



# The RSPCA Good Business Awards

## Animal welfare and the food industry

The RSPCA opposes any form of farming that causes animals distress or suffering or denies them opportunities to behave naturally. The Society believes that farming practices should provide lifestyles that take account of the animals' needs and natural behaviours.

### Meeting an animal's needs

The RSPCA believes that the welfare of animals must take into account five essential 'freedoms'. These five freedoms form the basis of the RSPCA's policy on animal welfare. They are a set of principles about an animal's physical and behavioural needs and outline ideals towards which all those who care for farm animals should aspire. They were drawn up by the Farm Animal Welfare Council.

#### 1. Freedom from fear and distress

Provide conditions and care that avoid unnecessary fear and distress. All those managing and handling livestock must understand basic animal behaviour, in order to minimise stress to the animals.

#### 2. Freedom to express normal behaviour

Provide enough space, appropriate environmental enrichment and the company of the animals' own kind.

#### 3. Freedom from hunger and thirst

Provide a satisfying, appropriate and safe diet as well as access to adequate fresh water. Allowing generous feeding and drinking spaces helps minimise bullying and competition.

#### 4. Freedom from discomfort

Provide an appropriate environment including shelter and a comfortable resting area. A clean, dry, comfortable bedded lying area for mammalian species, perches for poultry, and plenty of space for all to move around must be provided, as well as shelter from the weather.

#### 5. Freedom from pain, injury and disease

Ensure that prevention or rapid diagnosis and treatment using good veterinary care is provided when required. Animals must be protected from injury and anything that may cause pain or illness. Their environment must also be well managed to ensure good health.

# How animal welfare fits within your policy on corporate social responsibility (CSR)

If you do not already have an animal welfare policy in place these are the areas you should be looking at to address and include:

- clear outlines on what your company requires of its suppliers in terms of animal welfare
- an explanation of your animal welfare aspirations, including how you develop and implement improvements in animal welfare throughout the supply chain
- detailed descriptions of the control programmes used on farms, in abattoirs and during live transport
- an explanation of how you inform consumers about animal welfare through in-store promotions and other communication methods.

The RSPCA can help you develop these so please contact us if you would like to discuss this further.

## Animal welfare issues within the food industry

### >>> IMPORT OF MEAT AND EGGS FROM OTHER COUNTRIES

Why is this an issue?

Animal welfare standards e.g. slaughter methods, transportation of live animals and on-farm conditions may not be equal to those in the UK nor enforced as effectively.

What constitutes good practice?

- Products such as meat and eggs should be fully traceable throughout the supply chain and only sourced from suppliers that, regardless of the country, apply standards that are at least equal to European baseline (legal) standards.
- Records of use of veterinary medicines must be kept and audited.
- Records relating to the origin of the livestock and of the movements and identification of animals, should be kept and audited.
- Inspections of suppliers by trained, independent auditors should be carried out at least annually to check animal welfare standards are met.

### >>> LIVE TRANSPORT OF ANIMALS

Why is this an issue?

Subjecting live animals to the stress of long-distance transport, often only to slaughter them on arrival at their destination, is neither justifiable nor acceptable in welfare terms. Long-distance live-animal transport can also be economically inefficient because it may lead to poor meat quality, damaged carcasses and lost profits and it increases the risk of spreading major diseases, such as Foot-and-Mouth Disease.

**What constitutes good practice?**

- Your company should have a policy ensuring that specified journey times are kept to a minimum and adhered to and that food and water provision, on-board conditions and the welfare-related training, skills and competency of hauliers are all appropriate for the needs of the animals being transported.
- All animals should be slaughtered as close as possible to the point of production.
- No animal should travel for longer than eight hours to slaughter or for the purposes of further fattening.

>>> **SLAUGHTER/KILLING METHODS****Why is this an issue?**

More than 40 million cattle, calves, sheep and pigs and over 900 million poultry are slaughtered every year in the UK for meat. In some cases the rearing conditions and way in which many of these animals are handled and slaughtered is far from satisfactory.

**What constitutes good practice?**

- The abattoir from where meat is sourced must appoint a specially trained animal welfare officer to oversee the welfare of all animals at the slaughterhouse.
- All slaughterhouse staff who have contact with animals must be supervised and appropriately trained to ensure competency in, and an understanding of, welfare issues during handling and slaughter.
- Your company should not sell any meat from animals that have been slaughtered without pre-stunning.
- A policy should be in place which ensures that there are regular inspections by an independent auditor of the welfare-related practices of all abattoirs which provide the meat your company sells.

>>> **INSPECTION ON FARMS****Why is this an issue?**

The proper implementation of standards needs to be verified to reassure companies and consumers. Suppliers should be inspected to ensure that the standards are being properly implemented.

**What constitutes good practice?**

- The implementation of standards by all suppliers needs to be checked at least annually.
- Inspections should be carried out by appropriately trained, competent, independent auditors. Some 'unannounced' inspection visits should also be made.
- Your company should have policies in place relating to what action will be taken in the event of a supplier failing to implement welfare-related standards properly.

## &gt;&gt;&gt; WELFARE OF BEEF CATTLE

## Why is this an issue?

Although beef production is often perceived as inevitably 'higher welfare', there are a number of important welfare issues associated with the rearing, transport and slaughter of cattle.

## What constitutes good practice?

- Only meat from cattle pre-stunned before slaughter should be sourced, with care being taken to ascertain that this really is the case.
- Clear labelling for the consumer is essential; this needs to include information on welfare/production methods.
- No tethering of cattle or calves is allowed.
- Calves are to remain with their mothers for an appropriate, specified period.

There should be no use of veal from overseas systems that have sourced calves from the UK, or that rear any calves under conditions that fail to meet at least UK industry practice (e.g. provision of plentiful straw bedding at all times; sufficient space for exercise; diet that ensures avoidance of anaemia).

## &gt;&gt;&gt; WELFARE OF DAIRY CATTLE

## Why is this an issue?

Dairy cows usually have their first calf at two years old and are then milked two or three times per day for 10 months, with a two-month rest before calving again. The dairy cow carries the double burden of producing large quantities of milk while trying to maintain body condition and carry her next calf. This imposes great demands on her, which can result in a number of conditions that can seriously compromise her welfare. Some of the welfare concerns include mastitis, lameness, metabolic disorders and, indirectly, infertility.

## What constitutes good practice?

- Stock-keepers should pay close attention to the condition of dairy cows' feet and take appropriate action to prevent lameness in the herd.
- Keeping cows comfortable during the winter housing period is essential. The tethering of dairy cows for the winter housing period is unacceptable to the RSPCA on welfare grounds.
- Disbudding (removal of horn buds) must only be performed by a person that has proof of competency, or by a veterinary surgeon.
- Cows need to have access to an outside exercise area in order to fulfil their behavioural needs.

## &gt;&gt;&gt; WELFARE OF VEAL CALVES

## Why is this an issue?

Veal is meat from calves, usually the unwanted offspring of dairy cows. Traditionally, these calves were reared in veal crates where they could not turn around and were fed a diet that would keep them anaemic - this contributed to the production of white veal. These crates are now banned in the UK and Europe and veal calves have to be housed in group systems.

However, in many of these systems used on the continent, welfare can be variable, as the calves are often reared on totally slatted floors with no comfortable bedded resting area and can be fed a diet which is low in fibre, which prevents their digestive systems from developing properly.

In the UK, regulations came into force in 1990, which were an important step forward for calf welfare. They ensure that veal calves in the UK have, for a number of years been provided with better standards of welfare than required by EU law. The RSPCA has developed its own standards for the production of rose veal (pink meat). The standards seek to go above the law where possible and focus on providing the best possible welfare for the animals.

## What constitutes good practice?

- Calves must be reared in straw bedded group systems and must have enough space to be able to lie down and get up without hindrance.
- The diet of the calves must contain enough fibre to allow for the normal development of the rumen/digestive system.
- The feeding regime must avoid the calves becoming anaemic and therefore must have sufficient dietary iron within it.

## &gt;&gt;&gt; WELFARE OF SHEEP

## Why is this an issue?

Although many sheep are reared for at least part of the year in pastures where they can express natural behaviours, very good standards of management and stockmanship are vital to avoid welfare issues due to disease and health problems, accidents and bad weather/ground conditions. Flocks are much larger now which can make it more difficult to spot welfare problems early and deal with them quickly.

Some lambs are now reared entirely indoors, which can increase the risk of problems due to over-stocking and lack of opportunity to express key natural behaviours.

Many sheep are naturally fearful of humans and unfamiliar situations and so require particularly careful and considerate handling and high welfare standards during procedures such as shearing, dipping, transport and slaughter, to ensure they do not suffer.

Sheep are probably the most frequently transported farm animals in the UK.

## What constitutes good practice?

- Sheep at pasture should always have access to shelter and dry lying areas and be able to avoid hazards. All sheep should have access to grazing throughout the grass-growing season (climatic conditions allowing).

- Appropriate handling facilities should be in place and staff well-trained, to ensure that sheep are not caused unnecessary stress during handling. Frequent, thorough flock inspections should take place.
- Farm-specific veterinary health plans should be in place covering key issues such as lameness, sustainable control of parasites and lamb survival, with an appropriate number of veterinary visits every year.
- Management practices should avoid the need for tail docking and castration of lambs unless absolutely necessary for animal welfare-related reasons.
- Plans should be in place to minimise live transportation and ensure lambs are not sold at livestock markets.

## >>> WELFARE OF PIGS

### Why is this an issue?

Many pregnant sows across the EU and elsewhere are kept in individual, narrow sow stalls throughout their pregnancy. A variation of this is the tether system in which the sow is attached to the floor by a short chain. Both these systems have been banned in the UK since 1999. They cause serious welfare problems through space restriction (sows cannot even turn around) and in many cases lack bedding or other environmental enrichment.

Farrowing crates are small pen-like systems in which sows are placed to give birth and suckle their piglets until weaned at three to four weeks old. The aim is to provide a system in which piglets are protected from being crushed to death by the sow, but the crates place serious restrictions on the sow's movement and expression of natural behaviour.

Many pigs reared for meat are kept in barren, crowded pens with only slatted or concrete floors on which to live. Fully slatted floors have been associated with an increased incidence of certain lameness problems.

Most piglets have their tails docked shortly after birth to reduce the likelihood of tail biting, the risk of which is increased by overcrowded and barren conditions. Poor conditions and management can also increase aggressiveness between pigs.

### What constitutes good practice?

- Pregnant sows should be kept in loose-housed straw-based systems rather than in stalls or stall and tether systems. Sows should not be placed in conventional farrowing crate systems for the full pre-weaning period.
- Pigs should be provided with comfortable, solid, well-bedded lying areas.
- Pigs should have access to plenty of space to move around and appropriate environmental enrichment, including the provision of appropriate manipulable materials to allow expression of natural rooting and exploratory behaviours, which help to prevent boredom and stress.
- Pigs should not be subjected to any mutilations (nose ringing, tail docking and teeth clipping) unless for welfare reasons. Piglets should not be castrated without anaesthetic.
- When labelling pork products with the terms 'outdoor bred', 'outdoor reared' and 'free-range' companies should commit to sourcing pigs from systems and conditions that meet the criteria set out in the Code of Practice for labelling of pork and pork products.  
[www.porkprovenance.co.uk](http://www.porkprovenance.co.uk)

## &gt;&gt;&gt; WELFARE OF LAYING HENS

## Why is this an issue?

There are many serious welfare problems for egg-laying hens that are kept in cages. Conventional battery cages for laying hens are bare, wire enclosures that are stacked on top of each other in rows. Each hen in the cage has the equivalent living space of 550cm<sup>2</sup> - less floorspace than the size of an A4 piece of paper. The lack of space in both conventional battery cages and enriched or 'furnished' cages (which provide each hen with only 50cm<sup>2</sup> more usable space - the size of a beer mat) restricts laying hens from moving around easily and from properly carrying out their natural behaviours such as wing flapping, stretching and dustbathing.

## What constitutes good practice?

- Shops and catering establishments should sell only eggs and products containing eggs that come from hens kept in well-managed alternative systems, such as barn or free-range and not from hens kept in cages.
- If a company is currently using or selling battery eggs as a product or as an ingredient in products, it should aspire to introduce a policy to phase out the use of cage eggs.
- Maximum colony size of 4000 hens for flocks of more than 6,000.
- Daytime lighting levels to provide a minimum of 10 lux.
- Stocking density not to exceed nine birds per m<sup>2</sup>.

## &gt;&gt;&gt; WELFARE OF CHICKENS BRED FOR MEAT

## Why is this an issue?

Most chickens reared for meat, often referred to as broilers, spend their lives in windowless, barren, overcrowded sheds. Typically they are kept in dimly lit conditions without sufficiently long period of darkness for proper rest. This dim light discourages activity, thus encouraging them to grow as quickly as possible.

In addition, broilers are genetically selected to grow quickly. The time from when they hatch as chicks to when they appear in the supermarket as packaged meat is typically less than six weeks. This rapid growth has contributed to a concerning level of heart failure and leg disorders in many broilers.

## What constitutes good practice?

- Stocking density should be set at a maximum of 30kg/m<sup>2</sup>.
- Chickens should be provided with natural light to supply minimum lighting levels in excess of 20 lux.
- Only genetically slower-growing strains of broiler chicken should be selected (45g a day average as a maximum) with the aim of improving bird welfare, e.g. better leg health.
- Environmental enrichment should be provided to encourage activity and the performance of natural behaviour.
- There should be clear and accurate information at point-of-sale to indicate the welfare standards under which the chicken has been produced.

## &gt;&gt;&gt; WELFARE OF DUCKS FOR MEAT

## Why is this an issue?

The RSPCA believes that as ducks are waterfowl they should be provided with access to open-water sources that can be managed hygienically and enable them to adequately fulfil their water-related behaviours. Unfortunately there is no UK legislation specifying the need to provide water for anything other than drinking. The RSPCA believes there should be UK legislation requiring producers to provide farmed ducks with such open-water sources.

As with broiler chickens, there is concern that ducks could in future be bred to grow too quickly and suffer similar problems i.e. heart and leg disorders.

## What constitutes good practice?

- Provision of an-open water source to allow ducks to fully express key water-related behaviours.
- Provision and effective management of appropriate litter material on the floor, i.e. straw.

## &gt;&gt;&gt; WELFARE OF FARMED FISH AND CRUSTACEANS

## Why is this an issue?

Fish farming or 'aquaculture' is a relatively young industry, with increasing technological developments. Handling during transport, slaughter techniques, poor water quality (living environment) and inappropriate health care can all have welfare implications.

## What constitutes good practice?

- Welfare implications should be constantly examined for specific species of farmed fish. Guidelines are available that incorporate standards for higher-welfare production and these should be applied.
- Your company should have knowledge of indicators that could occur when the welfare of the fish may be being compromised.
- Fish must be stunned before slaughter.
- There should be good management of, and maximum time limits set for, periods when 'crowding' of fish is undertaken.
- The fish's specified time out of the water should be restricted - for any purpose.
- Your company should implement the use of the electrical stun/killing methods of killing crabs, lobsters, crayfish and langoustines.
- Your company should have a policy stating how it will work with suppliers to minimise the impact on wildlife such as dolphins, porpoises, turtles and seabirds.

## &gt;&gt;&gt; LABELLING AND IN-STORE INFORMATION

## Why is this an issue?

Clear labelling and in-store information should provide the conscientious consumer with details of the welfare provenance of a product. This helps them to buy higher welfare products, thereby support good farming practice and avoid those produced in systems that fail to cater for animals' needs.

**What constitutes good practice?**

- There should be clear labels indicating the methods of production, not just on primary products such as a whole chicken but also on secondary products e.g. those using chicken as an ingredient (such as chicken curry).
- Information should be provided for customers in-store e.g. via poster and leaflets and at point-of-sale.
- Information should be provided on the company website detailing the company's animal welfare policy.
- There should be information on the menus, e.g. 'breast of free-range local chicken', to assist consumers with their choice of meal.
- For retailers stocking or using Freedom Food-labelled products, using the Freedom Food logo on menus or at point-of-sale demonstrates to your customers that you are providing products reared to the standards developed by the RSPCA.

**>>> INFORMING STAFF ABOUT ANIMAL WELFARE****Why is this an issue?**

Supermarkets, food retailers, caterers and restaurants all need to respond to the growing consumer demand for knowledge about how and where their food was produced. By giving your staff the relevant information and training they need to understand, support and promote your animal welfare policies, your company shows that it puts animal welfare at the heart of its business.

**What constitutes good practice?**

- There should be on-going staff training about the company's animal welfare policy and why it is so important.
- When new higher welfare products, ranges and menus are brought in, staff should fully understand how and where these products have been produced.
- Staff briefings should occur following major media coverage on an animal welfare related topic, so that they are fully up to speed with company policy and the availability of relevant higher welfare products.
- There should be information on the menus, e.g. 'breast of free-range local chicken', to assist consumers with their choice of meal.
- For retailers stocking or using Freedom Food-labelled products, using the Freedom Food logo on menus or at point-of-sale demonstrates to your customers that you are providing products reared to the standards developed by the RSPCA.