birds are encouraged to access it and are able to forage on all areas, while at the same time discouraging the presence of wild birds and pests. A well-maintained range area should at all times provide birds with palatable vegetation (including pasture).
- 3.23 All birds must have access to the range during daylight hours for a minimum of 8 hours per day once they are reasonably feathered (see section 1.24). The only exception to this is under veterinary advice (e.g. due to a disease outbreak or imposed biosecurity measure).
- 3.24 Access to the range must meet the following requirements:
- Popholes or full opening doors or panels must be of a height and width that allows birds to easily pass through using a normal posture.
 - The shed layout and position/number of popholes/openings must ensure that all birds have the opportunity to access the range.
 - Pophole/opening design and placement must avoid birds being able to obstruct the movement of other birds, avoid injury to birds and take into account prevailing weather conditions.
- 3.25 Adequate and appropriately distributed shelter must be provided on the range (e.g. non-flowering trees and shrubs, shade cloth or other structures) to protect birds from extreme weather conditions and allow them to move to be 'out of sight' of avian predators.
- At least 10m² of overhead shade per 1000 birds must be provided on the range.
- 3.26 Where fences are used, they must be constructed and maintained to restrict the entry of predators or pest animals and to ensure birds are effectively contained. Regular inspection of fences must occur to ensure they remain effective.
- 3.27 Regular inspection of the range must occur to ensure that any foreign bodies that could cause injury to birds are removed and to check that there are no poisonous plants or chemicals accessible to birds.
- 3.28 Any ramps for birds to access outdoor ranges must be less than 30 degrees for ease of bird movement to and from the shed.
- 3.29 Areas surrounding the shed must be well drained and be kept clean and tidy.
- 3.30 The range and adjoining area must be maintained in order to minimise the risk of fire. Contingencies must be in place to minimise the risk to bird welfare in the event of fire or other natural disasters.

4 Stocking density

- 4.1 Optimum stocking density indoors will depend on good management of shed conditions, i.e. temperature, humidity, ventilation, and litter condition. More space may be required in areas subject to high temperatures and humidity unless appropriate temperature, humidity and ventilation controls are in place and fully operational.
- 4.2 Stocking density is calculated on the basis of bird liveweight at pick-up and the floor space available to the birds in the shed.
- Stocking density must not exceed 28kg per m² of available floor area for naturally ventilated sheds¹.
 - Stocking density must not exceed 35kg per m² of available floor area for mechanically ventilated sheds². Where bird liveweight at pick-up is 5kg or less, stocking density must not exceed 30kg per m² of available floor area.
- 4.3 Stocking density in naturally ventilated sheds may be adjusted by exception if the producer can demonstrate that year-round temperature, humidity and mortality levels and management procedures are such that the welfare of the birds is not compromised. Prior approval must be obtained from RSPCA Australia.
- 4.4 Upon occurrence of disease or injury, stocking density must be reviewed and, if necessary, adjusted when a new flock is placed to ensure the welfare of the birds.

¹ Naturally ventilated refers to open-sided, curtained sheds which allow for natural airflow.

² Mechanically ventilated refers to sheds where air movement is managed with fans.

5 Management procedures

- 5.1 Persons responsible for the management and/or handling of birds must be appropriately trained and competent in their required tasks, including:
- handling of birds
 - inspection of birds and shed environment
 - the identification of normal and abnormal bird behaviour and deviations in production targets
 - bird care and treatment of injury or distress
 - humane destruction.
- 5.2 Birds (except poults, see section 1.15) must be observed at least three times in a 24-hour period to ensure that their appearance, vocalisations and behaviour are normal.
- Stockpersons must walk through the flock slowly and encourage birds to move.
 - Inspections should be increased during hot weather or disease outbreak.
 - If necessary, temperature and ventilation must be adjusted to ensure the welfare of the birds (see section 4).
- 5.3 Any weak, ill or injured birds must be identified and promptly treated or humanely euthanased (see section 8) without delay.
- Dead birds must be removed and disposed of promptly and hygienically.
 - Corrective action must be taken where possible.
- 5.4 Where birds are found to be entrapped or have escaped they must be freed or caught immediately. Corrective action must be taken to prevent this situation recurring.
- 5.5 Records must be kept of mortalities and rates per shed per week calculated over the life of the flock.
- Targets for mortalities must be identified. Cumulative mortality³ exceeding 5% must trigger prompt and appropriate diagnostic and corrective action.
 - The reason for culling must be recorded.
- 5.6 If managers are unable to identify the cause of ill health or disease and the appropriate treatment, veterinary advice must be sought and followed accordingly.

³ Mortality over the total growing period for both hens and toms.

6 Health

- 6.1 A Veterinary Health Plan must be in place to maintain the health and welfare of the birds. It should contain details of the following:
- Procedures for the identification and treatment of weak, ill or injured birds, including separation/treatment and euthanasia.
 - Procedures to prevent lameness (see section 6.5 - 6.7) and leg disorders that may lead to hock burn, foot pad burn, breast blisters, and/or dirty feathers.
 - Procedures to prevent injurious pecking.
 - A vaccination schedule (where applicable).
 - Any prophylactic or corrective medicines administered, their withholding periods, dose rates and when birds should be treated.
 - Any alternative medicines administered, e.g. probiotics.
 - Quarantine and biosecurity procedures (refer to *National farm biosecurity manual: Poultry production*, Commonwealth of Australia and *National water biosecurity manual: Poultry production*, Commonwealth of Australia).
 - Pest control procedures to restrict access of wild birds, predators and rodents to the flock (see section 3.7, 3.22 and 3.27).
 - Cleaning and sanitation procedures.
- 6.2 Health records must be kept for each batch, including details of vaccinations, disease, mortalities (deaths and culls and reason for culling), injuries, and treatments administered to birds. This information can indicate whether there is any overall management problem so that action can be taken to identify the cause(s) e.g. poor immunology, poor shed conditions, stress, etc.
- 6.3 Medication must be used only in accordance with the instructions on the registered label of the product unless veterinary advice has been given to vary the directions.
- 6.4 The Veterinary Health Plan must be updated on an annual basis in consultation with the attending veterinarian.

Lameness

Note: RSPCA Australia believes lameness is a serious welfare problem in turkeys, causing pain and discomfort to affected birds. The incidence of lameness can be reduced by selecting slower-growing strains, selecting for leg strength, providing birds with sufficient rest, providing proper nutrition to manage growth rate, providing stimulating activity, and properly managing the litter.

- 6.5 Producers must monitor birds for signs of lameness, investigate the cause, and take corrective action which aims to prevent lameness from worsening and from occurring in future flocks.
- 6.6 Birds with a gait score of 2 (see box below) that are not able to walk must be humanely killed immediately unless veterinary advice indicates that the condition can be cured and immediate measures are taken to do so.
- 6.7 Severely lame birds with a gait score of 2 (see below) should not make up more than 1% of the flock at any time.

Gait score (Dawkins 2004)

0 = normal (bird walks at least 10 steps with ease and is well balanced)

1 = abnormal (bird walks abnormally for at least 10 steps with an uneven stride and is unbalanced)

2 = unacceptable (bird is reluctant to walk or not able to walk)

Management of injurious pecking

Note: RSPCA Australia believes feather pecking, head pecking, cannibalism and aggression are serious welfare problems in turkeys, causing pain, discomfort and often death to affected birds. The incidence of injurious pecking can be reduced by e.g.:

- selecting for less aggressive strains
- providing birds with sufficient rest
- optimising diet and ensuring adequate nutrient intake
- offering a diet in mash rather than pelleted form
- providing sufficient feeding space
- stimulating activity e.g. through environmental enrichment
- properly managing lighting and litter
- providing visual barriers
- reducing stocking density.

- 6.8 The preferred options for the management of injurious pecking are the selection of less aggressive bird strains and use of alternative flock management practices that will eliminate the need for beak trimming (see note above).
- 6.9 Daily monitoring of birds must occur to identify signs of aggressive pecking or cannibalism and the likely causes.
- 6.10 If there are a large number of birds that are pecking or cannibalising other birds, action must be taken to adjust management practices (see note above).
- 6.11 Feather condition (as a result of pecking) must be monitored at the end of the growing period to enable management decisions to be made accordingly.
- 6.12 A bird that is injured as a result of pecking or cannibalism must be promptly removed for treatment or humanely killed (see section 9).
- 6.13 Beak trimming must only occur under the direction of the attending veterinarian and where all other methods of preventing pecking have failed. Where beak trimming is deemed necessary:
- RSPCA Australia must receive prior notification.
 - It must be performed at the hatchery by a competent operator using an infrared technique.
 - It must only take place once.
 - It must be limited to tipping of the beak only.
- 6.14 Artificial means of preventing cannibalism (such as blinkers or lenses) are not permitted.

Husbandry procedures

- 6.15 Husbandry procedures not specified elsewhere in these Standards must not be performed (e.g. desnooding, dewinging, or toe trimming).

7 Cleaning and hygiene

- 7.1 Hand-sanitising facilities and feet dips must be available at the entrance to each shed (the Veterinary Health Plan must include quarantine and biosecurity procedures - see section 6.1).
- 7.2 The premises and equipment must be cleaned as required before restocking to prevent disease carry-over to incoming birds. The cleaning principles of an all-in/all-out system should be used between batches of birds.

8 On-farm culling

- 8.1 All persons involved in the on-farm culling (euthanasia) of individual birds must be appropriately trained and competent in the approved killing methods (see section 8.3) to ensure that birds are humanely killed in the first attempt.
- 8.2 Birds must be handled in a manner that ensures that distress or discomfort is minimised.
- 8.3 The approved methods for humane killing of individual birds on-farm are:
- Birds 8 kg or under must be killed by cervical dislocation
 - Birds over 8kg must be appropriately restrained and killed by captive bolt⁴ to the head.
- 8.4 Killing pliers or other equipment that crushes the neck must not be used.
- 8.5 Birds must be monitored in the minutes following killing to ensure that they are dead, that is, there should be no vocalisation, corneal reflex, rhythmic breathing or deliberate movement.

⁴ Immediate insensibility leading to death is best achieved by placing the captive bolt perpendicular to the frontal bone on the midline between the ears and the eyes, and discharging twice.

9 Pick-up (catching)

Note: RSPCA Australia believes that the practice of "thinning out", i.e. partially depopulating a shed, has the advantage of providing more space for the remaining birds but can compromise the welfare of birds not being collected at the time. Preparation and catching should aim to minimise the effects on bird welfare of feed and water deprivation; noise; dust; disruption of rest; and, thermal discomfort.

Preparation

- 9.1 Removal of feed and water facilities must be managed to ensure that the time off feed and water for birds being collected for slaughter does not exceed 18 hours.
 - Birds must have access to water until pick-up commences.
 - Birds remaining in the shed following partial depopulation must be given access to feed and water immediately following completion of pick-up.
- 9.2 Lighting must be adjusted appropriately (e.g. dimmed where applicable) to ensure that birds are calm during catching.
- 9.3 Access roads and pick-up pads must be well maintained and kept clear to ensure access at pick-up.
- 9.4 An assessment of the birds must be made before pick-up to confirm that they are fit for the intended journey.
- 9.5 Any birds rejected from transport must be promptly treated or humanely killed.
- 9.6 Transport modules must be inspected to ensure that they are intact and cannot cause injury to birds during loading and transport.
- 9.7 Records of pick-up time and feed and water withdrawal must be maintained as part of the normal batch/consignment documents.

Pick-up

- 9.8 All persons involved in the pick-up and handling of birds must be appropriately trained and competent to ensure bird welfare is not compromised.
- 9.9 The catching process must proceed in a manner that prevents birds crowding together. This may include adjusting lighting (e.g. using blue light) or using partitions.
- 9.10 The catching process must be designed and managed to ensure that distress, discomfort and injury is minimised.
 - Birds should preferably be herded to a loading ramp where they are then caught and crated for transport.
 - Birds under 5kg should be caught and carried by both legs with no more than 1 bird in each hand.
 - Birds over 5kg should be caught by grasping the shoulder wing furthest away from the catcher and using the other hand to hold both legs.
 - Birds must be placed in the crate one at a time.
- 9.11 Transport modules must have a minimum depth of 32cm and either fully open tops or openings of sufficient size to avoid injury to the bird. Every effort should be made to use modular systems with sliding drawers as these pose less risk of injury to birds than fixed crates.

- 9.12 Transport modules must provide sufficient floor space to allow all birds to sit comfortably at the same time. This requires a minimum floor space of
- 100cm² per kg for birds up to 16kg
 - 110cm² per kg for birds up to 8kg
 - 125cm² per kg for birds up to 5kg
- 9.13 In order to minimise the time that birds are handled/carried, loading into transport modules must take place inside the shed.
- 9.14 Catching techniques that may compromise bird welfare must be addressed immediately.
- 9.15 A record must be kept of the total number of birds collected at pick-up.

10 Transport

- 10.1 All persons involved in the transport and handling of birds must be appropriately trained and competent to ensure bird welfare is not compromised.
- 10.2 The timing of transport (including catching, loading and unloading) must be coordinated between the producer, pick-up crew, transporter and processor in order to ensure that birds are not off feed and water for more than 18 hours prior to slaughter and to minimise time birds spend waiting on the vehicle.
- 10.3 Action must be taken to minimise the risk of heat or cold stress to birds during transport.
 - Birds should not be loaded at temperatures over 30°C or where it is likely that the temperature will exceed 30°C during transport. Where this is unavoidable, and in warmer weather, loading of birds must take place during the cooler part of the day. Upon arrival, birds must be placed in a cooled lairage area prior to being slaughtered without delay.
 - In cooler weather, measures must be taken to avoid wetting or chilling of birds.
- 10.4 Records of departure and arrival time must be maintained as part of the normal consignment documents.
- 10.5 Transport mortalities ('dead-on-arrivals') exceeding 0.2% must trigger appropriate diagnostic and corrective action.

11 Slaughter

- 11.1 All persons involved in the handling and slaughter of birds must be appropriately trained and competent to ensure bird welfare is not compromised.
- 11.2 Birds must be slaughtered at the closest available processing plant (or, as applicable, company processing plant) to their home farm unless prior approval has been obtained from RSPCA Australia.
- 11.3 Only processing plants that have previously been assessed and approved by an RSPCA Approved Farming Scheme Assessor may be used to slaughter RSPCA-Approved turkeys.
- 11.4 On arrival at the processing plant, birds should be unloaded immediately or action must be taken to prevent birds suffering from heat or cold stress.

Shackling

Note: RSPCA Australia encourages the use of controlled atmosphere systems (CAS) where birds remain in their transport modules upon arrival at the processing plant and are killed using a mixture of gases prior to being shackled. CAS has the benefit of reducing manual handling and avoiding the need to shackle live birds. However, research into alternative (less aversive) gas mixtures to those being used currently may offer additional welfare benefits. RSPCA Australia is monitoring these developments.

- 11.5 Shackles must be of a size and type and operated in a manner that does not cause unnecessary pain or distress to the birds.
- Shackling of birds should occur in a low-noise, low light-level area.
 - Birds must be hung on to the shackles by both legs.
 - Handling and hanging technique must reduce the incidence of wing flapping.
 - A breast comforter should run along the length of the line between point of shackling and the stunning bath.
- 11.6 Birds must not be suspended from the shackling line for more than 90 seconds before they are stunned.
- 11.7 Transport modules and the shackling area must be checked to ensure that no birds have been left behind.

Stunning

- 11.8 All birds must be stunned prior to slaughter.
- 11.9 Equipment and procedures for stunning must ensure the bird is immediately rendered unconscious without receiving pre-stun shocks from the equipment used.
- 11.10 All birds must be checked to ensure that they have been effectively stunned.
- 11.11 Where the stun has not been effective,
- affected birds must be immediately humanely killed prior to entering the scalding tank, and
 - the equipment must be checked to ensure correct operation.

Bleeding out

- 11.12 Bleeding out must commence within 20 seconds of stunning.
- 11.13 All birds must be checked to ensure that they have been effectively bled out prior to entering the scalding tank.
- Birds must be allowed to bleed out for at least 2 minutes prior to entering the scalding tank.
 - Birds must be dead before entering the scalding tank.

Controlled atmosphere killing

- 11.14 Birds must not be subjected to the gas mixture until the correct concentration has been reached and the batch has entered the controlled atmosphere system.
- 11.15 When exiting the controlled atmosphere system, birds must be checked to ensure they are dead.
- 11.16 Where the kill has not been effective,
- affected birds must be immediately humanely killed by cervical dislocation, and
 - the system must be checked to ensure correct operation.
- 11.17 Should the controlled atmosphere system fail, a back-up slaughter method must be available immediately to ensure humane slaughter of all waiting birds.

END OF STANDARDS



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