

Title: Improving stockperson attitudes to chickens: A novel clicker training approach

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Author: Dr S.J. Hazel

Summary

Positive stockperson attitudes to the animals with which they work lead to improved animal welfare, higher productivity and happier work environments. Conversely, poor attitudes can increase animal fear, reducing productivity and contributing to high staff turnover. Programs have been developed to improve stockperson attitudes and behaviours in the pig and dairy industries but interventions in the chicken industry have been limited.

The project has addressed this priority area in a novel way. In this study, stockpeople working in the layer hen and broiler chicken industries participated in workshops in which they learnt to clicker train chickens. The training was based on a class that had been run for first year animal science and veterinary students at the University of Adelaide, where survey results indicated that post-class students were more likely to think that chickens are intelligent, have individual personalities, and to believe that chickens can experience boredom, frustration and happiness.

The study comprised three two-hour workshops for a total of 12 stockpeople, and surveyed their attitudes to chickens pre- and post-workshop. During the period May to July 2016, three workshops with four participants each were run for stockpeople working on layer hen and broiler farms.

Following the workshops it was observed that stockpeople were more likely to believe that chickens are intelligent, can learn quickly, and that it is easier to work with chickens if you understand how to train them. The improved attitudes to chickens observed in the study are likely to translate to more positive interactions with them in the workplace.

This training methodology, used on a larger scale, has the potential to change existing attitudes to chickens, as significant changes were found even with a small sample size. Further study is required to determine this.