

Broiler welfare under scrutiny

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The genetic selection of broiler chickens for rapid growth and efficient feed utilization, the housing and management means that the welfare of the chicks can be under pressure. Wageningen University & Research is exploring ways to reduce this. Major welfare problems in broiler chickens are footpad lesions, locomotion problems and behavioural restrictions.

Well begun is half done

Wageningen Livestock Research conducts research into the effects of hatching conditions on the welfare and health of broilers. E.g. it has been shown that the litter quality improved and less footpad lesions occurred when eggs are hatched inside the broiler unit, instead of placing day-old broiler chicks from

the hatchery in the barn. Using a meta-analysis, Wageningen Livestock Research has also analyzed the effect of the duration of the absence from feed and water immediately after hatching on the chicks production, health and well-being.

More natural behaviour

Wageningen Livestock Research carries out research into optimal environmental enrichment for broilers. Environmental enrichment stimulates natural behavior and thus reduces the risk of welfare problems, such as locomotion problems and forms of contact dermatitis. We look for the right combinations of environmental enrichments that meet the needs of the broilers and are well applicable in practice.



Welfare monitor broilers

The European Welfare Quality® project developed a welfare monitor for broiler chickens based on animal based measures instead of resource based measures. Examples of measurements are a score for the locomotion, the prevention of soiling and forms of contact dermatitis such as foot pad lesions, and the degree to which chicks show natural behaviour. For the Netherlands we have adapted this monitor by combining observations in the barn with observations on the slaughter line in order to give a good picture of the welfare of the flock in a practically feasible manner. This monitor is also used for testing new broiler concepts. In cooperation with the sector, Livestock Research also works on a tailor made welfare monitor based on Welfare Quality.

Better well-being during catching, transport and slaughter

The process of catching, loading and transporting, and the handling procedures related to slaughter can have an effect on the well-being of broilers, a.o. due to the occurrence of injuries during these processes. Wageningen Livestock Research investigates these processes to gain insight into the causes and develops methods to prevent these injuries.



Contact

Wageningen Livestock Research
P.O. Box 338
6700 AH Wageningen, The Netherlands
www.wur.eu/livestock-research

Ingrid de Jong
T +31 (0)317 48 05 89
E ingrid.dejong@wur.nl