



Hens' Asks

April 2022



Introduction

The Hens' Asks has been developed by Eurogroup for Animals and its member organisations to define high welfare standards for laying hens in Europe. It addresses key welfare issues at different stages of the laying hens' life (parent flock, pullets, laying hens, catching, transport and slaughter). Companies can sign up to the Hens' Asks, specifying the scope of their commitment in terms of geographical perimeter (national vs regional), product range (company vs brand level) and egg category (shell eggs, egg products, egg ingredients) covered. By signing up to the Hens' Asks, a company commits to meet all the requirements listed below by 2027¹ for 100% of its sourcing for the specified perimeter.

Technical requirements

I. Parent Stock

1. Rearing systems, as well as transport and slaughter operations, for parent stock must comply with the requirements laid down under paragraph IV, V, and VI of this pledge. Rearing systems for male parent stock must comply with the conditions laid down in the European Chicken Commitment (ECC), until specific housing conditions for parent stock are developed;
2. Feed restriction practices are forbidden.

II. Male Chicks

3. Day old chicks must not be killed. In-ovo sex identification must be performed at day 7 of incubation, at the latest, or before if required by national legislation. Dual-purpose breeds can also be reared. In case of hatching of a male chick, he must be reared at least under the conditions laid down in the [KAT guidelines](#).

¹ Signatories can comply with the requirements on breeding stock, pullets, and slaughter by 2030.

III. Pullets

4. Pullets must be reared at least under the conditions to those they will encounter during the laying phase and laid down in paragraph IV, points 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13, 14, and 15 of this pledge. If pullets have access to the outdoors, it must be granted when they are fully feathered (from 6-10 weeks, depending on the breed). Stocking density must not exceed 14 pullets/m². Density must be calculated on the basis of the usable area (i.e. surface that is permanently available for the animals).

IV. Laying Hens

Space:

5. The use of cages, including colony cages, 'combi systems' and other systems where hens may be confined within the aviary, is not allowed;
6. Aviary systems must not have more than four tiers (i.e. maximum four tiers for aviary systems). Head height between tiers shall be 50 cm minimum, and facilities shall be installed to facilitate hens' movement between and within tiers (e.g. ramps, platforms, stepped systems,...). In case of new barns, the stacking of multi-tier modules is not allowed (there should not be a second unit of hen housing on top of a barn).
7. Stocking density must not exceed seven hens/m². Density must be calculated on the basis of the usable area (i.e. surface that is permanently available for the animals). Stocking density per floor area must be maximum 15 hens/m²;
8. Any new laying units must be provided with winter gardens (aka verandas) and where/when possible free range access. Outdoor areas, if available, must be equipped with enrichments and natural or artificial shelter to encourage exploratory activities and use of the entire outdoor area.
9. The use of electric wires in the living areas of hens (both building and winter garden) is forbidden;

Environment:

10. Hens must have access to natural light (at least 20 lux daylight) through daylight-permeable surfaces (skylights, side windows and/or light wells with shutters to protect animals from sunlight), which are at least 3% of the ground surface of the enclosure. Light intensity in littered areas must be at least 60 lux at animal level. Light sources must be non-fluorescent and of a frequency of at least 100 Hz. Hens must be provided with an uninterrupted period of darkness of at least eight hours on a daily basis;
11. The following air quality parameters must be respected:
 - max 20 ppm ammonia;
 - CO₂ 3,000 ppm;
 - H₂S 0.5 ppm;
 - Dust 10 mg/m³.



12. At least one nest for every six hens, covered with soft material allowing hens to sit on it, must be provided;
13. All of the following enrichment materials must be provided:
 - perches (at least 18 cm perching space/hen) [specification in Annex II (1)];
 - areas equipped for dust bathing [specification in Annex II (2)];
 - sufficient and clean litter [specification in Annex II (3)];
 - pecking blocks (at least two per 1,000 hens);
 - straw bales or other roughage bales [specification in Annex II (4)].

Procedures:

14. Beak trimming is not permitted;
15. Forced moulting is not permitted.

V. Catching and Transport

16. End-of-lay hens must be caught by trained staff, holding a certificate by the competent authority. Hens must be handled upright with support around their wings (i.e. the Swedish method);
17. Laying hens must not be transported for more than four hours.

VI. Stunning and Slaughter

18. Laying hens must not undergo live inversion and water-bath stunning. Controlled atmosphere stunning (CAS) using inert gas or multi-phase systems, preferably on farm, must be adopted instead.

VII. Auditing

19. All of the above criteria must be verified. Compliance shall be demonstrated by annual third-party auditing and public reporting.

Annex I: Technical specifications for the winter gardens (Paragraph IV. 8)

Winter gardens shall be littered, enriched and of a minimum 20% of the inside floorage and it cannot be used to calculate the stocking density. The structures/shelters are designed in such a way that the behaviour and needs of the chickens are taken into account. The planting/equipping is done in such a way that the chickens can cross open areas and a type of shelter can be reached within 20 m of any place in the run. A run does not have to be fully planted/equipped, strips along which the chickens can walk can also be created. Planting/equipping may consist of perches, trees, shrubs, corn, wooded banks, uprooted trees, sewage pipes, etc. This also serves as shelter during the winter. The covered run is an uninsulated, littered, and covered roaming area, which is directly connected to the enclosure via run openings to which all animals have easy access (by 10 AM at the latest, the hens shall have access to the covered run for an uninterrupted period of at least eight hours). The uninsulated roaming area must be clearly lighter than the interior of the enclosure, must have an outdoor climate, and be protected against weather influences in such a way that it can also be used during bad weather (e.g. by installing windbreak/ventilation mesh). The covered run is located along the entire length of the long side(s) of the enclosure. The distance from the furthest point in the enclosure to the covered run does not exceed 15 m. Enclosures that have run openings on one side (lengthwise), are not wider than 15 m. The covered run is separated from the enclosure by a full wall containing run openings. Openings to the covered run are at least 35 cm high and 40 cm wide. At least 2 m of passage opening must be available for every 1,000 chickens. The construction of the covered run, including the roof, prevents condensation formation and excessively high temperatures. The long side of the covered run is at least 70% daylight and air permeable in any case. The covered run is at least 2 m high everywhere. Starting at the beginning of the laying period, the covered run is covered by a layer of litter at least 2 cm thick.

Annex II: Technical specification for the environmental enrichment (Paragraph IV. 13)

(1) Perches: at least 18 cm perching space per hen must be provided.

(2) Dust bathing: There is an extra facility set up in the day quarters of at least 3,5 m² per housing group of 1,000 hens. This area must be equipped with peat dust or sandy soil of sufficient quality. In case of larger groups, dust bathing areas must be adjusted accordingly to the proportion 20.9 m²/6,000 hens.

(3) Litter: The substrate used in bedding must be dry, friable, clean and it must promote the expression of both the exploration behaviour (scratching and pecking) and dust bathing behaviour; Litter shall be provided in sufficient quantity (at least 560 cm² per hen) and it shall be 10 cm depth, at least.

(4) Straw bales, compressed alfalfa or other suitable pecking substrates must be provided: At least two straw, hay, or alfalfa bales weighing an average of 15-20 kg each are provided every 1,000 chickens. Straw/alfalfa/hay bales are replaced as soon as they are down to the level of the floor (or only 10% of the bale remains). The presence of inedible materials to be explored is recommended, but cannot replace edible materials (e. g. blocks of minerals, grains in the litter).

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