Managing layers without beak trimming?

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Overview

• Drivers for a ban on beak trimming
• The UK situation
• The Laying Hen Welfare Forum
• What can we learn from Europe?
• Challenges
• Opportunities
Drivers for a ban on beak trimming

- Societal views on ‘naturalness’ and mutilation
- Customer and consumer demand
- Legislation
- Change in other countries
Impact of trimming on hen welfare

• In comparison with non-trimmed chicks, both IR and HB-treated chicks show reductions in growth, feed-intake and activity, but when the magnitude of the reduction is compared between HB and IR groups, inconsistent results have been obtained (Gentle and McKeegan, 2007; Marchant-Forde et al., 2008; Marchant-Forde and Cheng, 2010). Dennis et al. (2009) found no differences in stress physiology between IR and HB-treated birds.

• ‘Farm Animal Welfare Council (FAWC) has long considered that the mutilation of all livestock is undesirable and continues to regard beak trimming as a major insult to the hen’s welfare.’ (2007 report)
The UK situation

It’s not if but when

EU Directive 99/74/EC bans all mutilations but allows Member States to authorise beak trimming to prevent feather pecking and cannibalism.

The Minister has given a strong message regarding moving to a ban on beak trimming and asked for a timeline.

Uniquely in Europe, the UK has the highest proportion of free range (over 50%) and currently little barn/aviary.

Many retailers have signed up to go cage free by 2025.

UK consumers like large, brown eggs.
The Laying Hen Welfare Forum
www.lhwf.co.uk

• LHWF brings together expertise from industry, farm, animal welfare and government to explore how we can improve flock management and reduce injurious pecking amongst laying hens

• Through practical studies, the group is seeking to establish economically positive ways of improvement in animal welfare for laying hens and pullets

• LHWF will promote knowledge transfer to the wider egg industry, including the domestic poultry keeping sector, and endeavour to encourage adoption of best practice by all
EIP Agri project – ‘Maintaining Feather Cover’

1. Empower broad range of producers (n 25+) to maintain feather cover through producer-led development of bespoke Feather Cover Action Plans

2. Better understand the on-farm processes (and barriers) for action to maintain feather cover

3. Support wider on-farm action through industry press articles, social media blogs, video case studies, producer-led roadshows/share fairs

4. Create an industry-led reward scheme for maintaining feather cover

5. Communicate industry ownership over maintaining feather cover for the transition from beak tipping to intact beaks
What can we learn from Europe?

- CH, SE, NO, DE, DK, NL, AU have voluntary or legislative bans on beak trimming
- German market is a major driver for move to intact beak in DK and NL which supply it
- Most have moved to predominantly white genotypes, as white birds space out more and are less likely to peck injuriously
- Dutch experience in making the switch is good nutrition and attention to detail is very important alongside pecking blocks and other ‘enrichments’.
Challenges

• Mortality rates are higher in intact beak flocks, particularly large flocks of brown birds

• Injurious pecking is a direct or indirect (via pathogen ingress) cause

• The recent Dutch experience of moving to intact beak flocks is an increased mortality rate of about 3%. They have a 60:40 white: brown bird ratio with more brown in ‘premium’ systems.

• This level of 3% increased mortality = 1 million birds in NL and ~3 million in UK that might not die if beak trimmed. Morbidity?
Challenges

• Even with beak trimming, mortality is higher in FR and organic flocks, with injurious pecking a substantial cause. Weeks et al (2016) mean mortality in FR flocks ~9% and colony cages <6%

• Will the consumer accept smaller, white eggs? With blemishes?

• More seconds if move to white genotypes (dirtier eggs)

• Greater expertise, husbandry skills, motivation and support needed to manage brown birds
Opportunities

• With experience, constant vigilance and attention to detail it is possible to manage flocks of intact beak (IB) birds with good welfare.

• In the UK this is achieved by most organic flocks but with a lower SD of 7 birds/m² (rather than 9/m² for FR) and max flock size of 2k vs colonies of 4k in houses of 64k or more for FR or barn.

• The lhwf visit to Hendrix suggests that it would take about 10 years to select for brown genotypes to be easier to manage with IB – and a similar length of time to breed white birds laying larger eggs.

• But there are only 2 companies and the world market is 85% in conventional cages, so is there the incentive to develop breeds for a niche market?
Opportunities

• The Lhwf is building a number of support materials which will be available through the website lhwf.co.uk
  • Case studies, videos, feather scoring sheets, blogs etc
  • Will share information gained by study tours to countries already managing under a ban
  • Is encouraging sharing of knowledge and is reaching out to a wider stakeholder group
  • There will be KE roadshows starting next year
  • Please contact us with any tips for managing intact flocks
Summary

1. UK farmers will have to manage birds without beak trimming
2. The lhwf is acting on the BTAG report recommendations and will support the industry through this change
3. Bespoke Feather Cover Action Plans (FCAPs) in conjunction with the Flock Health Plan will be key. Vets will have a vital role.
4. The lhwf’s project aims not only to learn how to develop FCAP’s but how to support vets and farmers in implementing effective strategies for managing flocks especially in cage-free systems.
5. FeatherWel offers evidence-based management strategies.
6. Genetic changes could help, but can’t be relied on.
References & resources


www.featherwel.org
www.lhwf.co.uk
www.hennovation.eu
www.henhub.eu