







Raising the welfare standards for meat chickens

			SPCA Certified		Code of Welfare	
	Requirement	Why is it important	Free Range	Barn raised	Free Range	Barn raised
 <p>CHICKEN HEALTH & BEHAVIOUR</p>	Food and water	Sufficient, high quality food and water helps chickens maintain good health.	Unrestricted access to food and water. Water quality is tested annually.		Adequate quantities of food provided. Continuous access to water that is palatable and not harmful to health. Water quality testing not required.	
	Maximum stocking density	Lower stocking densities encourages mobility, resulting in chickens with better leg health, more comfort for birds and improved opportunities for social and foraging behaviours.	Maximum permitted is 34 kg/m ² .		Maximum permitted is 38 kg/m ² .	
	Health inspections	Feet, feathers and weight are important indicators of a chicken's overall health and wellbeing, and can be an early sign that something is wrong.	Chickens are weighed weekly. Feet and feathers are inspected weekly. If contact dermatitis scores are triggered, remedial action must be taken. Chickens are inspected at least 3 x daily.		Where incidence of contact dermatitis is triggered, remedial action must be taken. Chickens inspected at least once daily.	
	Enrichment	Enrichment encourages chickens to explore, improves leg strength and heart health. It can also reduce fearfulness in chickens and improve their ability to cope with stress. Enrichment can include pecking items, such as cardboard boxes, hanging chains, string, balls. The more a chicken can peck and pull apart something, the better they like it!	Enrichment is provided in sheds, with one small item per 500 birds, and one large item per 1,000 birds. Enrichment must be spread throughout the shed so all chickens can 'play' with them.		Enrichment not required.	
	Perches	Chickens have a strong behavioural need to perch and roost, reflecting the drive to avoid predators by sheltering up high. Perches can also help improve leg strength and increase mobility and promotes resting.	Perches required - 3 m perching / 1,000 chickens.		Perches not required.	
 <p>HOUSING</p>	Shed floor	Chickens prefer a good layer of good quality wood shavings (litter) on the shed floor, as it gives them opportunity to dustbathe, scratch and forage, and helps keep their feathers and skin healthy.	Entire floor is covered in good quality litter to a minimum depth of 50 mm. Litter must be checked weekly, recorded, and if in poor condition, must be fixed or replaced.		Litter must be good quality material, friable and completely cover floor. No minimum depth stated. Must be managed to avoid levels of dustiness or dampness that may cause health problems.	
	Light hours	Appropriate light and dark hours in the shed are important to ensure chickens display normal behaviours around eating, drinking, resting and sleeping.	Minimum 8 hours of light and minimum 6 hours dark every 24 hours, and at least 4 hours darkness must be continuous. A dawn to dusk dimming period is required to allow chickens to adjust to lighting changes.		No minimum light hours. If 4 hours dark provided, must be continuous. If > 4 hours dark provided, must be minimum 3 hours continuous darkness provided.	
	Air quality indoors	Chickens need good air quality to prevent respiratory problems, such as disease and damage to eyes and lungs. High ammonia is also bad for people working inside the shed with the chickens. Chickens prefer a temperature between 20 - 25°C to stay healthy, avoiding disease and heat stress.	Ammonia must be ≤ 15 ppm, and temperature and ammonia levels are monitored and recorded daily.		Ammonia must be ≤ 20 ppm. Recording of ammonia or temperatures not required.	
 <p>OUTDOOR ACCESS</p>	Outdoor access	Being outside provides chickens with more opportunity run, scratch around, forage and dustbathe in a complex environment. Access outside also gives more space inside the shed to chickens that prefer to stay inside.	Chickens have unrestricted access outside for at least 8 hrs day. Chickens must be allowed outside by at least 21 days.	No access outside. Enrichment required inside the shed to encourage chickens to explore their environment.	Chickens are given some access outside during daylight hours, but there is no minimum amount of time required, or when required by.	No access outside, and no enrichment required.
	Popholes	Popholes cut into the sides of the sheds allow chickens to access the area outside (range). Popholes of the right size and popholes being kept open for longer encourages more chickens outside more often and for longer periods.	Popholes must allow chickens to see part of the range and shelter from inside the shed. Specifications for size and number of popholes required.	No access outside. Enrichment required inside the shed to encourage chickens to explore their environment.	Openings must be wide enough to enable chickens to freely move to and from outdoors at all times without risk of smothering or injury.	No access outside, and no enrichment required.
	Shade, shelter & shrubs, vegetation outdoors	Shelters, trees and shrubs give chickens a sense of protection from overhead predators, whilst vegetation, such as grass, crops and shrubs encourages chickens to scratch and forage outside - performing normal behaviours. Overhead shade and shelter encourages chickens out onto the range, and for longer. Domestic chickens evolved from Red Jungle fowl, who lived in the jungle under trees - this influences their behaviours (e.g. foraging, ground scratching) and need for overhead cover.	Outdoor shade and shelter requirements must be met. Shelters and trees/shrubs need to cover at least 20% of the range or an area of ≥ 8 m ² per 1,000 chickens. Chickens must be able to use the shelter and shade at all times; appropriate ground cover (e.g. grass), needs to be looked after, with no big muddy patches. Must be managed to encourage ranging further away from the building.	No access outside. Enrichment required inside the shed to encourage chickens to explore their environment.	Must have access to shelter from adverse weather that is likely to cause heat or cold stress, and to reduce the risk of predation.	No access outside, and no enrichment required.
 <p>CONSUMER ASSURANCES</p>	Animal welfare audits	Announced and particularly unannounced audits ensure transparency, integrity and credibility of standards.	Independently audited annually by an external auditing company, and at least three unannounced audits per year. SPCA Certified visit every single farm.		Animal welfare audits not required.	
	Feed and water free from sub-therapeutic antibiotics	Using antibiotics sub-therapeutically, where there is no diagnosed disease, condition or microorganism (bacteria etc.), can lead to antibiotic resistance and means that healthy chickens are unnecessarily treated.	Use of sub-therapeutic antibiotics in feed and water is not allowed. Therapeutic antibiotics may only be used when prescribed by a registered veterinarian for treatment of a specific diagnosed condition, disease or injury.		Medication may only be used in accordance with registration conditions, manufacturer's instructions or professional advice.	