

UNDERSTANDING NEW ZEALAND FREE-RANGE EGG FARMING

GENERAL INFORMATION SHEET

Introduction

Free-range hens must have access to both a barn environment and to the outdoors during daylight hours. A free-range egg is laid in a barn environment that enables hens to access the outdoors through “pop holes”. Pop holes must meet certain criteria to ensure that hens have adequate access to the outdoors.

A free-range hen’s barn environment provides shelter and shade from heat or cold, as well as pests and predators. Barn housing and equipment is designed to allow birds to express natural behaviours such as perching, scratching and nesting.

All free-range egg farms must comply with Animal Welfare (Layer Hens) Code of Welfare 2018, which is administered by MPI in New Zealand, and was developed by the National Animal Welfare Advisory Committee (NAWAC).

The Animal Welfare (Layer Hens) Code of Welfare 2018 (“the Code”) is available in full on the Ministry of Primary Industry’s website: www.mpi.govt.nz.

What is “free-range” egg farming in New Zealand?

Hens living in a free-range environment must:

- ✓ Have access to outside range during daylight hours
- ✓ Have access to food and water each day
- ✓ Have access to perching, nesting and scratching areas
- ✓ Have eight hours of darkness every 24-hours
- ✓ Be housed in compliance with the Animal Welfare (Layer Hens) Code of Welfare 2018.

On the following page there is further information about each of these requirements.

Access to outside range

Free-range hens live in barns with access to the outdoors during daylight hours. Outdoor access is provided through “pop-holes”, which are exit points from a barn that are spread evenly along the barn walls. These pop-holes must not be smaller than 35cm high and 40cm wide.

The outdoor space shared by free-range hens must only allow for a maximum of up to 2,500 hens per hectare.

Access to food and water each day

All layer hens in New Zealand must have adequate access to food and water each day, to maintain good health.

Access to perching, nesting and scratching areas

A free-range farm’s barn environment must value the health and welfare of layer hens, with good management of environmental factors so that hens do not have to compete for their food, water or perches. A barn environment provides shelter and shade from heat or cold, as well as pests and predators. Barn housing and equipment is designed to allow birds to express natural behaviours such as perching, scratching and nesting. There must not be more than 9 hens per square meter in the barn environment on a free-range farm.

Eight hours of darkness every 24-hours

It is important that all hens are provided with an 8-hour period of darkness every 24-hours to help them to rest and sleep properly.

Compliance with the Animal Welfare (Layer Hens) Code of Welfare 2018

The Code of Welfare is devised by the National Animal Welfare Advisory Committee (NAWAC) – a panel of leading, independent New Zealand-based experts in animal welfare. There are a significant number of detailed requirements that must be met for a free-range egg farm to comply with the Animal Welfare (Layer Hens) Code of Welfare 2018. Some of the most important factors include the needs explained, above.

Some other important needs that our outlined in the code include: good pest control to keep any unwanted pests away from hens, providing housing and equipment that is designed to allow birds to express natural behaviours, providing adequate ventilation in barns and protection from injury and disease, use of medication only in accordance with registration conditions and under veterinary supervision, and, importantly, every farm must have a health and welfare plan that includes daily checks of the hens, removal of any hens that have passed away, and the humane treatment of sick hens.

A copy of the full Animal Welfare (Layer Hens) Code of Welfare 2018 is available at: www.mpi.co.nz.