

Protection of chickens kept for meat production

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The committee adopted the report by Thijs BERMAN (PES, NL) amending the proposal under the consultation procedure. Although MEPs approved the general rule established by the Commission to limit stocking densities to 30 kg/m² per unit, they nevertheless called for several changes to the proposed directive:

- while agreeing with the Commission that a derogation to the rules may be authorised, up to a maximum of 38 kg/m² provided a number of additional animal welfare criteria are met, the committee proposed a cut-off date of 1 January 2013, after which the stocking density may not exceed 34 kg/m²;
- some of the additional welfare criteria should be extended to all holdings, regardless of whether they are operating under the derogation. Thus, all establishments should have to conform to certain rules: non-flickering light of at least 50 lux intensity on a 24-hour rhythm, relative humidity of maximum 70% (when the outside temperature is below 10 degrees), temperature of maximum 3 degrees more than the outside temperature (when this exceeds 30 degrees) and sufficient ventilation. The concentration of NH₃ should not exceed 20 ppm and the concentration of CO₂ should not exceed 3000 ppm measured at the level of the chickens' heads;
- beak-trimming and the castration of male chickens should not be allowed under any circumstances;
- the national authorities should be responsible for enforcing these rules "in the form of unannounced spot checks" at least once a year. The cost of these inspections should be borne by the competent authority itself;
- the committee was concerned that penalties should be effective, proportionate and dissuasive, and therefore amended the provisions in the Annex requiring that the stocking density be reduced where deficiencies are detected. It proposed that incidences of deficiencies in a flock should be classified into three groups, depending on the scale of the deficiencies, and that the penalty reduction in stocking density should be one kg/m². Severe deficiencies would lead to repeated reductions;
- there should be a uniform classification scheme for symptoms of illness in chickens;
- the Commission should report within 6 months, rather than 2 years as proposed, on the possible introduction of a harmonised EU system of labelling chicken meat for consumers. The committee said that such labelling should indicate the origin and production standards of the product, the chicken stocking density at the holding concerned, the animal's age and "other parameters which consumers wish to be taken into account";
- given the possibility of lower standards of animal welfare around the world, the EU should "control, and where necessary, prohibit imports of chickens from third countries which come from holdings which do not observe similar rules on the welfare of chickens for meat production as those to be adopted by the EU";
- after two years, the Commission should assess the directive's impact on the welfare of chickens and its economic impact in each Member State. It should assess the welfare parameters after five years and where necessary put forward proposals for adjustments to the relevant provisions of the directive.

