

RSPCA Assured introduces new welfare standards for laying hens

Verandas and natural daylight requirements amongst incoming changes

Friday 10 November 2023

RSPCA Assured has today announced the details of the new RSPCA welfare standards for laying hens that will be introduced next year.

From 01 May 2024, the new [RSPCA](#) standards will come into effect. However, this will be a phased process for some of the more significant changes, and farmers will be given up to six years to implement these.

In order to continually progress standards of farmed animal welfare, the RSPCA regularly reviews and updates all of its standards for different species, in consultation with the farming industry, taking account of the latest scientific, veterinary and industry knowledge and experience.

As part of this review process, the RSPCA has now developed a new set of standards for laying hens, which includes a number of new standards as well as revisions to existing standards.



Dr Kate Norman, Senior Scientific Officer and poultry specialist at the RSPCA, said: “The new laying hen standards will be a huge step forward for hen welfare. Two of the key new standards are the introduction of verandas for barn members and the new requirements for natural daylight for both barn and free-range members, which will come into force in 2030*.

“We recognise these are a big change for some of our members and it’s therefore really important that we give them enough time to make the necessary changes and support and advise them during that process. As such, RSPCA Assured has doubled the notice period

RSPCA Assured Press Office
press@rspcaassured.org.uk
01403 286170 / 01403 915693

RSPCA Assured
Wilberforce Way
Southwater, Horsham
West Sussex, RH13 9RS

01403 286170
hello@rspcaassured.org.uk
www.rspcaassured.org.uk

RSPCA press office
0300 123 0244/0288
press@rspca.org.uk

Duty press officer
Evening and
weekends
07825 158490

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usually given to members to implement new standards from three to six months, and the RSPCA has allowed up to six years for the more significant changes, such as verandas and natural daylight, to be made.”

Verandas

A veranda is an additional roofed, but uninsulated, structure attached to the outside of a poultry building, which has a fully littered floor. Alongside other key welfare improvements, verandas provide barn hens with access to natural daylight and an outdoor climate.

Kate said: “There are farmers in the UK and Europe that have already successfully installed verandas or are considering investing in them, which demonstrates how achievable these standards are, even though they may feel challenging.

“When looking at the European farms and research, we discovered that including a veranda resulted in a reduction of the daytime stocking density in the main house. This has welfare benefits such as promoting preening, dustbathing and foraging behaviour and reduces feather damage.”

Natural Daylight

The new natural daylight standard requires barn and free-range members to provide natural daylight in houses for all hens by the age of 21 weeks, and the natural daylight coverage must correspond to at least 3% of the total floor area of the house.

“Natural daylight is not something that is commonly given to laying hens in the UK,” Kate added. “But giving them natural light provides many welfare benefits. Turkey and broiler producers under the RSPCA Assured scheme are already required to provide natural daylight inside the house, and we have had really positive feedback from many of them about the benefits. Especially regarding improvements in bird activity levels, for example, less time lying and more time standing which improves leg health.”

The new standards are not only intended to further improve hen welfare but also better protect farms during times of disease outbreak, such as bird flu. The RSPCA and RSPCA Assured believe that the provision of verandas and natural daylight can help better maintain the health and welfare of hens, despite any imposed restrictions such as housing orders.

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New, potential or existing RSPCA Assured members who are in need of support or advice about meeting the new laying hen standards should [contact](#) RSPCA Assured membership services via the RSPCA Assured website.

Find out more and view the new laying hen standards [here](#).

Ends

Notes to editors

- *All existing barn RSPCA Assured members have until 1 January 2030 to provide hens with access to a veranda and meet the natural daylight requirements; from 1 May 2024 new members and those with refurbishing buildings will be required to meet these standards.

Following consultation with industry the RSPCA and RSPCA Assured will **not** be requiring verandas for existing free-range members, but will work with industry to look for ways to make this achievable.

- Find out more about egg-laying hens [here](#).

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