

Stonegate



Stonegate Farmers Corporate Welfare Policy 2020-21

Applicable to all chicken, duck, and speciality species (quail, ostrich, guinea fowl, geese, pheasant, rhea, turkey, and emu) within the company supply chain.



Welfare Statement

At Stonegate, we are committed to providing exemplary animal care and the best welfare standards we can provide to all bird species including chicken, duck, and speciality species (quail, ostrich, guinea fowl, geese, pheasant, rhea, turkey, and emu) in our care throughout their life. We recognise that good welfare is not only the right thing to do for the livestock, but it is what our customers expect and makes good business sense. Good welfare reflects on the quality and integrity of our eggs. We work closely with our contracted producers to ensure high standards of welfare of all our livestock. We are committed to keeping animals safe, comfortable, and healthy by following the principles of the 'Five Freedoms' and through continuously reviewing the conditions and environments in which we keep our birds. We monitor and record key welfare indicators and audit all farms and systems regularly. We aim to deliver products from livestock which are managed in environments which surpass baseline requirements.

1.0 Business Operations

1.1 Pullet Rearing

The company rearing sites will uphold the standards of our retail customers and other standards outlined by the BEIC, APHA, RSPCA. In addition, the company will remain bound by all relevant codes of practice and work to ensure that birds are reared to standards which are expected by their laying sites and customers. All operations will be regularly audited and monitored by management and company veterinarians. Key welfare indicators will be reviewed to support processes of continuous improvement practice's (CIP's).

1.2 Pullet Transport

The company will plan for the transfer of all pullet species including chicken, duck, and speciality species (quail, ostrich, guinea fowl, geese, pheasant, rhea, turkey, and emu) from rearing farm to laying farm within permitted legal limits and at appropriate times to minimise any stress to poultry. Pullet transport will be completed with the use of dedicated, specialised vehicles and the operations will remain scheduled and planned to avoid delays and ensure the receiving farm is prepared to accept offload. Performance will be continuously reviewed. The companies target is to ensure birds reach laying farms within eight hours of the departure of delivery vehicle(s).

1.3 Bird health

The company will work closely with specialist poultry veterinarians, nutritionists, and geneticists on all matters of bird and flock health. Vaccination programs, management techniques and nutritional specification will be regularly reviewed with information from the field used to help develop CIP.

1.4 Laying Farm Operations

The company will ensure that all laying sites in the supply chain meet the standards required under all relevant regulation and codes of practice regarding the provision and need to uphold high standards of animal welfare. Competent staff will ensure that all laying sites operate within effective welfare guided methods. The company will ensure laying farms within its supply chain are regularly visited, advised, and audited to control standards of animal welfare alongside egg production. Company and supply base sites will be expected to comply to codes of practice outlined within their country and district specific law and legislation. The company will ensure that all audit processes are tested against provisions outlined within legislation as a minimum. All egg processed from the company supply chain will be sourced from a UK farm.

1.4 Depopulation Transportation

All species including chicken, duck, and speciality species (quail, ostrich, guinea fowl, geese, pheasant, rhea, turkey, and emu) 'end of lay' transportation will be completed with the use of dedicated, specialised vehicles and the operations will remain scheduled and planned to avoid delays and ensure the destination slaughter facility is prepared to accept offload. The companies target is to ensure all species including chicken, duck, and speciality species (quail, emu, ostrich, guinea fowl, geese, pheasant, rhea, turkey, and emu) reach slaughter facilities within eight hours of the departure of delivery vehicle(s).

1.5 Bird Slaughter

The company will ensure that all 'end of lay' poultry species including chicken, duck, and speciality species (quail, ostrich, guinea fowl, geese, pheasant, rhea, turkey, and emu) are slaughtered through utilising humane methods of inert gas stunning. The company will work closely with the abattoirs to ensure all operations: catching, transport, lairage and slaughter are carried out with the welfare of the birds in mind and that all parties comply with UK Government standards of poultry slaughter detailed within DEFRA's "Welfare of Animals at time of Slaughter Regulations" and EU regulation 1099/2009.

All members of staff working on company farms that are responsible for daily husbandry will be trained to cull according to safe and humane practices outlined by government within Animal Welfare Act 2006. The practices align with those outlined by the Humane Slaughter Association (HSA).

1.6 Sub-Contractors

All contract labour the company employs on farm sites will be verified by Stonegate Farmers to ensure appropriate levels of competence, experience, and/ or relevant qualification(s). All contract labour will be supervised by the responsible manager of the site.

1.7 Company Farm Security

The company will encourage its producers to invest in effective mechanisms of security to protect against malicious damage which may compromise bird welfare. The company acknowledges the risks of trespass and damage from some animal activist groups and will prepare effective plans and procedures to reduce potential risk. The company will ensure all official farm visits to supply base farms will be carried out with sufficient prior notice and secondly using all reasonable personal protective equipment and bio-secure clothing.

1.8 Company Staff Training

The company will engage in continuous training programs for employees. The company will ensure that welfare is an important consideration in the recruitment motivation, development, and retention of staff.

1.9 Routine Beak treatment

The company will ensure that 100% of duck, and speciality species (quail, ostrich, guinea fowl, geese, pheasant, rhea, turkey, and emu) within the supply chain are free from infrared beak-treatment.

The company recognises that most chickens are routinely infra-red beak treated. The sectors historical justification for this has been to protect the welfare of flocks in their entirety to prevent tendencies of cannibalism and feather pecking. The company will continue be at the forefront of movements to reduce the proportion of chicken flocks receiving routine beak treatment. The company recognises that this practice should be phased out and work will continue with geneticists, nutritionists, equipment suppliers and site managers to introduce changes to existing practices and introduction of novel on farm mechanisms to prevent negative bird activity through provisions such as supplementary enrichment and phycological care.

The company will continue to work with industry bodies to improve on farm control and work with hatcheries to continue to improve bird traits to reduce feather pecking and the level of industry wide chicken beak treatment.

1.10 Other Routine Mutilations

The company will ensure 100% of poultry including chicken, duck, and speciality species (quail, ostrich, guinea fowl, geese, pheasant, rhea, turkey, and emu) within the supply chain are free from de-winging, toe-clipping and de-snooding.

1.11 Responsibility

The company will work to communicate to company staff and producers within the supply chain that standards of welfare and health of animals rests with everyone who comes into contact with poultry during

the completion of their job role. The company will ensure managers facilitate practices which enrich welfare driven production and will review and adjust common practice procedure accordingly.

The company will continue to identify, monitor, and record behaviours, characteristics and features of the birds and their environment that contribute towards good standards of bird welfare. The company will work to ensure Qualitative Behavioural Assessment (QBA) becomes an increasingly effective way to develop bird welfare assessment above purely quantitative welfare measurement evaluation.

2.0 Primary Animal Welfare Concern's (PAWC's)

Although the company recognises that all company actions have the potential to impact on the welfare status of every animal within the companies supply chain, the company also recognises that there are clear factors which require greater level of control and therefore greater emphasis.

2.1 Bird Handling

The companies bird handling procedure during routine welfare checks is aligned with the Poultry Service Association and UK Government code of practice and supports practices of 'humane handling'. The company will place great emphasis on the importance of a humane and respectful approach to physical contact with birds within all species including chicken, duck, and speciality species (quail, ostrich, guinea fowl, geese, pheasant, rhea, turkey, and emu) of the company supply chain.

2.2 Farm Biosecurity

The company will ensure that the biosecurity controls on its own company farms, packing centre and contract producer base uphold good standards of practice on sites. Due to the highly infectious and ever evolving nature of animal disease the companies supply base efforts to control animal health will be a priority within the supply chain. The companies overwhelming priority will be to ensure animal health control is part of every management action.

2.3 Farm Visitation

The company will apply caution to farm visits to protect the welfare of birds on farms. Any visitor who is not employed by the company and who has been in contact with poultry from outside of the company supply base within the previous 48 hours will not be granted access to farms within the supply chain.

2.4 Record Keeping

The company will make all reasonable efforts to ensure that both mandatory and welfare relevant information and data will be filed on the secure company database for future reference. The company will keep and maintain suitable records for the purposes of due diligence.

2.5 Farm Auditing

The company's farms team will ensure that audits are completed with the primary interest of assessing and controlling bird welfare. Farm auditors will record key performance and welfare indicators which will be used to benchmark improvement and demonstrate best practice. Many of these are expected to be above guideline industry standards.

2.6 Growth Promotor Use

Stonegate Farmers will prohibit the use of any illegal and banned artificial growth promotor within all species including chicken, duck, and speciality species (quail, ostrich, guinea fowl, geese, pheasant, rhea, turkey, and emu) within the company supply chain.

2.7 Genetic Engineering and Cloning

The company will in all circumstances ensure that both the company and its external supply chain will source all pullet species including chicken, duck, and speciality species (quail, ostrich, guinea fowl, geese, pheasant, rhea, turkey, and emu) from hatcheries which prohibit the use of genetic engineering or cloning technology.

2.8 Veterinary Supervision

The company will use the services of the allocated company veterinary service to supervise all health and management plans on the company farms. The company will develop a plan with the relevant veterinary consultants to include regular monitoring of all poultry species under company control. All prescriptive interventions will be reviewed internally and verified by the company vet.

2.9 Supply Chain Antibiotic Use

The company's veterinary consultant will aim to use a responsible antibiotic use policy. The company prohibits the prophylactic use of antibiotics. Antibiotics will be used principally to overcome a health or welfare challenge which poses an immediate or high impact threat. The company will work continuously to achieve national flock averages of below the 1% RUMA target. All prescriptive interventions will be reported to the British Egg Industry Council for secondary review and supporting record.

3.0 Producer Base

3.1 Contractual Egg Supply

Our external producer group will continue to be recognised as the first responsibility stakeholder in the company. The managers of all our supply base farms will be responsible for compliance with all procedures and husbandry practices. Our company will ensure that all external producers are formally and contractually obliged to ensure that equal protocol for animal welfare assessment and auditing will be applied to our external producers as the company's internal farms.

3.2 Non-Compliance

The company will monitor welfare on all producer farms and where the company identifies a clear concern or potential lapse in welfare standards the company will implement a procedure of consultation, mediation or intervention involving the team and/or veterinary practitioner.

In the event of a dispute or inability for the company to ensure animal welfare is not compromised due to an immediate threat, reasonable suspicion, or formal complaint of suffering, the site and its product will be suspended until the non-compliance is closed. The company will ensure all non-compliances will be recorded for the purposes of due diligence and to ensure that the presence of repeat non-conformances will prompt review of current practices.