



Chicken Farmers of Canada
**ANIMAL CARE
PROGRAM**

**Implementation
GUIDE**



Introduction

Chicken Farmers of Canada (CFC) has developed a comprehensive animal care program designed to demonstrate the level of care given to Canadian chickens. The program was designed to complement CFC's *Safe, Safer, Safest* program and to provide assurance through documentation that farmers are meeting appropriate animal care standards.

The following is a guide to aid the implementation of CFC's Animal Care Program for farmers already implementing CFC's On-Farm Food Safety Assurance Program (OFFSAP) *Safe, Safer, Safest*.

The implementation guide consists of mandatory or highly recommended production practices that are not included in *Safe, Safer, Safest*. The full Animal Care Program should be referred to for additional information.

To aid with implementation, a combined set of flock specific records has been provided to capture the required information for both the OFFSAP and the Animal Care Programs.

Legend

In each section, production practices have been designated with either an **MD** or an **HR** represents a "MUST DO" production practice. These are mandatory for the humane care of your flock.

MD represents a "HIGHLY RECOMMENDED" production practice which indicates its importance in the animal care program.

HR HR production practices are not mandatory, but they are strongly recommended to ensure the highest level of care for your flock.

1

Feed and Water

An elevated level of aggression can occur when chickens are forced to compete for inadequate resources. To avoid this make sure that chickens are provided with enough space for feeding and watering and an adequate and predictable supply of feed and water.

a. Feed

Chickens must be provided with adequate space to feed without restriction.

The quantity and style of feeders must be appropriate to the number and size of the birds in the facility and they must be set at the appropriate height. Follow the recommendations of the manufacturer and the primary breeder for your particular breed of bird.

The total number of feeders or linear feeder space, the manufacturers' recommendations and the maximum barn capacity (no. of birds) must be recorded on Record Sheet 1.

The feed must be capable of satisfying dietary requirements and maintaining good health.

MD

b. Water

MD

Chickens must have continuous access to potable water, except when required by a veterinarian, as part of vaccination procedures or during the catching process.

HR

The temperature of the water should not exceed 30°C (86°F).

MD

The number and style of waterers must be appropriate to the number and size of the birds in the facility. Follow the recommendations of the manufacturer and the primary breeder for your particular breed of bird to determine an appropriate watering system.

The total number of drinkers or nipples, manufacturers' recommendations and the maximum barn capacity (no. of birds) must be recorded on Record Sheet 1.

HR

Water meters are useful tools for monitoring water intake by the flock.

2

Environment (Temperature, Air Quality and Lighting)

a. Temperature

MD

Record all temperature alarms and the corrective actions taken (see Record Sheet 1). Alarms are to be set for temperature changes outside of the optimal temperature range (thermal comfort zone) for the age and breed of bird.

b. Air Quality

The concentration of ammonia in the air should not exceed 25 ppm. At this level, discomfort to the workers is noticeable (i.e. eye and nasal irritation). At 10 to 15 ppm, ammonia can be detected by smell.

HR

If ammonia levels exceed 15 ppm, steps should be taken to try to address it to avoid any risk of respiratory damage to the birds.

MD

Farmers and/or farm representatives must monitor the quality of the air in the barn daily. If the air quality parameters are out of range (ammonia (25 ppm), humidity, air exchange rate) immediate steps must be taken to improve it.

HR

Ammonia monitoring devices (e.g. strips and tubes) are useful tools for monitoring ammonia levels in the barn.

c. Lighting

MD

During the first three days of the chicks' life you must provide enough illumination for normal feed and water intake and normal activity. Daytime lighting levels must allow chickens to be visually inspected without difficulty.

The lighting program must be documented. See Record Sheet 1.



HR

Birds should be exposed to a period of darkness. The period of darkness should be no less than 1 hour in each 24 hour period except during the brooding period (placement to 5 days of age) where light may be provided continuously.

d. Back-Up Systems

MD

A monitoring system must be functional to inform you of any power failure and temperature variation outside of critical limits. You must test the monitoring system and record when it was tested at least once per production cycle to ensure it is functioning appropriately.

Your barns must have a standby power system or an alternate method of providing and maintaining adequate ventilation, feeding, watering and lighting programs at all stages of grow-out. You must test the standby system and record when it was tested at least once per production cycle to be sure that a proper environment can be maintained if there is a power failure.

Contact information for key farm staff must be available to farm employees in the event of a fire or other disaster.

3

Stocking Density, Housing System and Litter Management

Sufficient space must be provided for all birds to have the freedom to walk, turn, sit, preen, flap and stretch their wings, and dust bathe.

a. Stocking Density

MD

Stocking density must be targeted for no more than **31 kg/m²** at its highest point before the birds are shipped *unless you meet the requirements outlined below*. Where provincial regulations stipulate a specific stocking density (at or below 31 kg/m²), then those regulations preside over the stocking density requirements of this program.

The total inside floor area available to the birds and the total number of birds needed to meet target density at market weight must be recorded on Record Sheet 1.

Barns that demonstrate an ability to operate under higher densities can adopt a density up to 38 kg/m². These criteria are determined by flock mortality, air quality, husbandry programs, feeding and watering equipment, ventilation systems, and litter control. Farmers raising birds above 31 kg/m² must be vigilant to observe for signs of stress and overcrowding. These indicators include elevated mortality, elevated lameness, poor litter quality, poor growth and poor ventilation. The parameters below are designed as tools for monitoring and preventing these conditions in flocks with a density of over 31 kg/m².



MD

If stocking between **31 kg/m² and 38 kg/m²** the following requirements must be met:

- The number of feeders and drinkers available must be appropriate for the number of birds in the barn. You cannot place more chicks than your feeders and drinkers can accommodate.
- Water meters must be available and intake recorded daily to monitor for changes in water intake.
- Chickens must not have to travel any farther than 3 to 4 m (10 to 13 ft) to reach feed or water when raised at target densities from 31 kg/m² to 38 kg/m² (6.35 lb/ft² to 7.78 lb/ft²).
- Minimum and maximum temperatures must be recorded daily.
- Humidity or ammonia meters must be available to ensure that air quality is sufficient. Humidity or ammonia must be measured on each floor of the barn and the minimum and maximum levels over each 24 hour period must be recorded. Corrective actions must be taken if levels are outside of the acceptable range. Relative humidity is acceptable between 50-70% and ammonia is unacceptable when it exceeds 25 ppm.
- Mortality, euthanasia and condemn records must be maintained for each flock. Mortalities and condemns must not be higher than what would be expected for birds raised at a density of up to 31 kg/m² (6.35 lb/ft²).

b. Housing System and Litter Management

Chickens in Canada are generally raised in clean, climate-controlled barns. They are typically raised in free-run systems where they can move about the barn freely. Broiler chickens may be raised in alternative types of housing systems provided that the animal care requirements outlined in this program are met.

MD

Alternative housing systems that do not meet the stocking density requirements stipulated in this program are not permitted for use in broiler barns.

All flocks must be provided with good quality (clean, dry and absorbent) fresh litter of suitable material, particle size, and depth. Wood shavings and chopped straw are examples of suitable litter.

Litter quality must be monitored daily.

If the litter quality is inadequate (that is, too wet or too dry) immediate measures must be taken to improve it.

4

Bird Monitoring and Handling

MD

The chicken farmer or one of his/her representatives must always be present at the time of delivery and placement, to make sure that the chicks delivered are in good physical condition and to ensure that the environment is appropriate for the chicks.



MD

You must inspect your chickens at least twice a day and more often during adverse weather. The flock must be observed for:

- Sick or injured birds
- Abnormal respiratory sounds/mouth breathing
- Dead birds
- Lameness and inability to rise
- Body condition
- Feather condition and cover
- Normal bird behaviour

5

Health Care Practices

MD

The name and contact information of a poultry veterinarian familiar with your farm operation and an alternate must be recorded on Record Sheet 1.

Watch for clinical signs of a disease and unusually high mortality. If you find a problem, consult a veterinarian. They will give you a diagnosis and treatment recommendations. Keep these reports. If a reportable disease is confirmed or suspected, you must inform a veterinarian from the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. The Provincial Veterinarian or a Provincial laboratory and your Provincial Board should be contacted if a provincially reportable disease is detected.

Leg disorders can cause pain and discomfort. Lameness in birds must be monitored closely. Birds experiencing lameness that inhibits or prevents them from walking and/or reaching food and water must be euthanized. A method for evaluating lameness can be found in 'Kestin et al. (1992).

Foot pad lesions should also be monitored closely. Lesions may vary from discoloration of the skin to ulcerations and inflammation of the foot pad. Foot pad lesions are associated with poor litter conditions (wet litter and high ammonia). Steps should be taken to improve litter quality if lesions are observed in the flock.

MD

Overall flock mortality rates for mixed sex flocks must not exceed the values outlined in the table below. Mortality due to variables outside of the farmer's control, vertically transmitted disease (e.g. hepatitis) or euthanasia (culling) due to variable chick size/stunted growth would fall outside of these parameters and would not result in corrective actions for the farmer.

Due to sex differences in mortality, overall mortality rates for single-sex male flocks may exceed the mortality rates for mixed-sex flocks by 2%.

¹ Kestin, S.C., Knowles, T.G., Tinch, A.E. & N.G. Gregory. 1992. Prevalence of leg weakness in broiler chickens and its relationship with genotype. *Veterinary Record*, 131: 190-194.

**Parameters for mixed-sex flock mortality using the equation
 $2 + (0.06 \times \text{slaughter age in days})$**

Slaughter Age (weeks)	Slaughter Age (days)	Theoretical Flock Mortality (%)
4	28	3.68
5	35	4.10
6	42	4.52
7	49	4.94
8	56	5.36

MD

Mortality levels must be recorded daily. If unexplained mortality exceeds 2% in 24 hours, a veterinarian must be notified. If high mortality occurs immediately after placement, hatchery personnel may be contacted in place of a veterinarian. The problem, corrective action and outcome must be recorded.

Sick or injured chickens must be culled on a daily basis. When it is necessary to cull chickens, they must be euthanized in a humane manner by skilled personnel.

6

Catching and Loading

The responsibility of catching and loading is shared between farmers and processors. On the farm, you can improve the humane handling of your birds through proper planning, building design and easy accessibility for load outs. Buildings should be designed to discourage needless transfer of birds between handlers.

MD

Farmers or a farm representative must be available (on site or by phone) to assist the catching crews should a problem arise. Feeders and drinkers must be lifted or removed, and the light intensity lowered to facilitate easier catching of the birds.

8

Workers and Management

MD

All personnel that are involved in the care and handling of the birds must understand the animal care program.

Personnel involved in the care and handling of the birds must be competent in the following areas:

- Understanding basic bird behaviour (normal and abnormal behaviour)
 - including signs of fear, distress and thermal discomfort
- Identifying signs of disease or poor health
 - including evaluation of lameness and foot pad lesions



MD

- Correct bird handling techniques
- Procedures for euthanasia
- Litter and air quality management
- Emergency procedures for fire and disaster

HR

To minimize excitement and to avoid startling the chickens when attending to them it is recommended that:

- Personnel wear clothing of uniform appearance
- Routine procedures be performed consistently and according to a schedule
- A signal be given consistently when entering the facility to alert birds that someone is approaching

9

Record Keeping and Corrective Actions

a. Record Keeping

MD

The static information recorded on Record Sheet 1 (or similar) must be available for each barn, and must be reviewed and updated as necessary, at minimum, on an annual basis.

The information recorded on the Flock Specific Records (or similar) must be completed per flock for each barn.

These records can be found under the “Forms” tab of the Animal Care Program manual.

b. Corrective Actions

MD

Each time a deviation occurs during a flock cycle, the deviation, and the reason behind it, must be recorded on the deviation sheet (for example: target density may be exceeded due the processing date being moved etc.) must be recorded on the deviation record sheet, the Flock Specific record forms, or a similar form. A single deviation does not directly affect certification. Based on the reason for the deviation a change in management practice may need to take place in order to prevent the deviation from re-occurring. The farmer must record any changes that are made.

If a particular deviation becomes an ongoing occurrence (e.g. re-occurs within the next three flocks), the farmer must take corrective actions in order to receive/maintain certification.