

# ACTION PLAN FOR ORGANIC POULTRY 2013

# **Action Plan For Organic Poultry**

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# Introduction

The way the vast majority of poultry are farmed in the UK today differs firmly from the organic principles that food should be produced ecologically, healthily, fairly and with care. Laying hens and broilers, enclosed in sheds of tens or hundreds of thousands, are fed on grain and soya shipped from around the world. Birds are routinely dosed with antibiotics to prevent disease outbreaks in their cramped environment, contributing to the risk of antibiotic resistant illnesses in humans. Most birds are kept in conditions that prevent them from expressing natural behaviours that are important to their welfare, with their lives further removed from those of their wild ancestors than any other farmed species. The enormous economies of scale that the industry has achieved through concentration and vertical integration lock farmers in and leave them little scope to do things differently.

Farmers, businesses, campaigners and consumers who support organic systems are committed to forging a better path for poultry. But are we clear enough what the destination looks like? What are the obstacles we face? What steps will we take together to get past them?

This document aims to answer these questions – to chart a clearer pathway to a humane and genuinely sustainable future for poultry, in line with organic principles. This first draft describes the Soil Association's aspirations and the steps we will take. But we want it to become a shared action plan, jointly owned by others with a stake in organic poultry right from breeders, feed companies and farmers, to processors, retailers and consumers. So please let us know what you think we have missed or got wrong, what we have right, and what steps you plan to take. We will then publish a shared plan, including the actions others will take, and make sure that, as a sector, we regularly review progress.

The action plan covers eggs and meat from all poultry species. We focus on the UK while recognising that poultry is a global business. The plan aims to bring the whole poultry sector closer to organic principles, and treats organic certification as one important tool to achieve this. So, as well as action to improve the Soil Association's organic standards and others across Europe, it includes steps to promote continuous improvement in production systems, ensure producers have technical support where they need it, promote the organic market, shape policy, drive research and encourage sustainable consumption. We have tried to keep this brief. The next section sums up the state of the poultry sector today, and the challenges it faces in meeting organic principles. We then set out steps to address each challenge.

# The challenges

The production and consumption of poultry meat and eggs has transformed over the past 70 years. Intensification has been associated with a rapid rise in consumption, particularly of poultry meat. Until the 1950s, chicken was a highly valued and expensive treat, eaten occasionally; now poultry meat is an everyday fast food and eggs are used as an ingredient in a wide range of processed products.

This change has had a global impact. The supply chain has become more concentrated, so that it is now dominated by a few large corporations. Production is in industrial-scale operations, disconnected from the land which grows their feed and disposes of their waste. Intensification started in the 1950s and gathered pace such that, by 1980, poultry production in the UK, Europe and around the world was overwhelmingly

Measure of change in the UK	1950	2010
Number of birds reared for meat	20,000,000	900,000,000
Poultry meat eaten per person per year	1kg	23kg
Number of poultry meat producers	300,000	3,000
Flock size on poultry farms	1% in flocks >500	70% in flocks >100,000
Time to slaughter weight	80-120 days	32-42 days
Growth rate of birds	25gm per day	100gm per day
Feed Conversion Rate (FCR)	2.35	1.70

Table 1 Transformation in UK poultry meat production and consumption.

in intensive factory farming systems (Table 1). Globally the production and consumption of poultry meat continues to increase with, for example, a new branch of KFC opening in China every 18 hours.

While poultry products have become dramatically more affordable and available, this has come at a cost to society, the environment and animal welfare. It has relied on feedstuffs from intensive arable farms with low biodiversity, destroying forests and diverting land from producing food crops for humans. The amount of feed required to produce each egg or kilo of meat has been reduced by keeping birds packed closely together (so they use less energy keeping warm and moving around), shortening their lives and breeding to increase their feed conversion rates. The birds coare not free to express all their natural behaviours. The use of veterinary medicines, including antibiotics, is widespread in order to try to contain disease outbreaks in crowded conditions and large flocks.

We believe that poultry should be more integrated into farming systems, so they rely less on feed from land that could produce crops for people and have a smaller overall environmental footprint, and that birds should be healthy and free to express their natural behaviour.

This is what well-managed organic systems are working towards.Our vision is that this becomes the normal way to farm poultry. Yet there are huge practical, economic and even environmental obstacles to getting there.Not least, it currently costs up to three times more to produce eggs organically compared with the cheapest factory farmed alternative, and up eight times more to produce meat. This is because the birds live longer, move more and so need more feed, the feed costs more to grow, more labour is needed, and the capital costs per bird are greater because more space is given to each bird.

The action plan that follows sets out the steps we will take towards making that vision reality, by helping organic production become more viable and sustainable, bringing the rest of the industry closer to organic principles, and promoting consumption habits that can be sustained by humane, integrated production systems.

# **ACTION PLAN**

The action plan addresses nine challenges, grouped under three headings:

#### A. Improve organic production systems:

- Improve organic standards
- o Address technical challenges in organic poultry production
- Grow organic sales as a share of the poultry market

#### B. Promote improvements across the whole industry:

- o Improve welfare for all poultry
- o Enable better integrated production systems
- Address the specific environmental challenges facing free range systems
- Improve the health impact and eating quality of meat and eggs

#### C. Promote sustainable consumption:

- Influence eating habits
- Communicate the value of sustainable, higher welfare poultry products.

# A. Improve organic production systems

### Improve organic standards

Organic standards for poultry meat and egg production aim to create integrated production systems that tread lightly on the environment and respect birds' welfare and natural behaviour. While they certainly succeed in avoiding the worst elements of non-organic systems, there is still room for improvement in meeting these aims thoroughly and consistently. We want to make the Soil Association standard as effective as possible in delivering high environmental and welfare outcomes on-farm, and in supporting progress to best practice among producers.

The Soil Association Poultry Standards diverge from the EU Organic Regulation on some points, and are followed by only a fraction of the organic sector as they can be more challenging and costly to meet. To influence the way all organic poultry are managed in the UK, we need to work with other certifiers and organisations to improve the EU Organic Regulation, and explore ways to make our own standards more accessible to producers.

#### What we have achieved so far:

- Developed Soil Association organic standards that are rated the best for welfare by Compassion in World Farming.
- Eliminated the routine use of antibiotics in organic systems.
- Initiated the <u>AssureWel</u> project in partnership with RSPCA, Bristol University and others to develop an outcome-based approach to assessing the quality of poultry production systems.
- Included the outcome-based AssureWel measures in Soil Association Certification
  Ltd inspections of laying hens.

#### Our ongoing programmes and projects:

- Revising Soil Association organic poultry standards so they:
  - Refocus on the organic principles
  - Integrate outcome- and resource-based standards to strengthen impact
  - Incorporate the latest scientific research and methodologies
  - Support continuous improvement to deliver best practice
  - Apply to all commercial poultry species
  - Address key challenges where derogations continue to be permitted
- Applying the welfare measures developed through the AssureWel project to the inspection of organic broilers, including inspector training so that improvements in key areas can be monitored at annual inspection.
- Encouraging producers to complete regular self-assessment using the AssureWel measures for proactive welfare planning.
- Evaluating the effectiveness of veterinary and other advisor engagement with welfare outcome audits to further embed support towards continuous improvement.

- Conclude standards review with updated SA standards that address on-farm production system issues (e.g. flock size, range management, for full list see Annex).
- Fully implement outcome-based welfare standards on organic farms certified by Soil Association Certification Ltd.
- Promote the uptake of <u>FeatherWel</u> strategies on-farm to reduce injurious feather pecking.

- Work with other certification bodies towards eliminating the use of beaktrimmed pullets in all organic systems, building on evidence from AssureWel and FeatherWel.
- Work with other certification bodies to increase the use of organically reared parent stock and pullets.
- Work with <u>IFOAM EU Group</u> and members of the Leading Organic Alliance to influence standards and certification across the EU.

# Address technical challenges in organic poultry production

Organic poultry producers face technical challenges that call for research, for sharing best practices that some have successfully developed and for additional investment in supply chains. The Annex has a list of these, of which the greatest challenges include:

- Effective use of range which, if well-managed, can provide a valuable contribution to the nutritional needs of appropriate breeds of poultry.
- Developing 100% organic feeds with a small carbon footprint that have the right balance of amino acids, and meet the nutritional and physiological needs of the birds to ensure good production levels and high bird welfare.
- Increasing the production of suitable feedstuffs and developing the infrastructure to enable local feed materials to be used.
- Achieving good litter quality in the houses to avoid hockburns and footpad dermatis in table birds and reduce feather pecking in laying hens.

#### What we have achieved so far:

- Developed rigorous methods to assess welfare outcomes on organic farms through AssureWel
- Contributed to DEFRA/industry LINK research on the life cycle assessment of poultry systems and home-grown protein.

#### Our ongoing programmes and projects:

- Supporting on-farm participatory research into key technical challenges, including for organic poultry production, through the <u>Duchy Originals Future</u>.
   <u>Farming Programme</u>.
- Disseminating new information (such as FeatherWel advice) through events

and publications.

- Developing an advisory tool for vets to promote continuous improvement in animal welfare.
- Promoting self-assessment tools for producers to continually monitor and improve animal welfare.

#### Priorities for action to 2020:

- Support research and development into key technical challenges for organic poultry production:
  - Alternative protein sources (particularly meeting the need for amino acids – methionine and lysine), potentially including legume varieties, cereals and invertebrates
  - Organic management of breeding flocks
  - Improving development of breeds suitable for organic systems
  - Preventing mycoplasma in breeding flocks
  - Management methods to encourage better use of the range (including to supply more nutrition to the birds)
  - Managing the flock and range to achieve good outcomes during periods of poor weather and ground conditions
  - Improving feather cover
  - Minimising keel bone damage
  - Reducing mortality in layers and broilers
  - Reducing hock burn and foot pad dermatitis in broilers.
- Support development of links between arable farmers and poultry producers to get more local feed supply.
- Campaign for more abattoirs and high-quality on-farm or mobile facilities to reduce the transport time for poultry to slaughter.

### Grow organic sales as a share of the poultry market

Organic poultry systems are radically different from most – the birds range the most freely, have longer lives and more space, and are fed crops grown without pesticides. Many of these practices cost more. Yet organic farming needs to be a viable business, and this means that producers need to command a price that gives a sufficient return for the work they do and the capital invested in the system. To achieve this under present conditions is a significant challenge. The high prices of organic feed, in addition to the lower feed conversion rates associated with free-ranging, mean that shoppers pay three to eight times more for organic poultry products than for non-organic. This premium, far higher than for other organic products, has hit sales hard during the recession and driven producers to abandon organic production. For example, UK organic egg sales reduced by 35.3%, year on year to October 2012 according to figures from Kantar Worldpanel.<sup>1</sup>

While technical improvements and rising non-organic feed prices may reduce the difference in production costs, it will continue to cost more to produce organic poultry for the foreseeable future. So we need to build awareness of its benefits and support the supply chain to meet consumer demand consistently and efficiently.

#### What we have achieved so far:

- Highlighted the benefits of organic systems, particularly for animal welfare,
  to school children and their parents through the <u>Food for Life Partnership</u>.
- Established producer support and marketing services to help market development in the face of a downturn in the UK organic market.
- Developed new routes to market for organic producers through our work in the procurement sector.
- Highlighted that the organic market continues to show growth in other European countries and elsewhere in the world, to boost confidence.

#### Our ongoing programmes and projects:

- Driving organic sales in catering through the <u>Food for Life Catering Mark</u>,
  which requires at least 5% organic ingredients at Silver and 15% at Gold.
- Supporting producers, processors, retailers and caterers to develop the organic market, including for poultry products.
- Highlighting the benefits of the Soil Association symbol in communicating organic quality to consumers.
- $\circ$   $\;$  Investigating the returns to producers and to retailers from the sale of

organic products.

#### Priorities for action to 2020:

- Work with retailers to increase availability of Soil Association organic poultry products to consumers.
- Work with the supply chain to guarantee on-going supply of SA organic eggs and poultry.
- Campaign to highlight the benefits of organic poultry production, for the birds and the environment (including non-GM, biodiversity benefits and greenhouse gas emissions).
- Highlight the importance of ensuring that producers get a fair return for their investment of capital and labour and thereby justify the price to consumers.

# **B. Promote improvements across the whole industry** Improve welfare for all poultry

The past decade has seen incremental improvements in some aspects of the welfare of poultry in the UK, for example through the increase of free-range systems as a proportion of egg production. The welfare of poultry in all systems, for meat and eggs, must be much further improved. For example, birds should not suffer the discomfort of leg weakness that can be associated with systems in which birds are kept inside, close together in very large numbers or, in the case of egg production, in close confinement. There is also more to ensuring what the <u>Farm Animal Welfare Council</u> calls a 'good life' for animals than not subjecting them to pain: they should thrive, and have the resources and freedom to express their natural behaviour.

The European ban on so called 'conventional' battery cages that has been introduced will not mean that egg laying chickens are free-range or kept in cage-free barns; rather they will be in small groups in larger cages seeing only a minor improvement in their welfare. Although largely beyond our influence, we also recognise that the majority of egg laying chickens around the world will continue to be produced in the small battery cages that are now being phased out in Europe.

Intensive systems account for three-quarters of all poultry production in the UK. We aim to improve welfare for this majority of UK poultry, as well as the much smaller numbers in higher-welfare systems. We also aim to further improve animal welfare in organic production systems beyond the UK.

#### What we have achieved so far:

- Worked in partnership with members of the <u>Farm Animal Welfare Forum</u> to promote better welfare systems for poultry production.
- Developed with others the AssureWel project, aiming to improve the welfare quality of all poultry production systems, not only organic.
- Communicated the animal welfare benefits of organic poultry production (e.g. Batteries not included report).
- Driven the demand for higher-welfare (Freedom Food and organic) eggs and meat through the Food for Life Partnership and Catering Mark, which now accounts for 744,000 meals daily.

#### Our ongoing programmes and projects:

- Providing training and support through AssureWel to producers, vets and inspectors in order to improve welfare outcomes in all non-cage production systems.
- Developing a framework through AssureWel to communicate to scheme owners and licensees that the optimum quality of life of farm animals depends on them having the resources and freedom to express their natural behaviour, and that the absence of illness or injury is not sufficient.
- Campaigning with CIWF and the RSPCA for it to be required that all animal products sold in Europe are labelled with their method of production.
- Further driving the understanding of animal welfare and the demand for higher-welfare products through the Food for Life Partnership and Catering Mark.

- Promote the widespread adoption of free-range production for both eggs and meat as a minimum.
- $\circ$   $\,$  Progress the FAWC 'good life' approach as outlined in their report of October  $\,$

2009 through contributing to academic papers on 'resource tiers' and a best practice framework.

- Promote a transparent approach across the industry to reporting on all aspects of animals' quality of life, including welfare outcomes and their freedom to express natural behaviour.
- Work with IFOAM EU Group to strengthen welfare-related requirements in the EU organic regulation and support their implementation in organic systems across Europe.
- Extend the AssureWel approach internationally to support the development of higher-welfare schemes.
- Roll out the Food for Life Catering Mark to assure the standards of 2 million meals a day by 2018.

#### **Enable better integrated production systems**

Poultry production is generally not well integrated within the whole farm system. Typically, poultry meat and eggs are produced on large, specialised units. The feed that the chickens eat is sourced on global markets, much of it produced in ways that compete directly with feed for humans and drive land use changes that contribute to climate change and biodiversity loss. The locally concentrated production of manure from large, intensive meat and egg production systems can result in pollution as well as loss of valuable nutrients that are not returned to the land to feed crops.

The challenge is to produce poultry products with a lower global footprint; ultimately this depends on greater integration of poultry production within the whole farm system and making better use of low-impact feed sources such as grasses, wild seeds, insects and spilt grain. Integrated production systems reduce nutrient losses from the farm by recycling manure to feed crops, so cut the risk of water and air pollution. They mitigate the biodiversity loss associated with intensive production of arable crops grown to provide feed for poultry. By sourcing feed from balanced rotations that include fertility-building phases they contribute to carbon sequestration, in contrast to continuous arable cropping that depletes soil carbon reserves. Integrating slaughter facilities on-farm or locally can also improve bird welfare and minimise transport. In 2006/07, just 1,000 businesses supplied 70% of chicken meat and eggs in England, with this high concentration implying a low level of integration.<sup>2</sup> Feed supply is clearly a critical factor shaping poultry production, and all systems of poultry production, including organic, continue to rely on cereal, pulses and soya imported from around the world.

#### What we have achieved so far:

- Promoted the principle of sustainable and integrated production systems and developed the organic option as a viable alternative, stressing the importance of grass-based systems for ruminant (cow and sheep) production rather than depending on cereals and soya.
- Supported the development of organic standards to require a proportion of the feed for pigs and poultry to be produced on the farm, or on linked farms in the region.
- Contributed to two DEFRA/industry LINK research on the life cycle assessment of poultry systems and home-grown protein, ensuring that they considered organic systems.

#### Our ongoing programmes and projects:

- Supporting linkages between farms to meet the supply of organic feed ingredients in one direction and fertility in the other.
- Supporting small-scale anaerobic digestion (AD) that can play a useful role in a farm's nutrient cycling, and campaigning against large-scale AD, which makes poor use of manure as a resource and contributes to pollution.

- Encourage policy and public debate about the need for integration of systems at local and regional level, for feeding, transport, slaughter and supply to consumers (including retail, farm shops, Community Supported Agriculture).
- Support research to build the evidence base on practical and effective integration strategies.
- Campaign on the global footprint of poultry production and the large areas of land used for production of poultry feed, highlighting the diversion away from

feeding people and the 'land take' that intensive large scale intensive production entails.

- Campaign for more abattoirs and high-quality on-farm or mobile facilities to reduce the transport time for poultry to slaughter.
- Trial more sustainable sources of feed to move away from soya and towards locally produced, lower carbon alternatives.

# Address the specific environmental challenges facing free-range systems

We believe that the opportunity to range freely outdoors is a basic requirement for animal welfare and a vital factor in ensuring a good life for the birds. It is also a feature of truly integrated systems, providing additional sources of nutrition from the range, such as insects. Managing land as range, for example as pasture or woodland, has environmental benefits, enhancing biodiversity and sequestering carbon. Yet the environmental benefits of ranging are poorly understood and it also carries some environmental costs. There has been little research to assess the level of nutrition birds can obtain from the range and how to enhance it, or taking account of carbon sequestration in life cycle assessments of free range systems. Meanwhile, we know that ranging means that birds need to eat more for each egg or kilo of meat produced, upping the footprint - on land, greenhouse gas emissions and biodiversity - associated with feed production. The latest research shows little difference in greenhouse gas emissions between organic and free range systems despite the birds' longer lives, but underscores the previous evidence that, without taking account of carbon sequestration, systems that confine birds make a smaller contribution to climate change. We believe that animal welfare is non-negotiable and reducing greenhouse gas emissions can never justify cruelty and confinement. We aim to understand and improve the environmental performance of free-range systems.

#### What we have achieved so far:

 Highlighted and promoted the whole system benefits of organic production systems to biodiversity and carbon sequestration, and the potential for reducing greenhouse gas emissions from agriculture through organic methods. • Contributed to life cycle assessment of organic poultry production.

#### Our ongoing programmes and projects:

- Promoting the biodiversity benefits of organic production systems.
- Refining and developing the life cycle assessment of organic poultry products (meat and eggs) that fully take account of the impact of land use and land use change (LULUC) arising from the production of feed around the world in carbon-depleting intensive arable production systems.

#### Priorities for action to 2020:

- Communicate that keeping animals in poor welfare conditions is not an acceptable approach to reducing the climate change impact of our diets.
- Campaign for the clear labelling of poultry products that are fed with GM feedstuffs.
- Develop meaningful environmental outcome indicators at the landscape level, so that farms are valued for their contribution to diverse landscapes.
- Assess the impact of improved husbandry on improving feed conversion in free-range systems.
- Support research into dual purpose breeds and accompanying management systems, and assess whether they reduce the overall climate change footprint of both meat and eggs.
- Explore innovative ways to reduce energy use on organic farms e.g. using dark brooders rather than heating whole sheds.
- Assess the environmental impact and business viability of systems that extend the lives of layers by allowing them to moult naturally.

### Improve the healthiness and eating quality of meat and eggs

Some people acknowledge that free range and organic poultry meat and eggs, as well as those from more mature birds or traditional breeds, tastes better with a fuller and more complex flavour. From the point of view of nutritional quality, although poultry meat is often seen as a healthy option, there is evidence that intensive production systems result in higher levels of Omega 6 compared to Omega 3 fatty acids – making both the eggs and the meat less healthy than that from free range and organic systems.

There is a growing problem of excessive use of antibiotics in agriculture generally; intensive poultry production employs routine preventative use of antibiotics to counter the disease risks of keeping large flocks in close confinement. This can accelerate antibiotic resistance increasing the risk of superbugs that can infect human populations. Evidence shows a lower need for antibiotics and fewer antibiotic resistant bacteria among animals kept in less intensive conditions, and the Danish and Belgian governments are beginning to require that livestock are given more space in order to reduce antibiotic use.

Finally, some research also suggests that welfare status of a bird may influence the presence of Campylobacter in the edible parts of poultry: stress hormones can cause the bacteria to grow more quickly and pass from the gut into the bloodstream.

#### What we have achieved so far:

- In partnership with Sustain and CIWF completed detailed assessment of the impact of antibiotic use in livestock generally, including poultry.
- Raised awareness of the risks associated with routine antibiotic use in intensive production systems in the UK and around the world, with Soil Association reports on the issues being followed by voluntary poultry industry bans on the use of lasalocid in layer replacements and modern cephalosporins and flouroquinolones in chicks.
- Highlighted the nutritional benefits of organic poultry to consumers via the press.
- Tracked the science relating to the risks of food-borne illnesses from poultry, and highlighted evidence that stress in poultry contributes to the risk of illness in consumers.

#### Our ongoing programmes and projects:

- Reducing the dependence on antibiotics in agriculture through campaigns and sharing best practice.
- $\circ$   $\;$  Highlighting the risks of super-bugs and the development of microbial re-

sistance to antibiotics as a result of high levels of use in intensive livestock production.

 Celebrating excellent poultry meat and eggs with expert judges through the Organic Food Awards.

#### Priorities for action to 2020:

- Highlight poultry products in Organic Food Awards and the improved taste and cooking quality of organic and free range poultry meat and eggs.
- Communicate the justification for the higher price of organic poultry meat and eggs in terms of taste and health quality.

# **C. Promote sustainable consumption**

### Influence eating habits

If everyone in the world ate as much poultry meat and eggs as we do in the UK, it could not be produced both humanely and sustainably. Reading University modelled the impact of a change to fully organic production in England and Wales.<sup>3</sup> They concluded that poultry meat production would be 30% and egg production 73% of current levels, implying a need for significant reduction in consumption. While the demand for poultry is growing fastest in Asia and Latin America, we believe that in the UK and other wealthy countries that already eat more poultry than could be sustained globally, we have a responsibility to moderate our consumption.

#### What we have achieved so far:

- Analysed the way in which current food systems are failing to feed the world's population adequately, highlighting the need for change in consumption patterns.
- Completed a detailed assessment of the productive capacity of England and Wales under organic management suggesting the reduction of consumption of poultry products that might be required.
- Completed and publicised a critical analysis of the amount of extra food required to feed the future population.
- Worked with Focus on Food, the Health Education Trust and Garden Organic to develop the Food For Life partnership, enabling change in the quality of

food in schools to include more local and organic ingredients, higher welfare animal products, sustainable fish, Fairtrade and fewer processed foods.

- Developed the Food For Life Catering Mark to transform food and supply chains within public procurement, which is already implemented in thousands of UK schools and an increasing number of other organisations, such as hospitals and universities, and private sector companies.
- Supported the call for mandatory healthy and sustainable food standards in public sector institutions, such as Sustain's Campaign for Better Hospital Food.
- Worked with Cardiff University, Food Matters, Sustain and many others to develop a network of Sustainable Food Cities, implementing healthy and sustainable food policies and practices.

#### Our ongoing programmes and projects:

- The Food For Life Catering Mark continues to transform food in the public and private sector throughout the UK. It is challenging the prevailing assumption that the rules for public procurement and mandatory standards prevent progress towards better and more sustainable food.
- Supporting other NGO initiatives to improve food security and the right to food based on sustainable production and consumption.

- Campaign for environmentally sustainable production and consumption based on a detailed analysis of how changes in poultry consumption and production will impact on the poultry sector globally, nationally and locally as it transitions to a sustainable, high-welfare approach.
- Working in partnership with others, highlight the need for alternative business models and practices that can enable transition to poultry systems that are welfare and environment friendly as well as just and equitable.
- Promote the relevance of healthy diets with less but better quality meat, eggs and dairy products as part of the Food For Life campaign message in schools and other public institutions.

 Support curriculum development for Food For Life schools that increases understanding of the practical steps towards sustainable consumption.

**Communicate the value of sustainable, higher welfare poultry products** If we are to move towards more sustainable poultry production and consumption, it is necessary to place a higher value on poultry products. They are far cheaper in real terms than in the past. Poultry meat has become a low-cost fast food and eggs are a cheap ingredient in many processed food products. Egg prices in the supermarket range from around 10p to 39p per egg, whilst a whole chicken can cost as little as £2 or as much as £15. We believe that poultry products should be valued as a source of high-quality protein.

While many of the steps in this action plan will reduce the cost of producing organic eggs and poultry meat, poultry products that are produced sustainably and ensure a good life for farm animals are likely to continue to cost more. Developing innovative routes to market, including through our Food for Life Catering Mark, is therefore crucial to ensuring that good food – healthy, sustainable and high-welfare – is available and accessible to all. Yet we also recognise that effective and lasting solutions to food poverty and diet-related ill-health depend on social and economic policies, for example on education, the minimum wage and benefit levels, not on cheap food.

#### What we have achieved so far:

- Communicated the value of organic products generally, explaining what the consumer is paying for and how the price for organic food reflects the qualities of the organic system – for animal welfare, the environment and society.
- Worked with others (e.g. FAWF, CIWF, WSPA and RSPCA) to promote the importance of improving animal welfare and highlighting welfare as a key attribute of all production systems.
- Improved our understanding of the impact of organic and conventional production systems on the nutritional quality of food.

#### Our ongoing programmes and projects:

 Communicating the added value of the Soil Association standard and symbol as a means to recognise good quality organic food.

- Campaigning against the introduction of GM crops in agriculture generally, and for animals fed with GM based livestock feeds to be labelled as such to enable consumer choice.
- Analysing the difference between the price that organic farmers receive for their products compared to the price paid by consumers in supermarkets and other outlets to help justify a better return to the farmer.
- Providing the justification for current and future support schemes for organic farmers (OELS) that inform the debate on the importance of farming systems such as organic with lower external costs or even net positive externalities.

- Present clear information on the cost of better poultry meat and eggs and the returns to the producer from non-intensive systems including organic and free range production.
- Help make sure that the farmer gets a fair return from their investment in higher quality, sustainable production systems.
- Highlight the importance and value of poultry meat and eggs as a high quality source of protein, not as a source of fast food or a cheap ingredient in processed food.
- Ally with consumer and social justice organisations to campaign for real solutions to food poverty.

# Annex 1: priorities for improvements in organic poultry production on farm

- a. No beak trimming
  - Use of appropriate breeds or strains (see 1e below)
  - Rearing systems that match the situation the birds will be in when in lay
  - Maximisation of the use of the outdoor range area
  - Environmental enrichment and foraging opportunities
  - Appropriate nutrition, feeds not changed too often, feed as a mash not a pellet
- b. Birds fully feathered at end of lay
  - \* The suggested controls for feather pecking are shown in section 1a above.
- c. No or minimal keel bone damage for laying hens
  - Birds learn to use perches in lay
  - Genetic selection for bone strength
  - Suitable perch design and arrangement of house 'furniture'
  - Birds able to exercise to promote bone strength
- d. Minimal mortality for layers and broilers and minimal hock burn and footpad der-

#### matitis in broilers

Steps to reduce mortality:

- Suitable breeds
- Good chick management (whether broiler or pullet chicks)
  - $\circ$   $\;$  Check chicks when they arrive from the hatchery
  - Make sure temperature and humidity in brooding house is at the right level
- Reduce the risk of smothering
- Control disease manage for health
- Control predators or exclude predators from birds

Reduce the incidence of contact dermatitis:

- Right breed, an active bird that doesn't just sit in the litter all day
- Good litter management keep bedding dry and friable, consider using wood shavings rather than straw

- Good range management to avoid the buildup of wet, muddy areas
- Additional measures to maintain bird health and welfare in poor weather conditions, for example use of verandah sytem system
- Appropriate stocking density
- Good ventilation to avoid humidity and moisture building up in the house
- Good house insulation especially the roof to minimise condensation
- Suitable diet methionine may have a role to play in skin healing and diets high in crude protein may lead to loose sticky droppings which can make bedding wetter and stick to the birds' feet making them more prone to foot pad dermatitis

#### e. Appropriate breeds are used

Summary of actions for breed type:

- Slower growing and less prolific breeds may have lower nutrient requirements
- Slower growing broilers will have fewer health problems
- Less prolific layers may have fewer health problems
- Active breeds will range better

#### f. Birds make full use of range area

- Provide shelter
- Give birds access to range from a young age
- Plant cover crops
- Enhance range to include a diversity of crop height (ideally trees)
- Provide natural feed and water on the range
- g. Poultry integrated into the farm system
  - Nutrients deposited on the range are used as part of a diverse system of food production
  - Manure deposited in poultry houses is used to grow organic crops on farm or locally
  - Links between livestock and crop growing farms for feed and bedding.

# References

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