

WORK INSTRUCTIONS FOR WHEN FEATHER PECKING AND CANNIBALISM OCCURS IN A FLOCK



The current Welfare Code places responsibility on the farm owner, manager and staff to minimise feather pecking and cannibalism in poultry flocks under their care. Beak trimming is to be used as a last resort. Early detection of feather pecking or cannibalism increases the chance of corrective action being effective and maintains bird welfare if the behaviour is detected.

1. Ensure staff are trained in basic husbandry skills, remain calm and do not disturb the birds when checking or handling them.
2. Promptly remove any bird that is injured as a result of feather pecking or cannibalism, for treatment or kill humanely.
3. Consider applying anti-peck compounds to pecked birds.
4. Remove from the flock birds that instigate pecking, are aggressive or are being pecked.
5. Check for events that may have disturbed the flock pecking order.
6. Check the health of the flock. A health problem in flocks often initiates pecking mortality. Remove lame, ill, unthrifty, dead and pariah birds from the flock as other birds peck at them.
7. Check feeders, drinkers, lighting and nesting equipment are working correctly and settings are correct.
8. Review diet (fibre, protein, vitamins, enzymes and minerals) and ensure adequate nutrient intake.
9. Offer a diet in mash form rather than pelleted form.
10. Check and reduce light intensity. Eliminate brighter areas and shafts of bright sunlight entering sheds. Reduce abrupt shifts in light intensity between shed and range.
11. Implement a strategy for managing floor eggs including collecting them regularly and consistently.
12. Stimulate bird activity through environmental enrichment.
13. Ensure birds are not being disturbed by vehicles, other farm noises or the presence of predators, wild birds, flies, rodents and ectoparasites.
14. Check that nesting equipment is working correctly, boxes are at the correct height and there is no overuse of nest boxes.
15. Check that hens are not attracted to peck at the exposed reproductive tract during egg laying.
16. Check shed climate and ensure that ventilation, heating and cooling equipment are working correctly and maintaining climate within requirements.
17. Monitor dust and ammonia levels as poor ventilation can increase pecking.
18. Monitor birds during abnormal weather conditions such as high humidity and temperature, thunderstorms and lightning activity.
19. Review flock history.
20. Consider re-trimming birds or fitting blinkers on advice from a veterinarian or animal husbandry specialist if changes in management have not been effective in reducing pecking.
21. Review suitability of equipment and management practices in the longer term.
22. Are unusual events such as out of feed or water, high temperature, power outage, storm, predator incursion, etc. recorded in the flock records?