

Protection of chickens kept for meat production

2005/0099(CNS) - 13/04/2018 - Follow-up document

The Commission presented a report on the application of Directive 2007/43/EC and its influence on the welfare of chickens kept for meat production and on the development of welfare indicators.

The report takes into account production conditions which influence broiler welfare as well as the socioeconomic and administrative implications of the Directive including regional aspects. It is based on a **study completed in 2017** and on audits carried out by the Directorate-General for Health and Food Safety and the opinions of the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA).

The main conclusions of the report are as follows:

Economic data of the sector: the EU is, behind Brazil, the United States of America and China, **one of the main global producers of broilers** (11.3% of global production), with a total poultry meat production of 14.1 million tonnes in 2014. Three quarters of the EU production is concentrated in seven Member States: Poland, United Kingdom, Germany, France, Spain, Italy and the Netherlands which also have the largest farms.

The 2017 study reported that broiler production in the EU has increased by 18.6% from 2009 to 2014, now representing about **6.5 billion birds a year**. Production and consumption have been increasing steadily and chicken is second after pig-meat as the largest consumed meat in the EU. Just over a quarter of a million people are employed in the EU poultry sector.

Application of the Directive: the 2017 study reported that the Directive has been fully transposed into national legislation.

The Directive introduced specific **training** requirements for keepers with derogations on the basis of prior experience. The training emphasises the responsibility of the keeper and the need to balance management and provision of resources as well as practical aspects of catching and transport.

Moreover, the Directive provides three stocking density ranges and keepers must meet a different set of requirements for each range: (i) the general rule is that the stocking density does not exceed 33 kg/m²; (ii) a derogation to allow an increase above 33kg/m² up to 39kg/m²; (iii) a further increase above 39kg/m² up to 42kg/m² is allowed under certain conditions.

The report noted that **different maximum stocking densities** are applied in different Member States. **Farm inspections** generally provide assurance that legislative requirements are met, but Member States have not always provided clear compliance criteria so that their inspectors can make a practical assessment whether farms comply with the law, although there are some good practices such as well-defined maximum gas concentrations and available equipment to measure these.

A **good practice** in some Member States is automatic sharing of data on mortality rates which facilitates investigation of cases, in accordance with the Directive, when excessive deaths may have occurred.

Welfare indicators: the report indicates that controls based on monitoring of footpad dermatitis are the most likely to demonstrate that animal welfare has improved. These controls are the most effective way of setting priorities for farm surveys. Authorities and farmers have also been able to measure progress and meet standards on the basis of actual animal welfare results, thanks to the footpad dermatitis scoring.

According to the report, the Directive has provided an **adequate framework to ensure the welfare of broilers** and, although the scoring of footpad dermatitis is not defined at EU level, the use of this indicator has led to the most systematic improvements in animal welfare.

Conditions at hatcheries and/or parent flocks are often suspected of giving rise to high mortality rates during the early stages of rearing, but such establishments are not investigated by authorities as they have not defined specific animal welfare rules applicable at these other sites.

The proper assessment of the more technical requirements, such as **ventilation**, which influence chickens' welfare, is also a challenge for authorities.

Costs of the Directive: the 2017 study indicated that overall, Member States and industry do not consider the implementation of the Directive as having significant financial implications. Exports and imports largely balance each other and there has been no major cost from implementing the Directive. The competitiveness of the sector in different Member States has not been negatively affected by operating at lower stocking densities.

In conclusion, the Commission will continue to work with Member States to **disseminate examples of good practice** for controls and with Member States and industry on guidance on farm management.