

Request for Code of Practice Interpretation

Code of Practice: Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Pullets and Laying Hens (2017)

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SUMMARY OF REQUEST FOR INTERPRETATION

Concern

There is a gap between how farmers and other industry stakeholders are interpreting the Code with respect to whether “bedding” must be added to aviary systems, or whether the gradual accumulation of “litter” over time is sufficient. In particular, there is concern that many farmers have interpreted the Code to mean that “bedding” is not required, and that “litter” produced by hens naturally (from manure, feathers, shedded skin particles, etc.) over a period of time is sufficient to meet the Code’s requirements regarding the provision of litter.

Questions

1. Does the Code require that bedding (as defined in the Code) be added to Single-Tier and Multi-Tier Housing systems, particularly at placement, in order to meet requirements regarding the provision of litter?
2. Alternatively, can producers rely exclusively on the gradual build-up of litter produced naturally over the course of time from bird excreta, feathers, feed, dust, and other materials, in lieu of providing bedding at the time of placement and/or on an ongoing basis?

RELEVANT CODE SECTIONS CONSIDERED BY THE CTP

Glossary

- **Bedding:** Loose material such as wood shavings or chopped straw that is added to housing environments.
- **Litter:** The combination of bedding and/or bird excreta, feathers, feed, dust, and other materials on floors of bird housing systems.
- **Litter Space:** A solid floor surface with the ability to hold or contain litter/substrate.

Section 2.5.4: Foraging and Dust Bathing

Relevant Final Requirements

- Hens housed in litter-based systems must be provided with continuous access to litter.
- For Single-Tier systems: At least 15% of the usable space must be litter.
- In Multi-Tier systems at least 33% of the usable space must be litter, except for up to 24 weeks of age, when the litter may be reduced to a minimum of 15% of the useable space.

Relevant Transitional Requirements¹

- For Single-Tier systems installed prior to April 1, 2017, that are fully slatted, or where less than 15% of useable space is litter, a solid surface area of at least 1.5 m² (16.0 sq ft) for litter/substrate for dust bathing must be provided for each 1,000 hens. Where multiple sites are provided, they must be evenly distributed.
- Hens housed in litter-based systems must be provided with continuous access to litter. (F)
- In Multi-Tier systems, at least 33% of the usable space must be litter, except up to 24 weeks of age when the litter may be reduced to a minimum of 15% of the useable space. (F)

Section 3.5: Litter Management

Requirements

- Litter must be of a good quality, and friable.
- Bedding that is added must not be harmful or toxic to birds.
- Litter condition must be monitored and managed to avoid levels of dustiness or dampness that could cause leg, respiratory, or other health problems such as the build-up of parasites or diseases.
- Litter that has become excessively wet (e.g. from a water leak, flood) must be removed promptly.
- Used litter must be removed between flocks.

CTP INTERPRETATION

Question #1

Does the Code require that bedding (as defined in the Code) be added to Single-Tier and Multi-Tier Housing systems, particularly at placement, in order to meet requirements regarding the provision of litter?

Interpretation

The Code does not require that bedding must be added to Single-Tier and Multi-Tier Housing systems at placement, or at any other point during production. Consequently, it would not be considered a violation of the Code if supplemental bedding was not provided at or shortly after placement.

Rationale

- The Code does not contain a requirement that mandates the provision of “bedding” at placement.
- The Code does not contain a requirement that stipulates or prescribes a minimum depth of bedding and/or litter at any point during production.
- It is recognized that birds start producing litter immediately and that a depth of 1 to 2 cm is possible between 24 and 48 hours after placement.

¹ The inclusion of “(F)” at the end of a requirement indicates a Final Requirement that applies to flocks placed after the stated transitional date

- In the Glossary, “Litter” is defined as “*the combination of bedding and/or bird excreta, feathers, feed, dust, and other materials on floors of bird housing systems*”. The use of “and/or” in the definition was deliberate and represents an important element in that “litter” can include “bedding” in addition to organic matter produced by birds, but does not have to.
- Uses of the terms “litter” and “bedding” in sections 2.5.4 (Foraging and Dust Bathing) and 3.5 (Litter Management) are also deliberate. By including both terms in the glossary, the Code Development Committee recognized that the terms have distinct meanings and should not be used interchangeably.
- The Code Technical Panel acknowledges that there may be some confusion regarding the Section 2.5.4 Requirement that states: “*Hens housed in litter-based systems must be provided with continuous access to litter*”. The Requirement was intended to ensure that birds have continuous access to litter areas as a means of preventing birds from being locked in non-litter areas of specific types of non-cage systems (e.g., multi-tier).

Question #2

Alternatively, can producers rely exclusively on the gradual build-up of litter produced naturally over the course of time from bird excreta, feathers, feed, dust, and other materials, in lieu of providing bedding at the time of placement and/or on an ongoing basis?

Interpretation

For the reasons stated above in both the interpretation and rationale to Question #1, it would be acceptable to rely exclusively on the gradual build-up of litter produced naturally over the course of time in lieu of providing bedding at the time of placement.

RECOMMENDED ACTION

- The Requirement in [Section 2.5.4 \(Foraging and Dust Bathing\)](#) which states that “hens in litter-based systems must be provided with continuous access to litter” should be interpreted to mean that hens in litter-based systems must have continuous access to litter areas.
- The preferred action to provide clear guidance regarding the Requirement in [Section 2.5.4](#) would be to amend the Requirement to read: “*Hens housed in litter-based systems must be provided with continuous access to litter areas*”. However, given that EFC and the provincial boards have direct access to producers, it may be sufficient to ensure that clarification is provided through the on-farm assessment process and producer communications.
- The Code Technical Panel’s interpretations regarding the provision of bedding to birds at placement should be referenced by EFC’s Animal Care Assessment project team, and implemented through provisions of the Animal Care Assessment.
- EFC and provincial boards should undertake to communicate the Code Technical Panel’s interpretation to egg farmers, third-party assessors, and any other relevant groups and/or individuals.