

Beak Trimming Training Manual

A report for the Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation

By

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Foreword

In March 2000, ARMCANZ passed a resolution that required the egg industry to develop a national accreditation program for beak trimming. Beak trimming at the required standard is a component of the national generic quality assurance program being developed by RIRDC.

The national generic quality assurance program helps to ensure that standards are achieved in bird welfare, food safety, biosecurity and product labelling. This program requires commercial birds to be beak trimmed by an accredited beak trimmer. Correct beak trimming minimises risks to welfare caused by aggressive pecking. Beak trimmers, therefore, have a vital role to play in the welfare and production outcomes achieved by the egg industry.

The development of the training manual that defines acceptable standards and trainer's guidelines is the first step in developing an accreditation program. These standards include how to trim the beak of chickens, conform to biosecurity requirements, handle birds for beak trimming, set-up beak trimming equipment and assess the quality of the beak trimming job.

The training manual is designed to be used during workplace training and will help trimmers to gain the necessary skills, underpinning knowledge and attitudes to become an accredited beak trimmer. The trainer's guidelines gives instruction to trainers and assessors on how trainees can be trained and assessed for accreditation using the national competency standards developed during this project and approved by RTCA.

Use of the training manual and trainer's guidelines for accrediting beak trimmers is likely to lead to improved standards of beak trimming and bird welfare in the Australian egg industry. The accreditation process will ensure that minimum standards are achieved and best practice is promoted.

This project was funded from industry revenue, which is matched by funds provided by the Federal Government and is an addition to RIRDC's diverse range of over 600 research publications. It forms part of our Egg R&D program, which aims to support improved efficiency, sustainablity, product quality, education and technology transfer in the Australian Egg Industry.

Most of our publications are available for viewing, downloading or purchasing online through our website:

- downloads at www.rirdc.gov.au/reports/Index.htm
- purchases at www.rirdc.gov.au/eshop

Peter Core

Managing Director Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation

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Executive Summary

Beak-trimming of commercial layer replacement pullets is a common yet critical management tool that can affect the performance for the life of the flock. The most obvious advantage of beak trimming is a reduction in cannibalism although the extent of the reduction in cannibalism and feather pecking depends on the strain, season, type of housing, flock health and other factors. Beak-trimming also improves feed conversion by reducing food wastage and reduces stress associated with dominance interactions in the flock.

Consultation with experienced beak-trim operators in Australia revealed that the main problems being faced with the practice are achieving appropriate beak length and shape of beak to minimise further pecking. Operators report variations in beak hardness, bleeding of beaks following trimming and a lack of experienced, well-trained personnel to conduct the operation. Proper beak-trimming can result in greatly improved layer performance but improper beak-trimming can ruin an otherwise healthy flock of hens. Re-trimming is practiced in most flocks, to avoid the potential problem of cannibalism as a result of beak re-growth.

Given the continuing welfare scrutiny of using a hot blade to cut the beak, ARMCANZ recommended, in March 2000, the development of a national beak trimming accreditation program. To promote the importance of an accreditation system for improving beak-trimming standards it was necessary to prepare appropriate training documentation to standardise beak-trim training in Australia and satisfactorily resolve the most urgent welfare issues of achieving consistent beak-trimming and improving the standards of beak trimming.

In April 2001, the Egg Program of the Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation (RIRDC) Australia provided funds for a project to develop training manuals for beak trimmers. The impetus was a recommendation by State and Territory Agriculture Ministers that beak trimmers in Australia be accredited. A beak trimming management committee and corresponding group comprising researchers, RIRDC members, beak trimmers and egg producers were involved in developing the beak trimming training manuals.

The approach used was for the researchers to initially prepare HACCP documentation on the beak trimming process and circulate to all members of the committee. Two workshops were held to discuss the documentation, in particular the required accuracy standards and approaches needed to train beak trimmers. Two manuals were prepared as a result of recommendations from the committee. One was the beak trim training manual; the other the trainer's guidelines.

The management committee recommended that beak trim training be carried out in the workplace. An experienced beak trimmer passes on the required knowledge, skills and attitudes to trainees. The beak trim team leader decides who will be trained and who will be the workplace trainer. They also decide when and where workplace training will take place. Those requiring accreditation must be assessed. Assessment compares the person's beak trimming performance to the industry standard. Assessment occurs during a normal beak trimming job so that the assessor can observe and discuss work performance. The standards for beak trimming are based on national competency standards. Competency standards are statements of the skills required for effective performance in an industry. They are the outcomes achieved from training and provide the benchmark for assessment. (The competency standards were developed by Michael Bourke during the project and approved by the Rural Training Council in January 2002).

The role of a workplace trainer is to train suitable employees so that they can beak trim chicks, pullets and laying hens according to egg industry standards. The aim is to bring them up to the required standard so that they can be assessed as competent and therefore be called an accredited beak trimmer.

The trainee's role is to learn on-the-job. They need to acquire the necessary knowledge, skills and attitudes so that they reach the industry standards. They are assessed once they and their team leader think that they can meet the standards. They become an accredited beak trimmer if they are deemed 'competent'. If they do not reach the required standards they are deemed 'not yet competent' and can be reassessed when they have gained more experience in the areas they did not perform well in.

The outcome of the beak trimming accreditation project is a training manual and trainer's guidelines for the Australian Egg Industry to support the industry's commitment to maintaining high standards of beak trimming. Development by the Egg Industry of documentation that recommends best practice procedures and training courses to accredit beak trimmers will raise the beak trimming standards in Industry and help to improve the profitability of egg farming. Utilisation of the training manuals will give confidence to operators when undertaking beak trimming and result in improved standards of beak trimming.

In conclusion, this project meets its objective of providing documentation for workplace training and accrediting of beak trimmers. However, for the outcomes to be realised, it requires industry to develop the necessary infrastructure to ensure that only currently accredited beak trimmers are allowed to practice in industry.

Introduction

Beak-trimming is performed early in the life of commercial hens to decrease injuries caused by the behavioural vices of cannibalism, bullying and feather and vent pecking and to avoid feed wastage. Beak-trimming is known to help flocks with a hysteria problem. For the majority of birds beak-trimmed in the world today, it involves the partial removal of the upper and lower beak using an electrically heated blade. Without a correct beak-trimming program, the egg producer risks heavy losses of chickens and pullets from cannibalism and, in the laying stage, from protrusion and vent pick outs. In many cases these losses represent the major part of mortality not caused by infectious disease. If birds are not trimmed, mortality of 25% of the flock can occur and can cause similar financial losses to a disease outbreak.

¹Roberts (1986) expressed the view commonly expressed by welfare groups that beak-trimming is "a discredited mutilation and farmers who still practice it should be brought into line by law. It is a last ditch measure to avoid the consequences of bad management. If stocking densities are too high, the diet not balanced, or if lighting is at fault, stress-aggression occurs. To overcome it the beak is burned off cutting through a bed of highly sensitive nerve tissue, similar to the quick of the human finger nail".

Many producers believe that on balance the practice of beak-trimming is to be favoured, provided that the operation is performed properly. When birds are trimmed using best practice techniques chronic pain in the beak is minimal and far outweighs the pain and fear birds suffer when bullied and feather pecked by untrimmed birds. The main role of beak trimming, however, is to prevent the trauma birds suffer while being pecked to death.

Decisions about beak-trimming include the need to trim, the age to trim, amount of beak to remove, temperature of the blade and length of time to cauterise the beak. These factors coupled with differences in beak growth characteristics have the potential to create an endless number of combinations, many of which may result in harm to the individual bird. The beak-trimming method needs to be tailored to strain. One method may work with one strain but may be quite inadequate for another strain. In general, however, if the beak is cut near the tip of the bone, at the correct angle and blade temperature, trimming will be successful. The problem facing producers is that they are sometimes unsure of the best age to trim chickens and method to use for their circumstances.

In Australia, the Welfare Code recommends that, if beaks are to be trimmed, no more than half of the upper and one third lower beak be removed. On occasions, however, excessive cannibalism reported in imported brown layers has meant that both beaks are cut more heavily with increased cauterisation. Re-trimming of older birds has become necessary to avoid continuing outbreaks of cannibalism.

With greater precision now required when beak trimming there was a need to develop practical beak trim training documentation for accrediting beak trimmers beak trimming at day old, 5-10 days and retrimming at 8-12 weeks and the required record keeping for auditing.

¹ Roberts, P.H. 1986. Mutilations which are done for the convenience of man-not for the benefit of the animals. AgScene, 82: 12

Objectives

The original objectives cited in the submission were as follows;

- To develop HACCP-based quality assurance documentation to improve beak trimming.
- To develop an accredited beak trimming course.
- To prepare best practice beak trimming training materials.
- To assist the egg industry to achieve consistent beak trimming.
- To improve public perception of beak trimming by accrediting beak trimmers.

During the project, the management committee recommended that the outcomes of the project be as follows;

- To develop a beak trimming training manual.
- To develop trainer's guidelines for beak trimming

Note: the HACCP documentation was prepared as a basis for developing the training manual. It is considered that adoption of the training manual and trainer's guidelines will improve beak trimming and public perception of the practice.

Methodology

Management Committee

A beak trimming management committee was formed comprised of researchers, RIRDC, beak trimmers and egg producers who were invited to join the committee either as sitting members or as corresponding members. Terms of reference for the committee were distributed at the time of issuing the invitation.

HACCP Documentation

A HACCP booklet on the beak trimming process was prepared by the researchers with the following information;

- 1. Audit questions and implications relating to each part of the beak trimming process that could be completed by a yes/no answer. Critical issues were identified and defined as the processes in the beak trimming protocol that if they go wrong will cause permanent damage to the beak resulting in poor bird health, production and welfare.
- 2. Record keeping checklists.
- 3. List of targets to be achieved.
- 4. Score sheets for auditors to monitor, evaluate and verify beak trim standards.
- 5. Fact sheets that provide more detail on the questions and the implications.
- 6. Training manuals for use in accrediting beak trimmers.

The HACCP documentation on beak trimming was prepared and distributed to committee members in time for the first meeting in Adelaide in July 2001.

Committee meetings

Meeting 1

The committee met in Adelaide from 14-15th July 2001 and reviewed the HACCP documentation. Recommendations by the committee to the research group on requirements for the training manual were provided. This included writing a training manual, which was simpler than the HACCP documentation and only contained information on the key tasks required of a trimmer. To assist in rationalising the HACCP documentation Michael Bourke met with beak trimmers while they were working on the job at Pace Farms in NSW. Subsequently, the beak trim training manual and trainer's guidelines were prepared and distributed to the committee.

Meeting 2

The committee met in Melbourne over 17-18th November and reviewed the manuals. The recommendations from the committee were to further reduce the content of the manual and the guidelines to essential information only and present in a small-sized (A5) booklet. Suggestions for presentation in the booklets were for background information on each task on the left-hand side of the page and key tasks presented as brief dot points in large type on the right side of the page.

Beak trimming competencies developed for the RTCA

Beak Trim Chickens

RUA AM2.....B

This competency standard covers the functions involved in beak trimming chickens. Competency in this standard includes setting up equipment so that accurate trims are achieved and stress on the birds is minimised. This standard applies to all poultry species and breeds used for meat or egg production. Work is likely to be under routine supervision with intermittent checking. Responsibility for some roles and coordination within a team may be required. Beak trimming of chickens is usually performed within established routines, methods and procedures.

Element	Element Performance Criteria	
Prepare to beak trim birds	1.1	Entry biosecurity procedures as specified by the farm and beak trimming team are followed
	1.2	Beak trimming instructions are sought and confirmed with farm or team management
	1.3	Discussions are held with other workers to ensure smooth operation of the beak trimming process
	1.4	Equipment and tools suitable for beak trimming are selected, checked, and maintained
	1.5	Equipment is set up according to age of birds to be trimmed and bird behaviour
	1.6	Occupational health and safety hazards are identified, risk assessed and suitable controls implemented
Beak trim birds	2.1	Birds are handled according to relevant Codes of Practice to facilitate accurate beak trimming
	2.2	Beak shape, length and hardness are assessed regularly
	2.3	Birds are beak trimmed according to instructions
	2.4 2.5	Industry standards for accuracy are achieved Length of beak trimmed is in accordance with industry guidelines
	2.6	Birds with bleeding beaks are re-cauterised
	2.7	Bird welfare is assessed regularly
	2.8	Birds are culled according to instructions
Complete beak trimming procedures	3.1	The welfare of beak trimmed birds is checked and adjustments made where necessary
	3.2	Upper beak length is measured on samples of 100 birds
	3.3	Relevant information is recorded and reported according to farm and team requirements
	3.4	Exit biosecurity procedures are completed in line with farm and team procedures
	3.5	Equipment and tools are cleaned, sanitised and maintained according to team procedures

Range Of Variables

The Range of Variables explains the contexts within which the performance and knowledge requirements of this beak trimming standard may be assessed. The scope of variables chosen in training and assessment requirements may depend on the work situations available.

What Occupational Health and Safety requirements may be relevant to this standard?	 Safe systems and procedures for: Handling livestock Using handling equipment Hazard and risk control Manual handling Handling, application and storage of hazardous substances Protection from solar radiation, dust and noise The appropriate use and maintenance of personal Protective equipment.
What existing and potential hazards may be encountered in the workplace?	Burning from beak trimming bars, electrocution from electrical cords, injuries from livestock movement and handling, sunburn from solar radiation, respiratory problems from organic and other dusts and injury from moving machinery and vehicles.
What personal protective equipment may be relevant to this standard?	This may include boots, hats, overalls, gloves, protective eyewear, respirator or facemask, and sun protection (sun hat, sunscreen).
How are chickens beak trimmed?	A beak trimmer uses a heated blade to remove a portion of both beaks. This is an animal husbandry practice commonly carried out to limit the pecking damage that birds cause to each other. The beak grows after it is trimmed so birds are often re-trimmed when they are older. The beak trimming team generally catches birds and provides them to the trimmer. They also monitor the welfare of trimmed birds.
What trimming methods might be used?	Beak trimming methods vary according to the way the trimming machine is set up. The main choices are:
	Blade movement – this may be done manually where a foot pedal is pressed or automatically where the blade is moved by a cam on the machine.
	Guides – the cut may be judged manually by the operator or automatically using three holes in a gauge plate. The beak is inserted into the appropriate hole so that the blade cuts a set amount.
What organisational work procedures or requirements apply to this standard?	Work procedures will be based on sound agricultural principles and practices and may include oral or written instructions, organisational standard operating procedures, specifications, routine maintenance schedules, work notes, product labels and Material Safety Data Sheets, manufacturers' service specifications and operators' manuals and occupational health and safety procedures.
When and to what stock is beak trimming performed?	Beak trimming is usually performed on layer or breeding stock. Birds are usually trimmed at various ages from day old to 10 weeks of age. Re-trimming is a common practice to maintain the desired beak length and shape.
What tools and equipment may be used in the conduct of	Equipment including beak trimming machines, electrical cords, electrical safety switches, nets, surrounds, baskets,

this unit?	boxes and service tools.
How may a clean and safe area be maintained?	Tasks may include keeping access areas clear of tools and equipment, raising feeder and drinker equipment, keeping electrical leads dry and undamaged, maximising air quality and providing adequate light at the trimming machine.
What relevant information may be recorded and reported?	Bird numbers, accuracy results, details of administered preventative health treatments and any observed abnormalities.
How might information be documented?	Record keeping systems used are paper-based with information recorded into a diary or onto record sheets.

Evidence Guide

What evidence is required to demonstrate competence for this standard as a whole?

Competence in beak trimming chickens requires evidence that the chickens are accurately trimmed strictly in observance of the relevant Code of Practice. The skills and knowledge required to beak trim chickens must be transferable to a different work environment. For example, across a range of ages and strains of birds.

What specific knowledge is
needed to achieve the
performance criteria?

Knowledge and understanding are essential to apply this Standard in the workplace, to transfer the skills to other Contexts and to deal with unplanned events. The Knowledge requirements for this competency standard are listed below:

- Welfare implications of poor beak trimming
- Welfare implications of poor handling
- The need to maintain farm biosecurity
- Relevant occupational health and safety legislation, regulations and codes of practice.
- Specifications required for equipment set up
- Quality measures suitable for beak trimming
- The need for records

What specific skills are needed to achieve the performance criteria?

To achieve the performance criteria, appropriate literacy and numeracy levels as well as specific skills are required. These include the ability to:

- Interpret instructions prepared by the organisation, industry bodies, and/or manufacturers.
- Handle birds
- Operate beak trimming equipment
- Trim chickens' beaks
- Re-trim chickens' beaks
- Re-cauterise a bleeding beak
- Perform routine maintenance as required
- Count beak trimmed chickens
- Measure trimmed beak length

•	Record relevant information
•	Observe, identify and react appropriately to environmental implications and occupational health and safety hazards
•	Share information and observations with fellow workers and supervisors

What processes should be applied to this competency standard?

There are a number of processes that are learnt throughout work and life which are required in all jobs. They are fundamental processes and generally transferable to other work functions. Some of these are covered by the key competencies, although others may be added. The questions below highlight how these processes are applied in this competency standard. Following each question a number in brackets indicates the level to which the key competency needs to be demonstrated where 0 = not required, 1 = perform the process, 2 = perform and administer the process and 3 = perform, administer and design the process.

1.	How can communication of ideas & information be applied? (1)	By clarifying the specifications required for a particular trimming job. In providing feedback to farm managers and team leaders regarding trimmed birds.
2.	How can information be collected, analysed & organised? (2)	By gathering information about the accuracy of a particular trimming job. In providing farm managers or team leaders with a summary report on the beak trimming job.
3.	How are activities planned & organised? (1)	By sequencing the activities to be undertaken within a given period. Eg. taking biosecurity into account when moving from farm to farm, setting up equipment to optimise throughput and maximise safety while minimising bird stress.
4.	How can teamwork be applied? (1)	By working alongside others in the poultry shed to consistently achieve the desired trim.
5.	How can the use of mathematical ideas & techniques be applied? (2)	By counting chickens and calculating accuracy percentages.
6.	How can problem-solving skills be applied? (2)	By making adjustments to equipment to maximise accuracy and minimise bird stress.
7.	How can the use of technology be applied? (1)	By making calculations and providing reports.

Is there other competency standards that could be assessed with this one?

This competency standard could be assessed on its own or in combination with other competencies relevant to the job function, for example:

Handle livestock using basic techniques (RUAAM2NEWA)

There is essential information about assessing this competency standard for consistent performance and where and how it may be assessed, in the Assessment Guidelines for this

Training Package. All users of these competency standards must have access to both the Assessment Guidelines and the relevant Sector Booklet.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Committee Involvement

The participation by beak trimmers, farmers, researchers and RIRDC representatives on the management committee proved to be successful. The beak trimmers in particular were active participants and provided the practical input required enabling the researchers to develop a relevant training manual to meet their needs. In particular some of the issues the beak trimmers highlighted were;

- Beak trimming birds in hot weather.
- Meeting the varying requirements of farmers for levels and type of beak trimming.
- Beak trim set up variations depending on personal preference.
- The variety of machines, blades and techniques currently used to beak trim birds.
- The preference for training staff on the job.

Feedback from corresponding members was limited.

Farm Visits

Michael Bourke made two visits to Pace Farms in NSW to view first hand jobs being conducted by a beak trimming team and to discuss with beak trimmers their requirements in a training manual. The visits reinforced the need to prepare a manual in plain English and to keep documentation to a minimum.

Documentation

The HACCP documentation on beak trimming provided the initial information to the project committee but was too long, too detailed and impractical to use as a QA training manual.

It became clear as the project developed that minimal documentation was required if the training manual was to be effective. Beak trim staff working in the field have little opportunity to read training manuals and sometimes do not have the reading skills. The focus therefore was to prepare 2-3 key dot points for each stage of the beak trimming process, on the key responsibilities to staff. Brief supporting information to back up the key tasks was also provided.

Beak Trim Training Manual and Trainer's Guidelines

The training manual and trainer's guidelines will be made available from the RIRDC web site (www.rirdc.gov.au).

In conclusion, this project meets its objective of providing documentation for workplace training and accrediting of beak trimmers. However, for the outcomes to be realised, it requires industry to develop the necessary infrastructure to ensure that only currently accredited beak trimmers are allowed to practice in industry.

IMPLICATIONS

Use of the training manual and trainer's guidelines for accrediting beak trimmers is likely to lead to improved standards of beak trimming and bird welfare in the Australian egg industry. The accreditation process will ensure that minimum standards are achieved and best practice is promoted.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Training

- Accredited beak trimmers training should be competency-based and delivered in the workplace.
- Beak trim assessors should be associated with a Registered Training Organisation (RTO) and use the national competency standards to assess beak trimmers in the workplace.
- A central database should be maintained by industry with a profile of the training that has occurred.
- RIRDC develop a communications strategy to inform the whole of industry of the training and accreditation program and the requirement for only accredited beak trimmers being allowed to beak trim birds.

Textbook on beak trimming

• There have been a number of previous projects on beak trimming supported by RIRDC. Most of those reports and work undertaken overseas should be consolidated into one text book providing scientists, students and technical persons from industry knowledge on physiology, anatomy, behaviour, production, methods of trimming, alternatives to trimming and ethical issues associated with beak trimming. Other poultry interventions could be included in the text. Key researchers could be invited to write chapters in the textbook.

COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

The findings from this project have been communicated to Industry as follows:

Paper presented on beak trimming accreditation to;

- 6th European Poultry Welfare Symposium in Zollikofen, Switzerland in September 2001.
- Australian Poultry Science Symposium in Feb 2002 and
- Poultry Information Exchange on Gold Coast in April 2002.

RIRDC develop a communications strategy to inform the whole of industry of the training and accreditation program and the requirement for only accredited beak trimmers being allowed to beak trim birds.

PUBLICATIONS

Glatz, P.C., Bourke, M., Barnett, J.L. and Critchley, K.L. (2001). Developing an accreditation system for beak trimming in Australia. *Proceedings of the 6th European Symposium on Poultry Welfare, Zollikofen, pp 232-237*

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COMPENDIUM SUMMARY

Project Title:	Beak trimming accreditation
RIRDC Project No.:	SAR-35A
Researcher:	Dr Phil Glatz
Organisation: Phone: Fax: Email:	South Australian Research and Development Institute 08 83037786 08 83037689 Glatz.phil@saugov.sa.gov.au
Objectives	 To develop a beak trimming training manual. To develop a trainer's guidelines for beak trimming.
Background	In March 2000, ARMCANZ passed a resolution that required the egg industry to develop a national accreditation program for beak trimming. Beak trimming at the required standard is a component of the national generic quality assurance program being developed by RIRDC. The national generic quality assurance program helps to ensure that standards are achieved in bird welfare and egg quality. This program requires commercial birds to be beak trimmed by an accredited beak trimmer or a trainee working under the direct supervision of an accredited trimmer. Correct beak trimming minimises risks to welfare caused by aggressive pecking. Beak trimmers, therefore, have a vital role to play in the welfare and production outcomes achieved by the egg industry.
Research	A beak trimming management committee was formed comprised of researchers, RIRDC, beak trimmers, egg producers and welfare groups who were invited to join the committee either as sitting members or as corresponding members. Terms of reference for the committee were distributed at the time of issuing the invitation. The approach used was for the researchers to initially prepare HACCP documentation on the beak trimming process and circulate to all members of the committee. Two workshops were held to discuss the documentation, in particular the required accuracy standards and approaches needed to train beak trimmers. Two manuals were prepared as a result of recommendations from the committee. One was the beak trim training manual; the other the trainer's guidelines.
Outcomes	This project met its objective of providing documentation for workplace training and accrediting of beak trimmers. However, for the outcomes to be realised, it requires industry to develop the necessary infrastructure to ensure that only currently accredited beak trimmers are allowed to practice in industry.
Implications	Use of the training manual and trainer's guidelines for accrediting beak trimmers is likely to lead to improved standards of beak trimming and bird welfare in the Australian egg industry. The accreditation process will ensure that minimum standards are achieved and best practice is promoted.
Publications	Glatz, P.C., Bourke, M., Barnett, J.L. and Critchley, K.L. (2001). Developing an accreditation system for beak trimming in Australia. Proceedings of the 6 th European Symposium on Poultry Welfare, Zollikofen, pp 232-237 Glatz, P.C., Bourke, M.J., Barnett, J.L. and K.L. Critchley (2002). Accrediting beak trimmers. Proceedings of the Australian Poultry Science

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