



BETTER CHICKEN

Improving the lives of billions
of chickens farmed for meat



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“Consumers are more concerned than ever about where their food comes from and how it is produced.”



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HOW CHICKENS RAISED TO HIGHER WELFARE STANDARDS CAN BENEFIT THE CHICKEN, THE RETAILER AND THE CONSUMER

An estimated 1 billion chickens will be farmed in the UK this year¹. The vast majority of these chickens will be reared to standards that we believe are not good enough in terms of animal welfare.

More than 90%² of these chickens are bred to grow too quickly and are reared in dimly lit and overcrowded conditions, with not enough to keep them occupied. They have little room to move around freely and are unable to adequately perform natural behaviours like perching and preening.

Consumers are more concerned than ever about where their food comes from and how it is produced. This concern, along with animal welfare organisations and the media adding pressure to improve the lives of chickens, has driven many retailers and food providers to adopt more ethical practices.

The Better Chicken Commitment was developed in response to these concerns and offers support for retailers and the food service industry. It was produced by animal welfare experts to address a variety of animal welfare issues and sets standards to improve the lives of meat chickens. It is designed to be ambitious yet achievable.

Through the adoption of the Better Chicken Commitment, retailers and food service providers can show their customers that they share their concerns about animal welfare and are meeting rising expectations for animal welfare and food quality. We want to encourage all UK retailers and food service providers to sign up to the Better Chicken Commitment, and we're here to support and guide businesses to help them achieve their ambitions.



Find out more about the RSPCA's involvement with the Better Chicken Commitment at: rspca.org.uk/getinvolved/campaign/betterchicken

1. rspcaassured.org.uk/farm-animal-welfare/chickens
2. rspcaassured.org.uk/farm-animal-welfare/chickens

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS GUIDE?

At the RSPCA, we pride ourselves on our ongoing engagement with the farming and retail sector. Through our RSPCA Assured accreditation scheme we continue to help people and organisations make changes that can deliver huge improvements in animal welfare.

We recognise there can be challenges when adopting the Better Chicken Commitment, so we've developed this guide to help you meet the commitment and respond to consumer demands. This includes looking at consumer preferences and how to communicate the benefits of higher standards of welfare, to ensure that you see a commercial benefit from your commitment.

We're calling on all retailers and the food service industry to sign up to the Better Chicken Commitment (or 'BCC'), to look at how to adapt and how to highlight the importance of higher welfare chicken to your customers. We're here to help and support you.



“We’re calling on all retailers and the food service industry to sign up to the Better Chicken Commitment.”

IS THERE CONSUMER DEMAND FOR HIGHER WELFARE CHICKEN?

When it comes to customer demand for higher welfare chicken, the figures speak for themselves.

- Polling³ by the RSPCA showed that 87% of the public said they expect supermarkets to ensure all the chicken they sell is farmed to higher welfare standards.
- Following the broadcast of Jamie Oliver's and Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall's television programmes in 2008⁴, the supply of higher welfare chicken couldn't keep up with public demand. Consequently, retailers were running out of higher welfare chicken, with empty shelves displaying notes apologising to customers for the lack of supply. RSPCA Assured chicken reached 7% of production in the UK during this period, with higher welfare chicken in general reaching approximately 20% (including RSPCA Assured) – showing real demand from shoppers. This clearly demonstrates that when consumers have the knowledge and information at point of sale to make informed decisions, they want higher welfare chicken that's at least consistent with the requirements of the BCC. However, 15 years on, we believe there is a general lack of consumer understanding about meat chicken production as well as insufficient information available to make informed decisions about which chickens to buy.
- When shoppers were given clear information about how the hens that lay eggs were kept, sales of free-range, barn and organic eggs increased from 27% to 55% in 15 years⁵.
- When surveyed⁶, 35% of people would be willing to pay more for animal products sourced from higher welfare farming systems and an additional 44% would 'sometimes' be willing.



“52% of people who buy chicken meat said they'd be willing to pay more for higher welfare animal products.”

3. Opinion poll carried out by Savanta by RSPCA interviewed 2,089 UK adults aged 18+ online between 20 and 22 May 2023. Data was weighted to be representative of the UK by age, sex, region and social grade.

4. *Jamie's Fowl Dinners and Hugh's Chicken Run.*

5. Broiler Trails Q+A. Conducted by RSPCA.

6. Opinion poll carried out by Savanta by RSPCA interviewed 2,089 UK adults aged 18+ online between 20 and 22 May 2023. Data was weighted to be representative of the UK by age, sex, region and social grade.

BENEFITS OF THE BETTER CHICKEN COMMITMENT FOR THE FOOD INDUSTRY

Meeting customer demand for higher welfare

According to a recent survey⁷, 73% of participants believe that food quality is impacted by higher standards of animal welfare and 81% believe that when purchasing animal products it's important to have a level of knowledge about the conditions in which animals are reared. Consumers are now demanding improved animal welfare and food quality standards, with consumers becoming increasingly concerned about where their food comes from and how it was produced. When retailers and the food service industry adopt the BCC, it demonstrates to their customers that they are meeting rising expectations for animal welfare, sustainability and food quality.

Addressing health risks

Intensive farming, of any animal, poses a huge risk to human health. There have been alarming links found between chicken welfare and human antibiotic resistance. Chicken causes 70% of food poisoning cases in the UK⁸. The worrying research reveals that:

- faster-growing, lower welfare birds suffer more than slower-growing, higher welfare birds when infected with campylobacter, a bacteria that causes severe diarrhoea in humans;
- higher stress levels in chickens cause the bacteria to spread, putting meat-eaters at a greater risk of contracting the bacterial disease; and
- this common infectious disease is now developing alarming resistance to our antibiotics, effectively putting human health at risk.

Find out more about antibiotic resistance in farm animals at: bit.ly/3OkTO5H

What can retailers and the food service industry do to meet growing consumer demand? Sign up to the Better Chicken Commitment!



7. Opinion poll carried out by Savanta in February 2023 by RSPCA. Sample size 2,569, UK-wide (age) 18 years +.

8. www.rspca.org.uk/documents/1494939/7712578/Campylobacter+report+2022.pdf/b96ff2cd-3e7d-3fd3-781f-6d947a9cf36e?t=1646221715284

BENEFITS OF THE BETTER CHICKEN COMMITMENT FOR CHICKENS

Recognising natural behaviours

Chickens are sentient beings and have the capacity to feel pain and emotion. They are intelligent, social and can learn quickly and even count. Evolved from the red junglefowl, chickens like to:

- perch, and can flap their wings up to six feet off the ground,
- explore their environment by pecking at objects and scratching at the ground,
- dustbathe, which helps to keep their skin and feathers in good condition,
- preen their feathers to keep clean, and be active by running and wing-flapping, and they may 'spar' (play fight) with each other.

The vast majority of chickens are currently reared to standards that we believe are not good enough in terms of animal welfare and 77% of consumers who buy chicken meat said they were appalled that chickens farmed for their meat are suffering because of fast growth rates⁹. Meat chickens, also referred to as 'broilers', are by far the most widely produced farm animals for meat, with around 1 billion being slaughtered each year in the UK, 6.5 billion slaughtered across the EU, and 62 billion slaughtered worldwide.

Ensuring quality of life

The improved conditions that the Better Chicken Commitment demands are a way to ensure that broilers raised for food are treated well and have an improved quality of life. Meat consumption may not be going away any time soon, so we have an obligation and a responsibility to reduce the suffering of the animals in our care as much as possible and, ultimately, ensure an end to the suffering – and improvement to the welfare – of billions of chickens.

Each company that commits to the Better Chicken Commitment can make a difference by leading the industry.



9. Opinion poll carried out by Savanta by RSPCA interviewed 2,089 UK adults aged 18+ online between 20 and 22 May 2023. Data was weighted to be representative of the UK by age, sex, region and social grade.

THE CURRENT MARKET

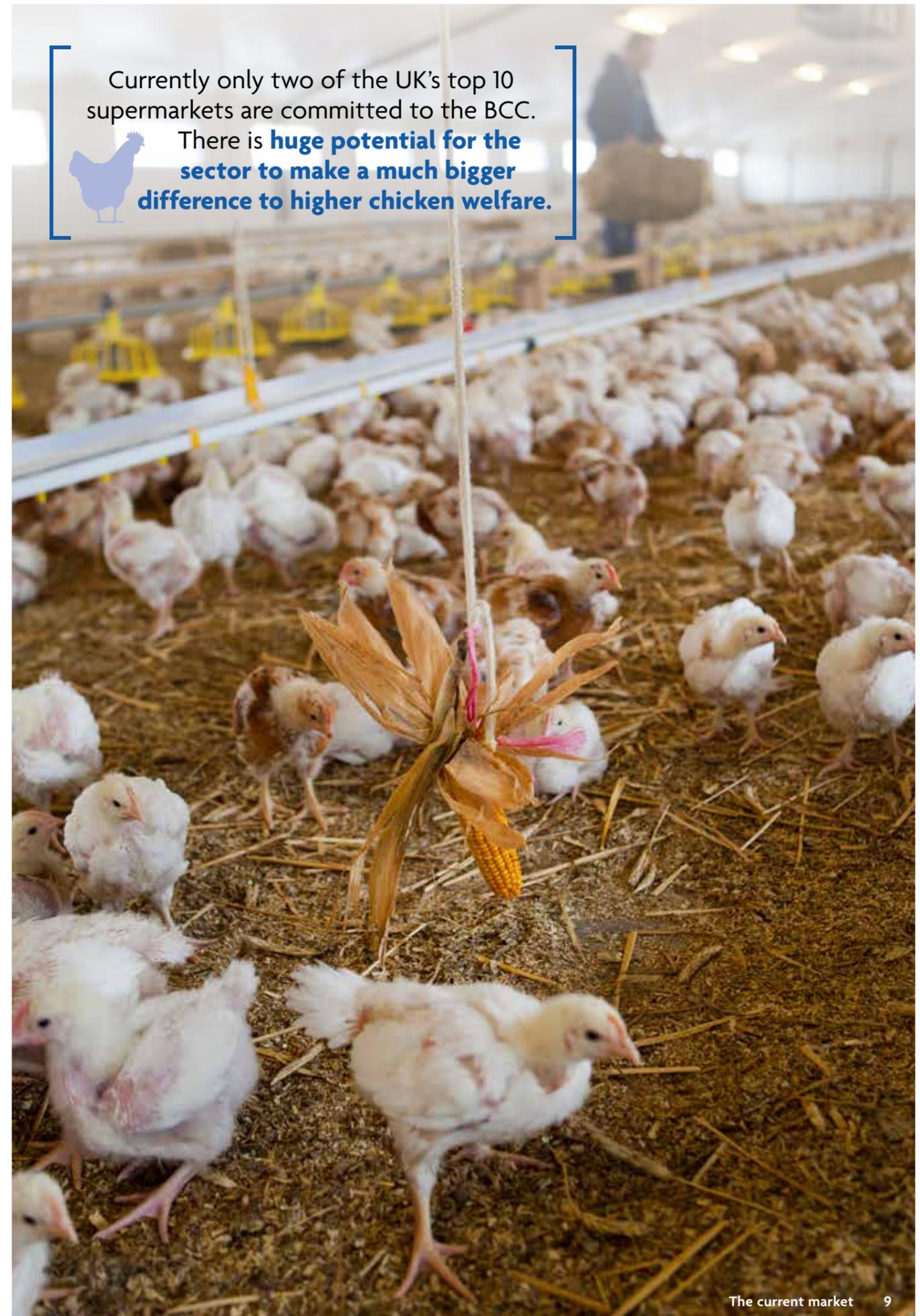
Roughly 28% of the UK's chicken supply is now committed to the Better Chicken Commitment, which means there's the potential to positively impact 300 million birds. Food service businesses have been quick to sign up, but supermarkets sell so much chicken that if all supermarkets committed the figure would leap to 89%¹⁰. Though often a leader in animal welfare, the UK is starting to lag behind when it comes to the welfare of broilers. A report published by The Humane League UK, *State of the Chicken Industry*, says that European countries are leading the way, with some countries committing that all their birds will be Better Chicken Commitment compliant.

Here are just some of more than 200 companies who have committed to the BCC and are leading the industry.



“Though often a leader in animal welfare, the UK is starting to lag behind.”

¹⁰. The Humane League UK. *State of the Chicken Industry*. 2022.



Currently only two of the UK's top 10 supermarkets are committed to the BCC. There is **huge potential for the sector to make a much bigger difference to higher chicken welfare.**

HOW DO YOU COMMUNICATE WITH YOUR CUSTOMERS ABOUT THE BCC?

Consumers are becoming increasingly interested in the production of their food. According to a recent survey conducted by the RSPCA¹¹, four in five people (81%) think that having a level of knowledge about the conditions in which animals are reared is important when purchasing animal products. A similar proportion (79%) say they would want to know whether livestock has been kept indoors or whether fish has been farmed or wild caught.

1. Communication is key

A recent survey conducted by the RSPCA¹² showed that 53% of respondents would be willing to pay more for animal products if they were aware of the conditions in which the animal was reared. This demonstrates a real consumer demand for higher welfare and an awareness of how their food is kept. With this in mind, marketing and communication of animal welfare is essential for the buyer journey and clearer labelling has never been more important.

Leading companies in the food industry are capitalising on this growing demand for higher welfare food production and are taking consumers on the journey with them, via a range of marketing and communications techniques.



11. Opinion poll carried out by Savanta in February 2023 by RSPCA. Sample size 2,569, UK-wide (age) 18 years +

12. Opinion poll carried out by Savanta in February 2023 by RSPCA. Sample size 2,569, UK-wide (age) 18 years +

2. Tips on talking about higher welfare chicken with your customers

Millions of chickens benefit from the industry moving towards higher welfare. Don't you think that's a message worth talking about? The best way to showcase to customers that you're committing to higher welfare is by shouting it from the rooftops!

If you're not very confident talking about higher welfare chicken with your customers, we are more than happy to help you improve your understanding of the issues and the benefits of your Better Chicken Commitment. Here are some examples of issues you might want to communicate to consumers.

- We're proud to be part of the Better Chicken Commitment because it means the chickens in our supply chain have lived a better life.
- We use higher welfare chickens who meet the standards of the Better Chicken Commitment, which means they have more room to roam indoors.
- By signing up to the Better Chicken Commitment, we are confident that the chickens we use have more light, space to roam and places to perch – and a better quality of life.

Key words and terms

You can use packaging to explain the life the chicken has led. There are a number of words that illustrate how the chicken was reared and explain that they led a happier life. These key terms offer the consumer greater insight at point of purchase.

Space to roam



Space to perch



Space to flap and peck



Natural light



Slower-growing



Higher welfare



Better welfare



Enrichment e.g. perches and bales



3. Your story

Your story can combine product quality with the tale of the farmers producing the product. This can be a powerful tool when raising awareness of where an animal product is from and how they were reared. Consumers are increasingly interested in the farms and producers behind the product and are now demanding more from the industry. Showcasing the farmer's story can be a great way to highlight higher welfare chicken and create a connection between consumers and the products. Meeting the human behind the product attracts their attention and instils trust, which may, in turn, lead to consumers buying the product.

4. Labelling

As we saw above, 81% of people surveyed think that having a level of knowledge about the conditions in which animals are reared is important when buying animal products, with 79% saying they would want to know if livestock had been kept indoors or whether fish were farmed or wild caught¹³. In addition, 84% agreed that there should be more transparency in the food service industry around the products used in processed and pre-packaged foods.

By adopting more transparent labelling on animal products, you can show consumers about the life a chicken has led and the higher welfare conditions under which they were reared. For example, you can tell them that you are part of the Better Chicken Commitment and that the chicken had space to roam and was able to perch.



“81% of people surveyed think that having a level of knowledge about the conditions in which animals are reared is important when purchasing animal products.”

¹³. Opinion poll carried out by Savanta in February 2023 by RSPCA. Sample size 2,569, UK wide (age) 18 years +

Case study: Shell eggs

Once consumers are given more information, there is clear evidence that higher welfare is the preferred option. The Egg Marketing Regulation came into force in 2004, requiring all shell eggs, including imports, to be labelled according to their method of production. This is generally considered to have contributed to the significant shift away from eggs from caged hens, allowing the growth of the cage-free industry and making a huge contribution to farm animal welfare in the UK. Since the introduction of mandatory labelling, cage-free eggs now account for 52% of all egg sales in the UK (up from 34% in 2003) and all UK supermarkets have pledged to only sell shell eggs from cage-free systems by 2025.



CONSUMER DEMAND: HOW BUSINESSES CAN CAPITALISE BY MOVING TO HIGHER WELFARE

By stocking higher welfare products, and therefore addressing consumer concern, retailers can benefit from increased sales and custom. Polling¹⁴ revealed that consumers would be disappointed or frustrated if they could only buy chicken reared to lower welfare standards, while some said they would not buy the lower welfare option if the higher welfare option wasn't available. Others said they would be likely or quite likely to move retailer if they were not offered a higher welfare alternative.

In a recent RSPCA survey¹⁵, 79% of people polled agreed with the statement: "I believe consumers can better ensure the improvement of animal welfare through purchasing habits".

Close engagement with suppliers is key to ensuring a smooth transition to higher welfare chicken. Here are four areas to consider and discuss.



1. Increased cost price

As slower-growing chickens live longer and have more room, additional costs are typically incurred.

Discussion Often customers only purchase particular cuts, such as breast meat. There may not be a market for the rest of the carcass to be sold as higher welfare, and this increases costs considerably. Breast meat has long been perceived as premium quality, but certifications such as RSPCA Assured can provide reassurance about quality directly to the customer, encouraging their use of alternative cuts. Offering a variety of cuts of higher welfare meat, or being creative by using different cuts in recipes, can help minimise increased cost prices. If this isn't an option, you could consider partnering with businesses who can use these cuts, for example restaurants or premium pet food manufacturers.



2. Variable demand throughout the year

Demand for chicken can vary throughout the year as customers change their consumption habits. For example, demand typically falls during the summer holidays, particularly in food service businesses that service the education sector.

Discussion Farmers need consistent orders throughout the year to operate. Working with your technology team and supplier, you may be able to identify recipes or products where frozen meat could be used. This allows you to provide consistent orders to farmers in your supply chain and benefit from the cost price benefits of this, while ensuring you have availability when needed.

14. RSPCA. *Everyone's a winner*. 2006.

15. Opinion poll carried out by Savanta in February 2023 by RSPCA. Sample size 2,569, UK-wide (age) 18 years +.



3. Sustainability targets

As slower-growing chickens live longer and have more room, additional emissions related to heat and feed may occur.

Discussion Soy feed has a high carbon footprint but is very effective at fattening birds quickly. As slower-growing breeds are more adaptable in terms of the diet specification they can be fed, more local grain-based feed can work as well as soy, reducing the environmental impact.



4. Additional investment and resources

More space and longer lives mean that additional barn space will be needed.

Discussion Does your supplier have additional capacity or will they need to construct or expand current barns? Government support for costs related to transitioning to higher welfare chicken is available. Discuss potential building requirements with your supplier and how long these may take to complete. Also discuss which breed is best for your requirements, as newer breeds may take time to build up the grandparent and parent stock in order to meet demand for the broilers.

87% of people who buy chicken meat expect supermarkets to ensure all the chicken meat they sell is farmed to higher welfare standards¹⁶.



16. Opinion poll carried out by Savanta by RSPCA interviewed 2,089 UK adults aged 18+ online between 20 and 22 May 2023. Data was weighted to be representative of the UK by age, sex, region and social grade.

WHAT IS THE BETTER CHICKEN COMMITMENT?

The Better Chicken Commitment is a key initiative for broiler welfare that aims to drive the food industry towards higher welfare practices. A number of animal protection organisations have come together and reached an agreement on what the most pressing welfare concerns are for broiler chickens. These concerns have informed the development of the Better Chicken Commitment, which outlines key requirements for farming chickens to higher welfare standards. There are around 1 billion chickens slaughtered in the UK each year alone, many of which will endure significant suffering because basic welfare needs aren't being addressed. This needs to change.

What are the criteria?

The Better Chicken Commitment stipulates six key requirements that promote higher welfare outcomes. These include: chickens having the room to move about more freely and the chance to scratch and dustbathe; chickens being provided with natural light so they don't spend their whole lives in dark, artificially lit conditions; and chickens being provided with enrichment items, such as things that the birds can explore and peck at, and perches so they can roost and rest without being disturbed. The BCC also sets out standards for slaughter that are more humane than, for example, shackling while conscious and water bath stunning.

The standards of the UK Better Chicken Commitment policy are written as follows.

We will require our suppliers to meet the following requirements for 100% of the [fresh, frozen, and processed] chicken in our supply chain:

1. Comply with all EU animal welfare laws and regulations, regardless of the country of production.
2. Implement a maximum stocking density of 30kg/m² or less. Thinning is discouraged and if practised must be limited to one thin per flock.
3. Adopt breeds that demonstrate higher welfare outcomes: either the following breeds, Hubbard Redbro (indoor only), Norfolk Black, JACY57, JA757, 787, 957, or 987, Rambler Ranger, Ranger Classic, and Ranger Gold, or others that meet the criteria of the RSPCA Broiler Breed Welfare Assessment Protocol.
4. Meet improved environmental standards including:
 1. At least 50 lux of light, including natural light.
 2. At least two metres of usable perch space, and two pecking substrates, per 1,000 birds.
 3. On air quality, the maximum requirements of Annex 2.3 of the EU broiler directive, regardless of stocking density.
 4. No cages or multi-tier systems.
5. Adopt controlled atmospheric stunning using inert gas or multi-phase systems, or effective electrical stunning without live inversion.
6. Demonstrate compliance with the above standards via third-party auditing and annual public reporting on progress towards this commitment.



HOW DOES THE BETTER CHICKEN COMMITMENT DIFFER FROM RSPCA ASSURED?



The RSPCA's welfare standards for meat chickens continue to reflect where we need to be if we are to truly protect the welfare of meat chickens from birth to slaughter. And the RSPCA Assured labelling scheme supports consumers who are looking for a higher welfare product. However, with around 1 billion chickens reared for meat in the UK each year and less than 2% being farmed to RSPCA standards, the minimum ask of the BCC will address the most pressing welfare concerns related to the majority of broiler production in Europe. It is a positive stepping stone for food businesses and a starting point for addressing important welfare concerns. When producers and food companies are able to go further, we will work with them to implement all the RSPCA's welfare standards and achieve RSPCA Assured accreditation.



“[The BCC] is a positive stepping stone for food businesses and a starting point for addressing welfare concerns.”

BECOME A PART OF THE BETTER CHICKEN COMMITMENT

To discuss how you can meet the Better Chicken Commitment and plan a roadmap, get in touch with a member of the RSPCA Assured team at hello@rspcaassured.org.uk

We will be more than happy to discuss steps you can take to improve chicken welfare and how you can commit to the Better Chicken Commitment.



Find out more about the UK Better Chicken Commitment at: betterchickencommitment.com/uk



Freedom Food is a wholly-owned subsidiary of the RSPCA, set up to administer the RSPCA's farm animal welfare labelling scheme, RSPCA Assured.

Freedom Food Ltd is a registered charitable trading company operating in the commercial field of food production from farmed animals. Its role is to promote and apply welfare standards drawn up by the RSPCA through marketing the RSPCA Assured labelling scheme. RSPCA Assured encourages farmers, hauliers, abattoirs and other businesses in the food supply chain to participate, educate and promote awareness with end-users and consumers of food products bearing the RSPCA Assured certification mark.

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