

Recommended code of practice for  
the care and handling of farm animals

# Chickens, Turkeys and Breeders from Hatchery to Processing Plant

## THE CODES OF PRACTICE:

The Codes of Practice are nationally developed guidelines for the care and handling of different species of farm animals. Codes are not intended to be used as production manuals but rather as an educational tool in the promotion of sound husbandry and welfare practices. The Codes contain recommendations to assist farmers and others in the agriculture and food sector to compare and improve their own management practices.

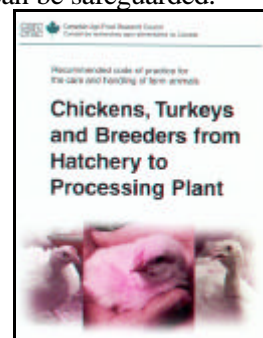
### **The Recommended code of practice for the care and handling of chickens, turkeys and breeders from hatchery to processing plant:**

This voluntary code is intended to achieve a workable balance between the best interests of the animals and the poultry industry. This code recognizes the basic principle that the humane treatment of animals is the prime consideration in animal husbandry and handling and that animals, which are treated well and protected from stress, are growing in far better physical and mental condition. This translates into significant benefits and economic advantages to producers and processors as well.

This code has been prepared with recognition of current practices. It identifies the areas where the welfare of the animals could be at risk unless precautions are taken. The code sets out what these precautions should be, bearing in mind the importance to animals of a total environment and the fact that there is often more than one way in which their welfare can be safeguarded.

This factsheet highlights a small amount of the information found in the complete Recommended code of practice for the care and handling of Chickens, Turkeys and Breeders from Hatchery to Processing Plant.

A copy of the complete Recommended Code of Practice can be found at the Canadian Agri-food Research Council's web site:  
[www.carc-crac.ca](http://www.carc-crac.ca)



## **Highlights from the Recommended code of practice for the care and handling of chickens, turkeys and breeders from hatchery to processing plant:**

### **Section 1: Hatcheries**

- Commercial hatcheries concentrate their efforts on maximizing hatchability of fertile eggs and on marketing healthy high quality chicks to their customer requirements. Environmental conditions for incubation are controlled automatically and are safeguarded by supplementary mechanisms activated in case of unexpected malfunction or disruption of energy sources. High standards of sanitation are essential for the production of high-quality chicks. Generally, economic interests of commercial hatcheries favour the best care of marketable chicks, as this has an influence on the birds' future performance.
- Every person working with birds in a hatchery should be able to understand and accept his/her responsibility to prevent avoidable suffering. Before duties are assigned, hatchery operators should be satisfied that personnel responsible for handling live chicks have the skills and training necessary to perform any required treatment or procedure without causing unnecessary pain, suffering, or distress to the chicks.

### **Section 2: Production of Hatching Eggs**

- Depending on the type of housing used, brooding temperature for the first week of life should range from 29 to 32°C (84-90°F) at the eye level of the chicks. Thereafter, the temperature should be lowered by 2-3°C (4-6°F) each week, down to approximately 21 - 23°C (70-75°F) at the age of 6 weeks, and thereafter preferably maintained relatively steady within the range of 10-27°C (50-80°F). Various strains of chickens can vary in their optimum temperature requirements. For this reason, the behaviour of chickens in a pen or brooding cage can be used as a reliable indicator of thermal comfort. The crowding of young chicks outside the perimeter of the heating zone usually indicates too high a temperature and, conversely, the gathering of chickens in close proximity to the heat source usually indicates too low an environmental temperature. A temperature close to optimal is present when the chickens are evenly distributed throughout the whole brooder area. Other behavioural signs that indicate too high a temperature are panting, frequent spreading of the wings, frequent wing flapping, and the occurrence of pasty excreta on the cloacal area. Signs of low environmental temperature include feather ruffling, rigid posture, trembling, huddling, distress vocalization, and piling on top of each other.
- Beak trimming should be carried out only by highly competent, trained individuals. Particular attention must be paid to selection and adjustment of the equipment and to its maintenance. Beak trimming should ideally take place prior to 14 days of age.
- An emergency plan in the event of fire or natural disaster for each premise should be prepared and every attendant should be familiar with it.

### **Section 3: Broiler and Roaster Production**

- Housing facilities should be prepared to receive the chickens at the time of their arrival. The brooding area should be deaned and disinfected, and the heating equipment should be operating at the level necessary to maintain an environmental temperature suitable for chicks. It is recommended that the barn be pre-heated in advance of the arrival of the chicks.
- To minimize excitement of the chickens, attendants working with the same groups of chickens should wear clothing of uniform appearance during the whole production cycle. Activities of attendants should be consistent and performed according to a schedule.
- It is highly recommended that workers, before entering a pen, give an easily perceptible signal to the chickens to prevent their being startled.
- Chicken flocks should be observed and monitored at least twice a day.
- Sick or injured chickens must be promptly treated or killed humanely. Cervical dislocation is an acceptable humane method.

### **Section 4: Turkey Production**

- The successful breeding and production of turkeys depends on a high standard of bird husbandry that provides not only the essentials of life but also those elements that contribute to the well being of the birds.
- Turkeys should be handled in a manner to minimize stress. When turkeys are being held they should be in a comfortable body position. Holding or carrying time in a vertical position with the head down should be minimized and all movements with turkeys should be smooth.
- Heavy turkeys should be carried by both legs and one wing. Smaller turkeys that can be picked up by hand may be set down on their feet. The recommended method for heavier turkeys is to set the turkeys on the floor, preferably on their breast.
- An elevated level of aggression can occur when turkeys are forced to compete for inadequate resources. To avoid this, make sure that turkeys are provided with enough feeding and watering space and an adequate and predictable supply of feed and water.

### **Section 5: Handling and Transportation of Live Poultry**

- Owners and operators of poultry operations have a responsibility to provide facilities and equipment to make bird handling, loading and unloading possible without causing unnecessary injury or suffering to the birds. **The producer, or a representative, should be available throughout the catching and loading process.**
- Proper building design and accessibility to transport vehicles greatly improves the humane handling of loose-housed poultry. Producers are responsible for ensuring proper interior and exterior design of buildings to facilitate loading and unloading of poultry.
- All members of catching and transporting crews should be properly instructed and knowledgeable about the basic aspects of animal welfare and in handling birds. Careless catching of birds can be a source of injury.
- The driver should check the load and surrounding area for loose birds before departing.

## **Section 6: Processing Operations**

- Law requires the prevention of unnecessary suffering of birds before and during slaughter. In addition to welfare concerns, improper bird handling at this stage can seriously impair meat quality, visual appearance and attractiveness to the consumer.
- Upon arrival at the plant, the driver should advise the receiver of any special instructions regarding tarping and the condition of the load.
- Crates with live birds should be moved in a horizontal position.

## **Section 7: Areas for Further Research**

During its review of the previous version of the code of practice, the review committee identified several points where research is needed to improve the welfare of birds. A few of these points are listed below:

- Continuing nutritional research is recommended to promote on-going poultry health and welfare in areas such as skeletal strength and appetite management.
- Changing weather conditions confront transporters with constant challenges to maintain optimal conditions in bringing live poultry from farms to plants. Research has been suggested to develop monitoring equipment for birds in transit, which would alert the drivers of changing conditions.

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All Recommended Codes of Practice are presently developed by a national committee consisting of representatives from farm groups, animal welfare groups, veterinarians, animal scientists, federal and provincial governments, industry and related agriculture sectors. The following are some of the organizations that provided input at various stages in the drafting of this Code:

- Canadian Food Inspection Agency
- Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada
- Canadian Federation of Humane Societies
- Canadian Veterinary Medical Association
- Canadian Egg Marketing Agency

In 1993, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada asked the Canadian Agri-Food Research Council (CARC) and its Canada Committee on Animals and Expert Committee on Farm Animal Welfare and Behaviour to take the lead in cooperation with the Canadian Federation of Humane Societies in updating existing Codes and developing new Codes. CARC officially agreed to take on this responsibility in February 1995.

Further information on the process of Code development can be obtained from the Canadian Agri-Food Research Council (CARC), Heritage House, Building 60, Central Experimental Farm, Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0C6.

This factsheet was prepared by Penny Lawlis, Animal Care Specialist, Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food with the assistance of an Editorial Committee. Animal welfare factsheets have been printed and distributed through the financial support of your provincial agriculture department.