



Animal Welfare Institute

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February 22, 2011

Ohio Livestock Care Standards Board
Ohio Department of Agriculture
8995 E. Main Street
Reynoldsburg, OH 43068

RE: Proposed Standards for Poultry-Broilers

Dear Members of the Board:

I am writing on behalf of the Animal Welfare Institute (AWI) to offer recommendations and promulgate concerns regarding the setting of standards for the on-farm treatment of meat chickens. We understand that the Ohio Livestock Care Standards Board (OLCSB) has posted a set of Proposed Standards for comment.

Since its founding in 1951, AWI has been alleviating suffering inflicted on animals by people. Major goals of the organization include supporting high-welfare farms and achieving humane slaughter and transport for all animals raised for food. In 2006 AWI launched a high-welfare food labeling program called Animal Welfare Approved (AWA). As part of this program AWA collaborates with scientists and farmers to set animal care standards. The program employs a highly trained field staff to audit farms for compliance with these standards, and communicates regularly with hundreds of family farmers in dozens of states, including Ohio. The program covers the full lives of the animals from birth through slaughter.

Position Statement

AWI is deeply disappointed with the proposed standards for meat chickens. The standards do not comprise the level of care and protection of animal well-being that the public demands.

Consumers want animals, even those used for food production, to be treated humanely while they are alive. In a 2004 survey conducted by researchers at the Ohio State University, 92% of Ohioans agreed that it is important that farm animals are well-cared for, and 81% said the well-being of farm animals is just as important as the well-being of pets.¹

AWI believes that a board charged with setting minimum care standards that provide for the well-being of farm animals has a responsibility to consider the most recent scientific literature and expert opinions

¹ Rauch A & Sharp JS, *Ohioans Attitudes about Animal Welfare*, The Ohio State University, Social Responsibility Initiative, January 2005. http://ohiosurvey.osu.edu/pdf/2004_Animal_report.pdf.

and to set standards that reflect the latest information on animal behavior and welfare. As many new studies and scientific and medical organizations (e.g. the American Veterinary Medical Association) have shown, a practice that has become routine in the industry may cease to be considered acceptable or humane based on new evidence. The OLCSB is positing standards that are even less stringent than common industry practices, which are themselves often unacceptable.

The OLCSB **must** create minimum standards that strive to increase, not decrease, the well-being of animals on the farm. To the contrary, the current set of proposed standards for meat chickens allows for conditions and practices that typically result in animal distress, pain and suffering.

Inadequate Standards

The proposed standards set for meat chickens do not meet the mandated requirements of the OLCSB under Article 14 of the Ohio Constitution in that they do not provide for the “care and well-being of livestock and poultry.”² Animal well-being is a concept that allows animals to be free from mental and physical pain and suffering, or fear and distress. Contrary to industry adage, a productive animal is NOT necessarily a healthy (either physically or mentally) animal. Advances in science and technology allow animals to maintain productivity even under duress. For example, producers are able to yield good meat product from animals with poor conformation and flighty or aggressive temperaments.

Numerous sets of guidelines, worldwide, have been developed to account for fundamental factors in achieving animal well-being. Most of these guidelines are based on the concept that humans have a moral obligation to afford farm animals “Five Freedoms.” These freedoms imply certain husbandry requirements for the provision of basic farm animal welfare and are viewed as necessary to avoid welfare-related problems.³

The Five Freedoms are listed below, along with specific examples of the OLCSB’s failure to set minimum standards that meet these basic guidelines for broiler well-being.

- 1. Freedom from Hunger and Thirst** - by ready access to fresh water and a diet to maintain full health and vigor.
 - Proposed Standards allow feed restriction of breeders.
 - Proposed Standards make no requirement that all birds have adequate access to feed and water.
 - Proposed Standards allow withholding water from breeders and broilers for “management practice.”

² Ohio State Legislature, 129th Assembly. The Ohio Constitution. § 14.01 Ohio Livestock Care Standards Board.

³ Farm Animal Welfare Council: Five Freedoms. <http://www.fawc.org.uk/freedoms.htm>.

2. Freedom from Discomfort - by providing an appropriate environment including shelter and a comfortable resting area.

- Proposed Standards allow wire and slatted flooring.
- Proposed Standards do not specify any litter quantity or quality requirements.
- Proposed Standards make no requirement for access to fresh air.
- Proposed Standards fail to specify maximum ammonia level.

3. Freedom from Pain, Injury or Disease - by prevention or rapid diagnosis and treatment.

- Proposed Standards make no requirements regarding routine observation of birds for signs of disease or injury.
- Proposed Standards have no requirement that sick or injured birds be separated from other birds and given treatment or humanely killed.
- Proposed Standards do not specify a limit on maximum growth rates for birds that result in pain and disability.
- Proposed Standards allow painful beak trimming of breeders.
- Proposed Standards allow painful toe clipping of breeding cockerels.
- Proposed Standards allow painful comb dubbing of breeding cockerels.
- Proposed Standards allow catching and carrying birds by a single leg, which may result in pain and injury.
- Proposed Standards make no requirement for a dark period to allow for proper rest.

4. Freedom to Express Normal Behavior - by providing sufficient space, proper facilities and company of the animal's own kind.

- Proposed Standards make no requirement that birds receive either outdoor access or environmental enrichment indoors.
- Proposed Standards make no specifications to allow birds the opportunity to perch.
- Proposed Standards do not specify maximum stocking density, so birds may be prevented from flapping their wings and moving around normally.
- Proposed Standards do not specify minimum light intensity, thereby allowing constant low-level lighting.

5. Freedom from Fear and Distress - by ensuring conditions and treatment which avoid mental suffering.

- Proposed Standards make no provisions for birds to escape from threats such as other, more aggressive birds.
- Proposed Standards make no limit on flock size, which may lead to distress from overcrowding, noise and commotion.
- Proposed Standards make no stipulation that workers and catching crews are trained in humane handling.

Conclusion

The OLCSB has been charged by the Ohio Constitution with setting standards that provide for “the care and well-being of livestock and poultry” and “protect Ohio farms and families”.⁴ Economic viability and profitability is a major concern for farmers in a competitive market. However, animal well-being must become a higher priority. Some farmers in Ohio and the rest of the United States are already proving that alternative production methods such as organic or high-welfare farming are economically viable too, and can serve as a model for balancing the varied interests the OLCSB is responsible for.

AWI appreciates the opportunity to offer these concerns regarding farm animal care standards for Ohio, and hopes to see the proposed regulations reworked to incorporate the tenets of the Five Freedoms and animal well-being into the on-farm treatment of meat chickens. Please do not hesitate to contact me by phone at 202-446-2148 or email at elissa@awionline.org if you have any questions or desire additional information.

Sincerely,



Elissa Sosland, M.S.
Farm Animal Program Associate

⁴ Ohio State Legislature, 129th Assembly. The Ohio Constitution. § 14.01 Ohio Livestock Care Standards Board.