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## OPINION 07/07/2022 – Flemish Animal Welfare Council

# Standards for the keeping of turkey

### Legislation in force

The keeping of turkeys today is governed by the Royal Order of 1 March 2000 on the protection of animals kept for farming purposes, which contains general rules for keeping farm animals. This Royal Order transposes Directive 98/58/EC of 20 July 1998 "concerning the protection of farmed animals."

### Standards for new specific regulations

The Flemish Animal Welfare Council advises the minister responsible for animal welfare to develop regulations specifically for turkeys that will come into effect with the appropriate transition period. For this, the Council proposes minimum standards (see below), which have been elaborated by a working group including scientists and representatives of industry and animal welfare organisations.

A recent and comprehensive scientific report<sup>1</sup> compiled at the request of the Austrian government on the welfare needs of turkeys in turkey farming, as well as other reports, foreign regulations and standards of existing labels, served as a guide in drafting these standards (see Advisory Guide for more details).

### The situation in Flanders

There are currently about 28 turkey farmers in Flanders, mainly located in West Flanders, who together raise 1.2 million turkeys per year. In Flanders, mainly medium weight turkeys are grown. Hens are slaughtered when they weigh between 9 and 10.5 kg. They reach this weight after 15 to 17 weeks. Roosters are slaughtered when they weigh 15-16 kg, and they are then between 16-18 weeks old. Roosters and hens are kept separately. The turkeys are kept on the ground in a barn with no outside free-range option.

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<sup>1</sup> Krautwald-Junghanns et Širovnik Košičica, 2020. Anforderungen an eine zeitgemäße tierschutzkonforme Haltung von Mastputen. Bundesministerium für Soziales, Gesundheit, Pflege und Konsumentenschutz.

## **Routinely score and assess foot pad lesions**

During recent measurements at an abattoir, 99% of hens and 90% of roosters had foot pad lesions. Foot injuries or foot pad lesions (foot pad dermatitis) are discolouration, callus formation to subcutaneous inflammation on the sole of a turkey's foot due to contact with moist bedding.

This opinion recommends routinely scoring and assessing each batch of turkeys at the slaughterhouse for foot pad lesions.

These injuries can be avoided by, for example, keeping the bedding dry, providing appropriate ventilation, providing adapted feeding or reducing animal stocking density. As such, turkey farmers must actively take measures to avoid these injuries, and they may choose their own measures to achieve this goal. If a defined threshold value is not met, then additional legal measures will be imposed.

A foot pad lesion is a so-called animal-related indicator or well-being indicator that can be measured on the animal itself.

If this measurement is included in the regulations, it will be the first time in Flanders that the measurement of an animal-related indicator is routinely used for control purposes. Foot pad lesion measurement at the slaughter line has been used in broilers in a number of European countries for some time.

## **Environmental standards**

Besides scoring foot sole injuries, environmental standards are also proposed. Novelties here include providing perches, platforms and enrichment elements, as well as limiting the stocking density. These environmental norms should make turkeys express more of their natural behaviour (e.g. scavenging, pecking, sitting on perches).

## **Minimum standards for keeping turkeys**

The Flemish Animal Welfare Council recommends the following minimum standards for keeping turkeys from 1 January 2026:

### **Foot injuries**

- Measurement:
  - Score 100 animals/couple, score of 0, 1 and 2, on at least 1 leg (always the same leg) in at least 2 lots of 50 animals
  - The farmer must be able to provide a score report from the slaughterhouse. If that is not possible, there should be a score report in the barn before leaving for the slaughterhouse.
  - In the event of scoring with a camera system, the system must be scientifically validated.
  
- Assessment and measures
  - Weighting factor
    - Score 0: x 0
    - Score 1: x 0.5
    - Score 2: x 2

- If a total score higher than 80 is measured in two consecutive pairs, the stocking density must be reduced by 10% (with cumulative 10% reduction in case of a subsequent total score higher than 80).

### Stocking density

- Up to week 7: max. 10 animals/m<sup>2</sup>
- From week 8 onwards: max 3.5 roosters/m<sup>2</sup> - max. 5 hens/m<sup>2</sup>

### Maximum growth rate

- 135 g/day for roosters - 100 g/day for hens
- It recommends that the minister facilitate scientific research into a possible link between growth rate and turkey well-being, as well as the socio-economic impact of the further of the growth rate. If additional research were to show that this reduction is related to greater animal welfare and the socio-economic impact remains limited, the Flemish Council suggests adjusting the regulations if desired.

### Seating options

- Up to week 4: perches (min. 5 to 6 cm diameter; 3 cm/ turkey, based on number in the barn) or platforms
- From week 5: Platforms (min. 70 cm above ground, 100 cm<sup>2</sup>/turkey). Use of gangways (1 gangway/5 m<sup>2</sup> platform)

### Environmental enrichment

- Min. Offer 2 types, of which min. 1 is malleable material.
- Of each species min. 1 per 400 animals. In case of bale straw: minimum 15-20 kg per 400 turkeys.
- In case of non-malleable materials: at least 3 different types

### Daylight

- Per 24-hour period min. 8 h uninterrupted light and 8 h uninterrupted darkness,
- Min. 20 lux measured at turkey eye level, during dark period max 5 lux, in case of outbreak of feather pecking/cannibalism min 5 lux prescribed and diagnosed by a veterinarian.
- Until day 7, the light schedule may be gradually built up.
- Artificial light should not have a stroboscopic effect (min. 120 Hz)
- Light openings: the manufacturer of the tubes in co-responsibility with the farmer should be able to demonstrate that the daylight output through tubes or other technology, is equivalent to 3% of the ground area daylight openings.

## Indoor climate

Measured at the height of the turkeys' heads:

- NH<sub>3</sub>: max. 20 ppm
- CO<sub>2</sub>: max. 3,000 ppm

## Drinking and water facilities

- no excessive competition for food and drink facilities
- no animals unable to reach feed or drink

## Daily check

- Minimum 2x/day (at least in the morning and afternoon)

## Bedding quality

- The barn should be littered with dry, loose bedding; fresh bedding should be replenished daily, allowing turkeys to peck and scratch.

## Capture

- Not using only 1 leg
  - small animals (up to 7 weeks): 2 legs
  - large animals: min. 1 leg and 1 shoulder

## Infirmary

- Severely ill animals and those with severe locomotor problems that cause them to be unable to take in water or feed should be isolated or euthanised.
- A device must be present to perform euthanasia and the manager or supervisor must be able to handle the device.
- In the infirmary, there should be 3x/day checks and food and drink should be provided.

## Debeaking

- Efforts should be made to move toward turkey farming in which debeaking of turkeys' beaks is unnecessary. The Flemish Animal Welfare Council advises the minister to support research into this. The industry is committed to implementing a system as soon as it is available.

## Free-range

- If free-range:
  - Min. 8h/day (except in unsuitable weather conditions or on veterinary orders) at the latest from 10am onwards
  - Openings:
    - at least 65 cm high
    - at least 1.5 m wide (allowing more than 1 turkey to pass)
    - at least 2 openings/building
  - Furnishings
    - at least 10 m<sup>2</sup>/1,000 animals shelter
    - at least 5% of area planted
  - at the latest from 35 days

## Breast blisters (in roosters)

- Currently, a scoring method, threshold values and influencing factors of this animal-related indicator have not been sufficiently researched to specify values on this. The industry is ready to work out a clear scoring method and also an improvement pathway for breast blisters in roosters by 1 January 2025 with government support, Specific values can then be incorporated into regulations from 1 January 2026.

### NOTE:

*"It is the position statement of animal welfare organisations that on three key points (1. outdoor walking, 2. stocking density and 3. growth rate), the opinion merely confirms existing industry standards. Firstly, the organisations request that a mandatory free-range option is imposed (This is only an option in the opinion, which in practice means that a free-range option is not provided). Second, a maximum stocking density of 30 kg/m<sup>2</sup> for hens and 36 kg/m<sup>2</sup> for roosters should be imposed (as provided for in the opinion of the Flemish Animal Welfare Council). Third, to achieve the switch to breeding slower-growing breeds, the maximum acceptable growth rate for roosters, as provided for in the opinion of the Flemish Animal Welfare Council, is 120 g/day for roosters (the Flemish Council opinion provides 135 g/day for roosters)."*