



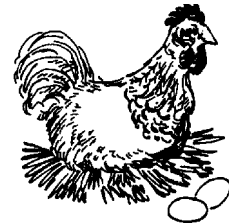
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## ***COMMERCIAL EGG TIP...***



### **QUALITY ASSURANCE FOR ANIMAL WELFARE**

In August of 2000, McDonald's Corporation announced animal welfare-related husbandry requirements for their suppliers of meat and egg products. In regard to laying hens, McDonald's stated that battery cages were to provide at least 72 square inches per bird and that hens were not to be molted by withdrawal of feed or water. The company also committed itself to work toward the phase out of beak trimming. Why has McDonald's done this? Animal rights groups have claimed that the animals used to produce McDonald's food products have been improperly treated. McDonald's business is simply to sell burgers, sandwiches and fries. It does not need public problems related to its products. By coming up with animal welfare guidelines for its suppliers, McDonald's is attempting to transfer responsibility for animal welfare back to the producer. In the process, McDonald's is also trying to use the issue to boost its image as a responsible corporate citizen. Other fast food companies and retail suppliers of poultry products can be expected to take comparable action.

Leaders in the egg industry have recognized that, in like manner to McDonald's, the welfare issue should be seen as an opportunity to demonstrate responsiveness to animal welfare concerns in society. The development of voluntary science-based welfare guidelines for flock care and management by the United Egg Producers is a good example of such responsiveness. Egg industry groups have also shown willingness to support research to improve the welfare impact of specific practices by funding research on alternative methods of molt induction.

It will be a significant step for many in the commercial egg industry simply to adopt the new UEP care and management guidelines. However, companies wishing to have a competitive edge need to do more than this. Since a customer may require concrete assurance that given welfare standards are met, it would be wise for an egg company to have a comprehensive animal care quality assurance program. The procedure to set up such a program could parallel that used to design a food safety HACCP program. A HACCP program may include three major components, quality assurance, pre- HACCP, and HACCP.

Quality assurance is the largest component of a HACCP program. It comprises a set of written good manufacturing practices (GMPs) outlining procedures deemed necessary by a company for production of a quality product. Animal care GMPs would comprise the most important part of an animal care quality assurance program because it is arguable that animal welfare problems most commonly occur when management or handling procedures are not carried out properly. Examples of animal care GMPs could be

#### **PUTTING KNOWLEDGE TO WORK**

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house preparation procedures to receive flocks, environmental monitoring and control procedures, flock inspection procedures, vaccination programs, etc. It is clear that many procedures which would qualify as animal care GMPs are already practiced by egg producers as good husbandry essential to the maintenance of a healthy, productive flock. These procedures would merely need to be formally recognized as animal care GMPs. Records would need to be kept to verify the execution of the GMPs.

Pre-HACCP is the second component of a HACCP program. In it, a team of individuals is identified to formulate and run the HACCP program, and the production process is clearly delineated so that the principles of HACCP can be accurately applied. Similarly, an animal care assurance team could be assembled. The critical entity (product) would be, e.g., a chick, pullet, laying hen, etc. A flow diagram of the production process (e.g., hatch, growout, lay) should be created and inputs into the production process identified.

The writing and implementation of HACCP, the third component of a HACCP program, was originally conceived specifically for food safety. It is possible, however, to take the seven principles of HACCP and adapt them for the purpose of animal welfare assurance.

1. Hazard Analysis. Conduct a hazard analysis for each step in the production process flow diagram. List all the welfare hazards identified. For example, excessive ammonia concentration in the layer house would be a welfare hazard .

2. Identify Critical Control Points (CCPs). Many hazards can be managed by good husbandry and adherence to GMPs, but some hazards may warrant special attention (i.e., CCPs) to ensure good animal welfare, e.g. ammonia level.

3. Establish Critical Limits. Each hazard identified as a CCP must have a preset limit which, if exceeded, a control measure must be triggered. For example, 25 ppm might be set as a critical limit for ammonia.

4. Monitor CCPs. Procedures must be established to ensure that each CCP is properly monitored, e.g., ammonia sensors might be placed at strategic locations in a house and tied into a computer for continuous monitoring.

5. Corrective Action. When a critical limit is exceeded, corrective actions must be taken to return the situation to compliance with the animal care assurance program. For example, ventilation rate might be increased to reduce ammonia concentration below 25 ppm. If possible, management must be adjusted to prevent reoccurrence of the problem.

6. Record Keeping. No welfare assurance can be established without a good system of records. Documents must be maintained to demonstrate the monitoring of CCPs, and to record events of corrective action.

7. Verification and Validation. This involves review of records, and inspection and audit of facilities at least annually to verify that the animal care quality assurance system in use is in compliance with the animal care quality assurance plan. The program and its implementation should be revised if necessary to make it more effective. For example, ammonia sensors should be tested annually for accuracy. Ammonia records and instances of corrective action should be reviewed. Improved methods of ammonia control or monitoring should be instituted if feasible.

Egg companies should be sensitive to the customer's needs in regard to animal welfare. An animal care quality assurance program should be designed to help the customer meet its public image objectives.



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\*\*Consult with your poultry company representative before making management changes.\*\*

“Your local County Extension Agent is a source of more information on this subject.”