

GOOD LIFE OPPORTUNITIES FRAMEWORK

Chickens reared for meat

HANDBOOK



LivWel+

Livestock Positive Welfare





Positive welfare leads to a good life

Good farm animal welfare is about more than preventing harm to animals – it's about creating the conditions for every animal to enjoy life. Animals value **positive experiences** such as feeling comfort, pleasure, interest, confidence, and good health. Allowing animals to make their own individual choices is also valuable. These help them to be relaxed, content, and able to cope well, which also supports growth and productivity. Enjoyable experiences are known as “**positive welfare**”.

To date, the main focus for farm animal welfare has been on preventing suffering. This approach is captured in the “Five Freedoms” for animal welfare, which aims to make sure animals are free from hunger and thirst, discomfort, pain, injury, disease, fear, distress, and from being stopped from behaving naturally. These harmful experiences are described as “**negative welfare**” which continue to be monitored and minimised.

For welfare to be truly good, positive experiences need to greatly outweigh any negative ones.

Defra's Animal Welfare Committee (formerly the Farm Animal Welfare Council) explains this through the idea of a “good life.” They rank animal welfare on a scale:

- **Life not worth living** – mostly negative experiences.
- **Life worth living** – a mix of positive and negative experiences.
- **Good life** – mostly positive experiences.

If animals are given resources (e.g. space, companions or enrichment) they value and that allow them to feel comfort, pleasure, interest, confidence, and good health, they have the chance to experience positive welfare and live a “good life.”

Good Life Opportunity Framework - Positive welfare tiers

Using advice from experts and research from scientific studies, scientists have created a framework that shows what farm animals need to feel comfort, pleasure, interest, confidence, and good health – and therefore live a good life.

The framework has three levels, ranging from **Welfare +**, giving animals some positive experiences that are better than the legal minimum standards, to **Welfare +++**, giving animals the best possible chance for a good life, with many opportunities for positive experiences

Moving up the tiers, animals have:

+ → ++ → +++

- More favoured resources (from the animal's point of view)
- A greater amount of resources
- More choice in resources
- Monitoring of behaviour and use of resources, so changes can be made to give them even more positive experiences

Defining opportunities for a good life for livestock

There are five categories of opportunities for positive experiences in farm animals:

Comfort

- Comfort focuses on the animals' ability to choose an environment that is physically and thermally comfortable.

Pleasure

- Beyond meeting their basic needs, chickens gain pleasure from food – especially when they have a choice in what they eat and can carry out natural activities like foraging and grazing.
- Young chickens also enjoy performing pleasurable behaviours like play.
- Chickens also experience pleasure from nurturing experiences between mother and chicks.

Confidence

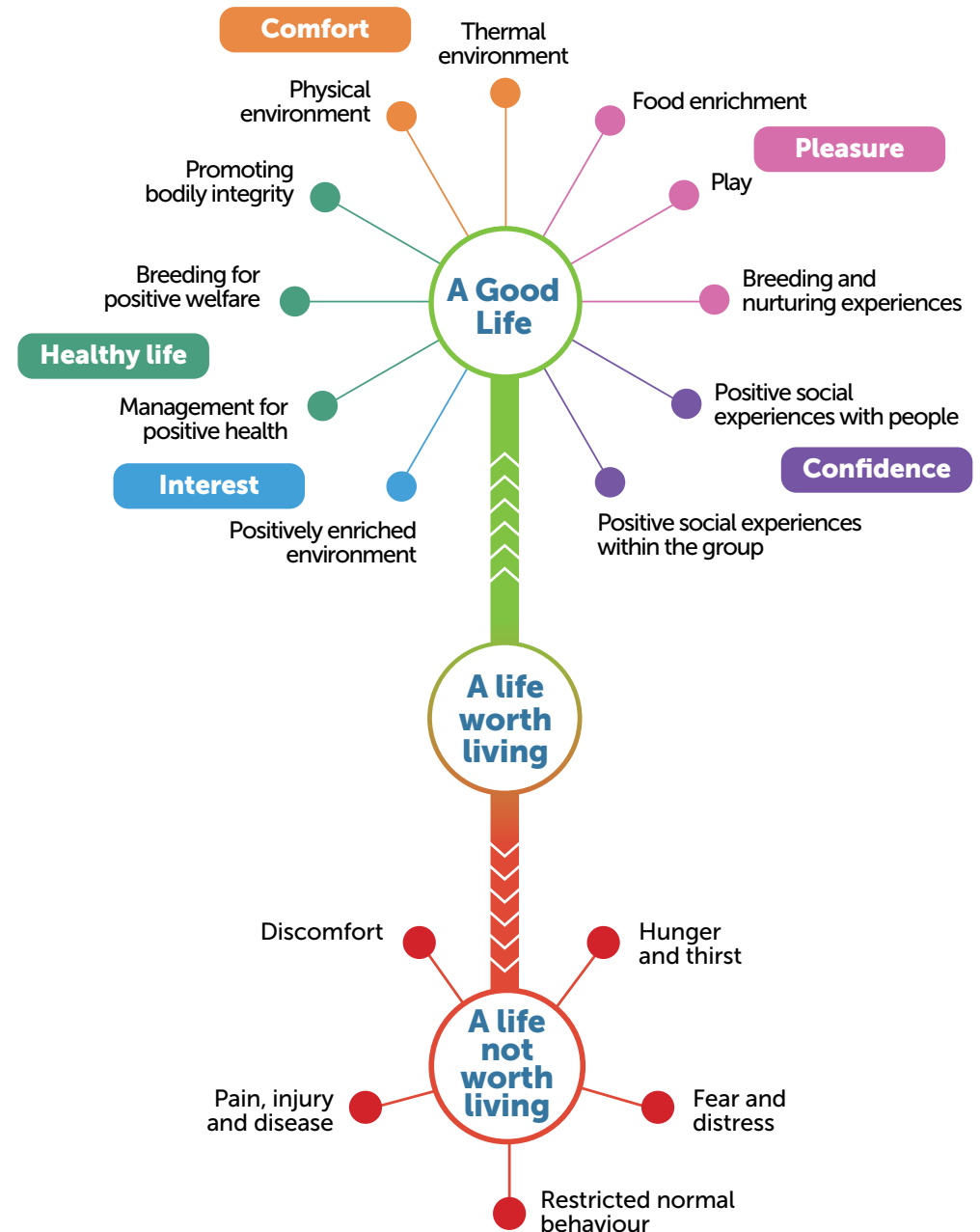
- When chickens are handled and managed in ways that help them feel safe, they can build trust with and enjoy the company of people.
- Chickens are flock animals and want to be around other chickens

Interest

- Chickens are inquisitive animals. They benefit from chances to explore, learn, show natural behaviours, and make choices in a varied and interesting environment throughout their lives.

Healthy life

- A healthy life is needed for a good life with day-to-day health managed effectively.
- Long term health and welfare is positively influenced by breeding choices.
- By not removing part of the beak for breeding hens or despurred/toe-clipped for breeding cockerels they are able to perform behaviours that are core to their basic nature.



Comfort:

Physical environment

POSITIVE FRAMEWORK TIERS



- Floors and platforms/perches are sufficiently dry and clean
- Litter is dry and compressible
- Access to elevated resting areas in the form of flat raised platforms and/or aerial perches, including ramps for access if fast growing breeds are used
- Design and location of platforms, perches and ramps ensure prevention of collisions, falls, trapping of claws and defecating on other birds
- From two weeks of age, suitable level and period of darkness (6 hours) for undisturbed, nighttime rest plus a period of twilight



- Separate dimly lit resting area provided
- Perches and platforms provided AND use of slow growing strain/breed that are better able to utilise perches
- Perches and platforms at different levels to support different behavioural uses (e.g. rest, preening), including refuge from other birds
- For the first two weeks of life, chicks should be provided with dark brooders or mother hens of sufficient size/quantity that most (>50%) can rest beneath them



- From 6 weeks of age, more than enough perch length for all birds to choose where and with whom to rest
- More than two types of perches including at least some wooden perches with a diameter of 3-5cm and a rounded profile with a flattened top
- Birds are observed and management is adjusted to optimise physical comfort and rest

SCIENTIFIC REASONING

Chickens evolved to live in the jungle. Elevated perches and platforms are chickens' preferred places for comfortable resting and preening, partly because they feel safer up high¹⁻³.

Fast-growing broilers find it harder to use perches because of their weaker legs and heavier breast^{4,5}. Ramps can help these birds reach platforms⁶.

Chickens prefer wooden perches with a flattened top, around 3-5 cm across⁷, but it's important to offer a choice of perch types and heights, as not all birds like the same thing. Giving birds this kind of choice and control improves their wellbeing⁸.

- Bach et al. 2019
- Olsson & Keeling 2002
- Keeling 2017
- Schmidt et al. 2009
- De Jong & Gunnink 2019
- Norman et al. 2018
- Chen et al. 2014
- Englund & Cronin 2023
- De Jong et al. 2022
- Bassler et al. 2013
- Schwean-Lardner et al. 2012
- Bayram & Özkan 2010
- Monckton et al. 2020
- Holt et al. 2023
- Dikmen et al. 2016
- Sokołowicz et al. 2020
- Fiorilla et al. 2024

Physical comfort is about chickens being able to choose a suitable, comfortable resting place, rest undisturbed and together if they choose

A dark brooder gives broiler chicks a warm, dark place to rest, much like a mother hen; chicks choose to rest under a dark brooders⁹. Once the birds are older and the brooder is removed, providing dark periods around 8 hours improve resting synchrony, reduce lameness and hock burn, and increase comfort behaviours such as preening, with no cost to growth¹⁰⁻¹².

Litter should be dry and comfortable so birds can rest on it if they wish. Chickens prefer sand or wood shavings for resting^{13,14}.

When chickens can access an outdoor range area, they perform more comfort behaviours like preening¹⁵⁻¹⁷.

Comfort: Thermal environment

POSITIVE FRAMEWORK TIERS



- Housing maintained at a comfortable temperature
- If using the house in the day, there is a choice of temperatures (e.g. birds able to move closer to or away from ventilated areas, sunlight patches)
- Birds have access to elevated structures
- Litter maintained in a dry condition
- If given outdoor access, access to some shade or shelter (e.g. trees, hedges, portable shelters)



- Access to an outdoor area with open air (e.g. veranda/winter garden or, ideally, a range)
- If given outdoor access, access to a range of shelter types and shade intensities (e.g. trees, hedges, portable shelters)



- From at least four weeks of age, daily access (at least four hours per day) given to a well-drained range, unless extreme weather prevents this
- Protection from weather on the range that all birds can access at once
- Shelter from weather around pop-holes e.g. cover from wind and rain
- Birds are observed and management is adjusted to optimise thermal comfort

Thermal comfort is about providing a comfortable temperature as well as a choice of temperatures, so all birds can adapt as they prefer

SCIENTIFIC REASONING

Thermal comfort means helping birds avoid getting too hot or too cold. Giving birds a range of temperatures and space to move lets them find the most comfortable spot and regulate their own body heat¹. Perching also helps birds stay cool by improving airflow, access to perches has been linked to lower mortality during hot weather^{2,3}.

Covered outdoor areas such as verandas, and even more so access to a varied range, give birds more choice over temperature. Shade, shelter and windbreaks are needed for outdoor protection and comfort (both strong sun and heat loss)^{4,5}.

Chickens like to synchronise certain behaviours, like resting and preening, therefore enough sheltered space for all of them together improves their wellbeing⁶.



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Where heat is a risk, measures such as good ventilation, evaporative cooling, cooled perches and certain dietary supplements can all help keep birds within their comfort zone⁷⁻¹⁰.



1. Hafez 1964
2. Riber et al. 2017
3. Gebhardt-Henrich et al. 2017
4. Santos et al. 2014
5. Passini et al. 2020
6. Keeling 2017
7. Baracho et al. 2018
8. Hu et al. 2021
9. Fezai et al. 2024
10. Dedousi et al. 2023

Pleasure: Food enrichment

POSITIVE FRAMEWORK TIERS



- Enough food to feel full at all production stages (including in the days (except the last 12 hours) prior to depopulation)
- Regular access to insoluble grit from an early age
- Diet includes an even distribution of wholegrain (e.g.

whole oats, wheat, corn, maize, barley) and/or other sources of fibre, (e.g. alfalfa, pea, silage)

- Enough space for all birds to access food simultaneously if meal-fed
- Access to a foraging substrate e.g. wood-based litter, straw, sand, oat hulls/husks, soil



- Diet includes more than one type of high value food e.g. wholegrain, rice, insects, forage crops/edible vegetation
- Some food offered daily outside

of standard feeders e.g. in the house: scatter fed, strung up vegetables, edible pecking blocks and/or naturally foraged on a diverse range

- More than one type of foraging substrate provided



- Feed fed in a non-concentrated form e.g. mash rather than pellets
- Diet includes more than two types of high value food including a range with access to insects and mixed species pastures
- Dietary components to improve gut health e.g. Allium species,

essential oils, propolis, quinoa, dietary fibre, black soldier fly larvae, probiotics

- More than two types of foraging substrate provided, including soil-like substrate (e.g. soil, compost)
- Feeding choices are monitored and acted on e.g. more preferred types of feed and foraging opportunities and novelty offered, within a nutritionally balanced diet

SCIENTIFIC REASONING

Feeling full gives birds pleasure¹, so they should always have enough food to satisfy hunger at every stage, including in the days before depopulation.

Foods high in fibre, like whole grains, help birds feel full, and chickens prefer whole grains to pellets^{2,3}. Feeding mash rather than pellets, and offering high-fibre foods, encourages foraging, dustbathing and comfort behaviours³⁻⁵. Regular access to insoluble grit from an early age also aids digestion³.

Scattering food, or offering it in foraging devices, encourages birds to search for food, a behaviour linked to positive mental states such as excitement^{6,7}. Insects like black soldier fly larvae are highly valued: scattering them increases foraging and activity, without harming growth⁸⁻¹⁰.

Dietary components such as Allium species (garlic and onion), probiotics, essential oils, black soldier fly larvae and dietary fibre can improve gut health and therefore mental wellbeing due to the gut-brain connection¹¹⁻¹⁴. They have been found to increase positive behaviours such as comfort behaviours and activity^{5,10}.

Range access gives birds more chances to engage in motivated behaviour to look for and find plants and insects, which is linked to positive states such as excitement⁶. Mixed-plant pastures boost foraging and healthy gut bacteria^{15,16}.

Litter that chickens can scratch supports their strong urge to forage; they prefer soil-like materials¹⁷.

1. Mellor 2015
2. Rose et al. 1995
3. DEFRA 2018
4. Bach et al. 2019
5. Makinde 2022
6. Seehuus et al. 2013
7. Pichova et al. 2016
8. Bongiorno et al. 2024
9. Oddon et al. 2024
10. Onuoha et al. 2026
11. Abad et al. 2020
12. Cheng et al. 2019
13. Laptev et al. 2021
14. Kraimi et al. 2019
15. Zheng et al. 2021
16. Breitsameter et al. 2014
17. Holt et al. 2023

Finding pleasure from food is about providing variety, opportunities to naturally forage, and ensuring birds feel full

Pleasure: Play

POSITIVE FRAMEWORK TIERS



- Sufficient space to allow at least some chicks to perform play behaviours e.g. play-fight, jumping, running and wing flapping



- Sufficient space to allow most chicks to perform play behaviours
- Slow growing strains/breeds used, so that birds are more capable of feeling active and therefore carrying out play behaviour



- Sufficient space to allow all chicks to perform play behaviours
- Chicks given access to different types of perches, litter and other environmental enrichments
- Enrichments to encourage play are replenished/changed regularly to maintain novelty
- Birds are observed and management is adjusted to increase play behaviour e.g. trialling objects that chicks might like to play with

SCIENTIFIC REASONING



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Having more space encourages play in chickens. Play includes sparring and frolicking, and is far more common in chicks and young birds than in adults¹⁻⁴.

Because fast-growing broilers chickens become less active as they grow, slower-growing breeds are more able to feel active and playful³.

Environments that offer a choice of enrichment, such as different litter and perch options, increase frolicking and sparring in young birds^{5,6}. Changing enrichment items unpredictably also increases sparring play⁷.

**Pleasure from play
is promoted by
providing plenty of
space, companions
and interesting
features
and objects**

1. Newberry 1999
2. Baxter et al. 2019
3. Rayner et al. 2020
4. Liu et al. 2020
5. Holt et al. 2023
6. Vas et al. 2023
7. Skånberg et al. 2023

Pleasure: Nurturing experiences

POSITIVE FRAMEWORK TIERS



- For breeding birds, nest boxes:
 - are secluded, clearly separated from other areas, and draught free
 - have low light levels
 - have a solid floor
- contain substrate which encourages nesting behaviour e.g. straw, shavings, husks
- For breeding birds, at least 1 nest box per 5 hens, or if group nest boxes are used there are partitions at least every metre



- For breeding birds, more than 1 nest box per 5 hens
- For breeding birds, more than one type of nesting floor substrate
- For breeding birds, wooden nestboxes provided
- Chicks reared using dark brooders



- Chicks reared with a mother hen
- Adult hens given the opportunity at least once in their lives to choose to go broody, incubate eggs and rear chicks
- Birds are observed and management is adjusted to optimise nesting opportunities

Enabling pleasure from nurturing focuses on the hen's preference for nesting behaviour, the opportunity to raise her chicks and for chicks to be reared by a mother hen

SCIENTIFIC REASONING



Nesting concerns breeding and dual-purpose flocks rather than birds reared for meat. Breeding hens prefer nests that are private, sheltered and dimly lit, with material such as straw or shavings to nest in^{1,2,3}, the prefer wooden nest boxes to plastic⁴. Nesting is a rewarding behaviour⁵.

Dark brooders mimics aspects of a mother hen: a warm, dark, secluded place to rest. This has lasting benefits into adulthood: less injurious pecking and fear, increases foraging, and it may improve gut and mental health through the gut-brain connection⁶⁻⁹.

Caring for chicks is rewarding for the hen too, providing positive feelings and pleasure⁴.

Chicks raised by hens show lasting welfare benefits - less fear, better social skills and more synchronised behaviour than those reared artificially^{10,11}, as well as less feather pecking¹². Mother hens also pass healthy gut microbes to their chicks, improving gut and mental health^{13,14}.

1. Kruschwitz et al. 2008
2. Ringgenberg et al. 2015
3. DEFRA 2018
4. van den Oever et al. 2020
5. Mellor 2015
6. Nordquist et al. 2020
7. Sirovnik & Riber 2022
8. De Jong et al. 2022
9. Kraimi et al. 2019
10. Hewlett & Nordquist 2019
11. Edgar et al. 2016
12. Shimmura et al. 2010
13. Li et al. 2022

Confidence:

Positive experiences with stockkeepers

POSITIVE FRAMEWORK TIERS



- Stock keepers are calm and quiet around birds, with constant and sudden noises avoided
- Stock keeper behaviour towards, and handling of, birds is gentle, calm and confident from an early age, including catching and handling in an upright position
- Stock keepers and contract catching teams have been trained and/or are experienced in catching and handling birds
- Efforts to improve the predictability for birds by signalling stressful events e.g. knocking on the door before entering



- Birds associate the presence of humans with neutral interactions e.g. talking to birds, maintaining regular visual contact, gentle touching
- Thinning is prohibited



- Birds associate the presence of humans with positive interactions e.g. feeding preferred foods, feeding from hand
- Formal training of stockkeepers on chicken welfare and handling
- Positive reinforcement used for all handling as far as possible e.g. leading birds using preferred foods
- Birds are monitored and action taken to increase confidence around humans
- Catching teams at depopulation catch and handle birds in an upright position

SCIENTIFIC REASONING

Quiet, gentle stockkeepers are crucial for low-stress handling¹. All handling should be calm and careful, and catching birds the right way up is less stressful than holding them upside down^{2,3}. Gentle handling from birth improves the human – animal bond⁴. Experienced, well-trained catching teams, including at depopulation, make catching far less stressful^{5,6}.

Reducing sudden noises and movements helps prevent fear and startle responses; making events more predictable, such as knocking before entering⁷. Playing the radio or music can calm birds and increase comfort behaviours⁸⁻¹⁰.

Seeing and hearing humans often - for example, talking softly to birds, reduces fear and stress¹¹⁻¹³. Chicks that observe other birds being handled gently also become calmer around people¹⁴.

Positive interactions, such as gentle touching and hand-feeding favourite foods build trust and make birds calmer and easier to handle^{15,16}. Positive-reinforcement training has been linked to less fear and even fewer social problems in the flock¹⁷.

Thinning is a stressful, negative experience for birds, avoiding it brings welfare benefits.

Training stockkeepers to assess welfare outcome measures has been shown to improve their ability to care for their animals even further¹⁸.

Ensuring confidence with stockkeepers requires good training and catching and handling birds in a calm and confident manner

1. Coleman & Hemsworth 2014
2. Kittelsen et al. 2018
3. Wolff et al. 2019
4. Siegel & Gross 2000
5. Pilecco et al. 2013
6. DEFRA 2018
7. Richards et al. 2012
8. Jones & Rayner 1999
9. Wang et al. 2024
10. Zhao et al. 2023
11. Zulkifli et al. 2002
12. Taylor et al. 2022
13. Ferreira et al. 2024
14. Calderón-Amor et al. 2025
15. Zulkifli 2013
16. Bongiorno et al. 2024
17. Mählis et al. 2023
18. Michaelis et al. 2022

Confidence: Positive social experiences within the flock

POSITIVE FRAMEWORK TIERS



- Stocking rate (maximum 30kg/m²) allows space to enable birds to avoid antagonistic interactions and choose who to be close to
- Resources (food, water, enrichment) provided in sufficient quantity and spread out evenly to avoid antagonistic interactions between birds
- Visual barriers e.g. bales, vertical panels and/or raised platforms

to allow birds to avoid negative social interactions and create the perception of smaller group sizes

- Sufficient good quality litter available to perform dustbathing as a social group activity without being disturbed
- New birds introduced to flock using strategies to reduce negative interactions e.g. visual barriers
- No birds isolated, e.g. hospitalised birds given at least visual social contact



- Stable groups of familiar individuals
- Resources (food, water, resting/perching places, enrichment)

provided in sufficient quantity to allow groups of birds to perform activities simultaneously

- Sufficient pophole space to avoid competition for access to an outdoor area



- Maximum 21kg/m² to give birds space to avoid negative interactions and choose which birds to spend time with
- Resources (food, water, resting/perching places, enrichment) provided in sufficient quantity to allow most birds to perform activities simultaneously

- Birds kept in small (around 100 bird) flocks
- No or minimal mixing of birds
- Presence of adult birds in the flocks
- Birds given environmental enrichment from a young age
- Birds monitored and action taken to reduce negative and increase positive interactions

SCIENTIFIC REASONING

Allowing birds to avoid negative interactions is key to increased social confidence. More space (a lower stocking rate), visual barriers and enough resources help birds avoid conflict¹⁻³.

Birds reared in enriched environments form more cohesive flocks and show less feather pecking^{6,7}.

Chickens are more aggressive towards unfamiliar birds, so keeping stable groups and introducing any new birds carefully reduces conflict^{4,5}.

Research on ideal flock size is limited, but smaller, more natural groups where birds can recognise each other tend to have better welfare^{8,9}.

Chickens are more aggressive towards unfamiliar birds, so keeping stable groups and introducing any new birds carefully reduces conflict^{4,5}.

Including adult birds creates a more natural flock. Adult hens calm and reassure chicks through their calls and act as role models for foraging, while cockerels act as lookouts, giving alarm calls that chicks respond to¹⁰⁻¹². Flocks with cockerels also range more and show less fear^{13,14}.

Keeping flocks stable supports lasting social bonds, and birds often perform daily behaviours like dustbathing together. Providing enough space and resources supports this synchrony^{15,16,17}.

Chickens are social animals. To ensure they have positive social experiences, they need space so they can be selective and synchronised, and stable groups so they can form stable hierarchies

1. Freire et al. 2003
2. DEFRA 2018
3. Cornetto et al. 2002
4. D'Eath & Keeling 2003
5. Gomez et al. 2022
6. Campbell et al. 2018
7. Zepp et al. 2018
8. Kiani 2022
9. Lindberg & Nicol 1996
10. Edgar et al. 2016
11. Nicol 2004
12. Zhang et al. 2025
13. Bestman & Wagenaar 2003
14. Oden et al. 2005
15. Collins et al. 2011
16. Keeling 2017
17. Carvalho et al. 2018

Interest: Positively enriched environment

POSITIVE FRAMEWORK TIERS



- In housing, continuous access to at least 1 type of enrichment item, evenly distributed in sufficient quantity for at least a quarter of the flock to use simultaneously to allow investigation and foraging behaviour, e.g. hanging jute rope/ soft string, pecking stones/blocks, forage blocks, lucerne bales, hay bales, plastic drums, hanging plastic objects, balls
- Continuous access to litter maintained in a friable condition for dustbathing and foraging
- Stocking density allows space for foraging and dustbathing e.g. not exceed 30kg/m²
- Sufficient natural lighting to encourage investigation, foraging and dustbathing e.g. covering at least 3% of the internal floor space



- Access to an outdoor area with open air (e.g. veranda/winter garden or, ideally, a range)
- At least two types of enrichment items available for investigation (can include a range of different vegetation types outdoors)
- Slow growing strains/breeds used
- Range contains covered structures e.g. shade and shelter panels and/ or tall grass, hedges/shrubs
- Covered structures and/or vegetation start no further than 3m from the pop holes and are distributed evenly throughout entire range
- Covered dustbathing opportunities e.g. dustbaths in the veranda, roofed sandpit distributed evenly on the range which start no further than 10m from the pop hole(s)



- At least 3 types of complex items for investigation provided (including a variety of vegetation on the range)
- New items for investigation introduced regularly (could include rotation between vegetation-containing pastures)
- From at least four weeks of age, daily access (at least four hours per day) given to a well-drained range, unless extreme weather prevents this
- Shelter/cover provided in the form of vegetation providing overhead cover, including trees, on at least 25% of range area and including some mature trees (>2 years)
- Quality of the range environment is maintained throughout all seasons e.g. reduce mud around popholes, range management to maintain vegetation
- Birds monitored and action taken to provide a more enriched environment



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Promoting interest in chickens requires a rich, diverse and interesting environment, providing enrichments to increase the opportunity for investigation and foraging behaviours

A more complex environment encourages birds to explore and forage: behaviours linked to positive feelings which also improves their health¹⁻³. Greater complexity increases foraging, preening and movement and reduces stress⁵. Access to enrichment from day one supports gut health, lowers fear and builds resilience⁶.

Dry, scratchable litter lets birds dustbathe and forage; they especially like soil-like substances and clean wood shavings^{7,8}.

A veranda gives extra sheltered space to forage and dustbathe and encourages birds to venture outdoors⁹.



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Chickens prefer natural light to artificial light, which increases activity, exploration, foraging and dustbathing^{10,11}.

Outdoor range access further boosts foraging and comfort behaviours, and slower-growing breeds range more¹²⁻¹⁴. Because young chicks are still developing their feathering and ability to keep warm, around four weeks of age is the earliest most birds can safely go outside^{15,16}.



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On the range, trees, hedges and shrubs give shade, shelter and variety and encourage birds to range further^{14,17,18}, mature trees (over two years old) are especially valuable¹⁴, and cover needs to reach right across the range, as birds only venture as far as the cover extends¹⁹. Giving visual access to the range early in life, and rotating fresh pasture, also encourages ranging^{20,21}.

Chickens have evolved from jungle animals. They prefer dense natural vegetation over artificial shelters and range more, and further, on ranges with such vegetations, especially trees²²⁻²³.

1. Manteuffel et al. 2009
2. Mellor 2015
3. BenSassi et al. 2019
4. Evans et al. 2023
5. Anderson et al. 2021
6. Yan et al. 2022
7. Baxter et al. 2018a
8. DEFRA 2018
9. Riedel et al. 2022
10. Rana et al. 2021
11. Wichman et al. 2021
12. Fiorilla et al. 2024
13. Sossidou et al. 2015
14. Riber et al. 2018
15. Lin et al. 2005
16. Campbell et al. 2025
17. Dal Bosco et al. 2014
18. Bosshardt et al. 2022
19. Göransson et al. 2021
20. Taylor et al. 2023
21. Knierim 2006
22. Stadig et al. 2018
23. Riber et al. 2018

Healthy life:

Management policy for positive health

POSITIVE FRAMEWORK TIERS



- Health and welfare plan setting out health and husbandry activities, developed with appropriate veterinary advice, and reviewed every 12 months or more
- Any variation in normal feeding, drinking or behaviour given immediate attention to identify the cause
- Pain relief used as part of management of unwell animals, when needed
- Specific training received on medication and humane culling



- Procedures in place to reduce the risk of disease and other negative consequences from being outdoors, e.g. predation
- Regular dialogue i.e. every 6 months with vet and/or other advisors/consultants to improve welfare
- Carry out welfare monitoring in addition to daily livestock inspections
- Welfare outcome monitoring data used to adjust resources and/or management to improve health and welfare accordingly



- Formal training given on medication and humane culling (group, peer advisor, on farm welfare research)
- Farm staff take active part in welfare activities with wider benefits (e.g. member of scheme policy/management)

SCIENTIFIC REASONING



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Managing for positive health focuses on proactive interventions that promote health and resilience

Daily care, prompt treatment of illness and the use of pain relief when needed are essential for positive health. Recording and reviewing flock data with a vet enables proactive, long-term welfare planning.

Positive welfare includes both short-term good experiences and long-term wellbeing. Wellbeing is related to resilience. A resilient bird can adapt positively and maintain health, which is a proposed indicator of positive welfare^{2,3}.

The health of an animal is more than the absence of illness: it includes feeling well, active and vigorous, and being able to thrive with good physical and mental wellbeing¹.

1. Mattiello et al. 2019
2. Colditz 2022
3. Rault et al. 2025

Healthy life: Breeding for positive welfare

POSITIVE FRAMEWORK TIERS



- Breeding choices are made that recognise the undesirable side effects of genetic selection for production efficiency and attempt to reduce/mitigate for current health and welfare problems (e.g. fast growth)



- Breeding choices are made for future flock health and welfare, valuing these EQUALLY to production parameters
- If own replacements are not home bred or selected by the

unit manager, feedback given to the breeders/genetic companies as to what traits are important to the manager



- Breeds/birds chosen for long term improvement of flock health and welfare, temperament, resilience and metabolic normality, including suitability to particular type of land/system in which they will be placed, valuing these MORE than choices made for production factors

Breeding for positive welfare means selecting the right breeds and traits to ensure a healthy life through long term positive wellbeing and resilience

SCIENTIFIC REASONING



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Breeding for high production can seriously reduce welfare. Selecting broilers for very fast growth is linked to metabolic disorders, leg issues and lameness, and sore feet, hocks and breast²⁻⁴, these are painful and life-limiting problems^{5,6}.

Choosing slower-growing breeds, reared in good conditions, consistently gives better welfare outcomes: less foot and hock damage, less lameness and lower mortality^{7,8}.

Breeding for welfare can promote positive traits, as breeds differ in foraging, fearfulness and curiosity^{9,10}. Parent flocks should be managed and housed so that good welfare traits can be selected for¹¹.

Valuing welfare over production can support the use of "dual-purpose" breeds used for both meat and eggs which have better welfare traits than commercial layer and broiler breeds^{12,13}.

1. Zuidhof et al. 2014
2. Bessei 2006
3. Karaarslan 2018
4. Knowles et al. 2008
5. Danbury et al. 2000
6. McGeown et al. 1999
7. Castellini et al. 2016
8. Riber et al. 2018
9. Fernyhough et al. 2020
10. Rozempolska-Rucińska et al. 2020
11. de Haas et al. 2013
12. Malchow et al. 2022
13. Rieke et al. 2021

Healthy life: Promoting bodily integrity

POSITIVE FRAMEWORK TIERS



- For broiler breeders/dual purpose bird systems: some birds not beak trimmed AND appropriate interventions/management strategies to prevent feather pecking
- For broiler breeders/dual purpose bird systems: some males not despurred/toe-clipped AND appropriate interventions/management strategies to prevent injury to female birds



- For broiler breeders/dual purpose bird systems: majority (>50%) of birds on the farm not beak trimmed
- For broiler breeders/dual purpose bird systems: majority (>50%) of males not despurred/toe-clipped AND appropriate interventions/management strategies to prevent injury to female bird



- None of the broiler breeders/dual purpose birds on the farm are beak trimmed
- None of the broiler breeders/dual purpose birds on the farm are despurred/toe-clipped

**By not removing/
altering parts of the
body, birds are able to
perform activities that
are core to their
basic nature**

SCIENTIFIC REASONING



In chickens, beak trimming causes pain and lasting loss of feeling¹. The beak is a sensitive tool used for finding and picking up food, preening, nest-building and dustbathing¹. In meat production, beak trimming mainly concerns breeding and dual-purpose flocks.

Male broiler breeders are routinely despurred and toe-clipped to reduce injuries inflicted on females during mating. These injuries happen because intense selection for fast growth has left males with incomplete courtship behaviour, so they force mating which can cause feather loss, skin wounds and claw injuries²⁻⁴.

This can be tackled through management and breeding. Separating males and females for part of the day, providing cover panels and elevated areas so hens can escape unwanted attention, keeping an optimal male-to-female ratio, and avoiding overfeeding of males all reduce injuries⁵⁻⁷. Longer term, selecting against aggression offers a genetic solution⁸.

1. Riber & Hinrichsen 2017
2. Millman & Duncan 2000
3. EFSA 2010
4. Riber et al. 2018
5. Riber et al. 2017
6. Xue et al. 2025
7. Cobb-Vantress 2008
8. Lupu et al. 2025

Notes

LivWel+ focuses on evolving farm animal welfare assessment into capturing “positive welfare” opportunities, but this sits alongside measuring and minimising “negative welfare” which can be done through AssureWel welfare outcome assessment protocols. For more information about AssureWel visit: www.assurewel.org/broilers

LivWel+

Livestock Positive Welfare



To find out more about the
LivWel+ project contact:
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Good Life Opportunities Framework:
Chickens reared for meat Handbook –
Pilot Edition.

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