



Poultry Extension Collaborative newsletter

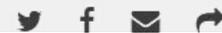
A collaboration between Purdue University, University of Maryland,
North Carolina State University and Virginia Tech

FDA Provides Temporary Flexibility Regarding the Egg Safety Rule During COVID-19 Pandemic While Still Ensuring the Safety of Eggs

States are killing pigs, chickens that COVID-19 keeps from the market. Could NC be next?

BY TAMMY GRUBB

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Nearly 2 million chickens at Eastern Shore farms set to be destroyed because of coronavirus-related plant shortages

Amid the COVID-19 Pandemic, Concerns About EU's Animal Welfare Standards Arise

News headlines related to livestock and poultry during COVID-19 crisis

COVID-19 and poultry welfare

Disruption in the production chain means overgrown birds at the farm that could face euthanasia or depopulation

Ensuring welfare of birds at the farm is key to maintaining a healthy supply of eggs and chicken during the pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on various industries, including the poultry and livestock sectors. Livestock prices are expected to go down by as much as 12%, causing billions of dollars in losses. Some examples of COVID-19 impacts on poultry production include difficulty of moving live animals, disruption of supply chains (feed, bedding, vaccines), and limited access to labor and professional services. These could directly or indirectly affect the welfare of the birds at the farm.

Management tips for the farm during the pandemic

- Train all employees on CDC guidelines to maintain sanitation and hygiene
- Enforce strict biosecurity measures and maintain minimum external access to the farm
- Source out PPE (masks, gloves) in advance and maintain inventory
- Constant communication with state and federal agencies, processing plants, and input suppliers
- Develop an emergency plan with a veterinarian in case of a disease outbreak in the flock
- Plan ahead for extended stay of animals on farm in cases where processing plants are closed
- Be prepared to process animals in small batches and sell them locally

Animal Welfare issues in times of a Pandemic



The closure of processing and packaging plants could lead to extended stay of market-ready chickens and turkeys at the farm. As birds continue to grow, they have less space.

Overstocking can cause stress, increase risks of disease, reduce litter quality, and cause behavioral issues such as aggression in birds. It also results in more restlessness and disturbance as birds have difficulty moving away from each other.

Although inter-state movement is not restricted in the U.S., certain states are beginning to impose travel restrictions and mandatory quarantines. This could lead to significant transportation stress, compromised animal welfare, and reduced product quality.

Disruption of a proper supply of feed, vaccines, medicine, and professional support are other factors that could be compromising welfare of poultry at the farm. Furthermore, waste disposal could be challenging, as prolonged housing of market-age birds results in build-up manure in the litter.

Potential Animal Welfare Solutions

There are certain strategies that could be employed at various points of production to minimize consequences for poultry welfare and potentially preventing large-scale depopulation of market-ready birds.



Housing & stocking

- Start out with a lower stocking density than the normal stocking capacity of the house.
- Consider thinning a flock to avoid overstocking if possible.
- In case of extended stay of market-age birds, use unused spaces in the barn to increase space per bird.
- Turkey toms can get particularly aggressive when they near market age and overstocking might exacerbate the problem. Include enrichments such as foraging and scratching materials (straw or pecking objects), which could distract them from aggressive behavior.



Feeding and Nutrition

- Stay in regular communication with feed mills and suppliers of raw inputs for feed formulation.
- Explore locally available sources as substitutes of common feed ingredients.
- Particularly for broilers and turkeys, feeding strategies that slow growth rates can extend productive life in the event that processing cannot be carried out as planned.
 - Qualitative feed restriction by replacing nutrient ingredients with inert components and fibers with low energy content could be used to manage growth. Examples are diatomaceous earth and rice hulls.
 - Most poultry refrain from visiting the feeders during dark hours. Manipulating the lighting regimen could be used to manage access to feeders and reduce growth rate.



Transportation

If transport is delayed, birds are at risk of significant heat and other environmental stresses that can result in death. Therefore, consider the following:

- Limit transport of live animals to 4 to 6 hours long.
- Provide cooling mechanisms such as fans and misting during transport or during stops
- Provide drinking water up until catching, during transportation, and at the plant.
- If experiencing wait times during hot days, keep moving the truck rather than waiting stationary, so that air flow is maintained.



Euthanasia & Depopulation

There might be a time when farmers need to consider terminating the flock.

- Proper euthanasia (= good death) should always be a priority when terminating a flock. Euthanasia methods approved by the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) such as euthanasia using carbon dioxide should be considered.
- Even though Ventilation Shutdown with heat (VSD Plus) has been approved for rapid depopulation in case of disaster (US Poultry and Egg Association and AVMA), it should be used only when no other options are available.

Other Considerations

- Lobbying with your state representatives and agencies to make provisions for green lanes for live poultry transport and keeping food markets open
- Following FDA and USDA guidelines on temporary changes in regulations that can benefit you to process and sell meat and eggs at local markets

Resources

- [AVMA-recommended euthanasia methods](#)
- [US Poultry and Egg Association - resources related to COVID-19](#)
- [National Chicken Council - resources related to COVID-19](#)
- [Guidance for poultry workers - CDC and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration](#)

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questions [here](#)*