



# Food Animal Initiative

ENVIRONMENTS FIT FOR ANIMALS FIT FOR THEIR ENVIRONMENT

## *FAI Technical Datasheet - The management of injurious pecking in turkeys Po3 Update August 2005*

The Farm Animal Welfare Council highlighted the issue of injurious pecking in turkeys as a welfare issue in their 1995 report<sup>1</sup>. This is a well known behaviour in turkey rearing systems. Current regimes to resolve this issue consist of either keeping birds in reduced lighting or trimming their beaks. Both solutions are difficult to justify in terms of turkey welfare as they produce other welfare problems (see below) and neither resolves the real issue i.e. why do the birds peck each other in a way can result in severe injury?

### ***'the facts.....'***

There are two main systems of keeping turkeys in relation to this issue:

1. Housed birds which are kept in controlled systems where lighting can be subdued (1-5 lux) in order to reduce injurious pecking.
2. Houses which allow light to enter and where birds have their beaks trimmed in order to prevent the more severe effects of injurious pecking.<sup>2</sup>

The law for turkeys and other poultry states that it is permitted to remove - 'not more than one third of its upper and lower beaks as measured from its tip towards the entrance to the nostrils or not more than one third of its upper beak only.'<sup>3</sup>

Research has shown that birds are less active in dim light and that this can cause eye abnormalities (see the FAWC report Appendix 3). Under system 1 above the bird's welfare is compromised as they are not provided with facilities to carry out their major natural behaviours other than feeding and drinking. Under system 2 birds' welfare is potentially compromised as the major organ for feeding and exploratory behaviour is altered and the dermis at the tip of the beak has many nerve endings.<sup>4</sup> These systems are not a long term solution for improved turkey welfare.

Under both systems birds can be subject to severe injurious pecking which may result in death. Research has shown that a substantial part of turkey behaviour can be classed as beak related.<sup>5</sup> Where birds are tightly stocked and do not have an enriched environment the object of exploration is more likely to be another turkey.



### ***'.... the FAI response!'***

At FAI we have reared 2-3 thousand birds per year for the Christmas market in two separate groups. The breeds of turkey used for free range production birds are slower growing and more placid than the more common white turkey of which there are several strains. The following features have been incorporated into the system;

1. Some of the birds not beak trimmed.
2. Birds housed in sheep sheds with ad lib hoppers and bell drinkers at 25kg per m<sup>2</sup> i.e. about 3 birds per m<sup>2</sup>
3. Turkeys free range in trees from 9am until dusk.
4. Whole grain provided in the diet.
5. Strings and plastic for pecking.
6. Enrichments such as apples and swedes provided when aggressive pecking occurred.
7. Straw provided 2 times weekly from stacks of bales in the shed.

Despite these provisions some of the bronze turkeys reared in 2003 and 4 were aggressively pecked mainly at the back of the head and this was the major cause of culls/mortality. These birds were removed to a hospital pen where many recovered. The birds for the 2005 market are an even slower growing strain and are based on the Norfolk Black. Indications so far are that these birds are not aggressive as the birds are now 10 weeks old.

1. FAWC Report on the welfare of turkeys Jan 2005 PB 2033 tel 02079046534 or e-mail [stephen.j.lyus@defra.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:stephen.j.lyus@defra.gsi.gov.uk)
2. Grigor et al, Veterinary Record 1995, 136: 11, 257-265
3. Veterinary Surgery (Exemptions) Order 1962 SI No.2557.
4. Gentle MJ et al Research in Veterinary Science 1995, 58:2, 158-162
5. Hughes BO, Grigor PN Animal Welfare 1996, 5: 2, 189-198

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