

## IFOAM EU Group

### Position Paper: Organic poultry production and rearing

August 2010

#### **1. Background**

- Organic poultry production in the EU is regulated by Council Regulation 834/2007 and Commission Regulation 889/2008. These outline a number of general principles and they also detail various technical restrictions.
- In developing these regulations, it was recognised that the rules for organic poultry production were still insufficiently developed and needed further work.
- This is partly because EU-wide poultry production has developed into a highly specialised, highly intensified and centralised system of livestock production. The result is that some of these methods fit uneasily with organic agriculture.
- The production has developed also in the organic sector, therefore an evaluation of the situation is needed and areas not covered yet need to be dealt with.
- As such, the IFOAM EU Group feels it is necessary to define more clearly how the organic principles should apply to organic poultry production and the progressive steps necessary to achieve this.
- The need for targeted and practical research is central to ensuring these progressive steps are successfully taken.
- The IFOAM EU Group presented papers on poultry production and rearing in June 2004 and March 2006. This new paper on poultry production and rearing is based on these documents and has been updated to reflect the new Council Regulation 834/2007 and Commission Regulation 889/2008.
- It has to be kept in mind that general animal welfare rules for poultry production are developing as well. Organic poultry production must stay distinguishable from conventional production.
- The present paper only relates to chicken production (table birds/broilers and egg layers). It will therefore be necessary to adapt the standards to other types of birds respectively at a later stage.

## **2. General principles of organic poultry production**

Regulation 834/2007 contains the following principles of direct relevance to poultry:

4. Organic production shall be based on the following principles:

(a) the appropriate design and management of biological processes based on ecological systems using natural resources which are internal to the system by methods that:

(i) use living organisms and mechanical production methods;

(ii) practice land-related crop cultivation and livestock production or

5. In addition to the overall principles set out in Article 4, organic farming shall be based on the following specific principles:

(e) the maintenance of animal health by encouraging the natural immunological defense of the animal, as well as the selection of appropriate breeds and husbandry practices;

(g) the practice of site-adapted and land-related livestock production;

(h) the observance of a high level of animal welfare respecting species-specific needs;

(i) the production of products of organic livestock from animals that have been raised on organic holdings since birth or hatching and throughout their life;

(j) the choice of breeds having regard to the capacity of animals to adapt to local conditions, their vitality and their resistance to disease or health problems;

(l) the application of animal husbandry practices, which enhance the immune system and strengthen the natural defense against diseases, in particular including regular exercise and access to open air areas and pastureland where appropriate;

Applying these specifically to management of poultry, they could be synthesised into the following.

- Organic poultry production is land based and integrated with crop and pasture management at the farm level.
- In order to ensure health and vitality, the build-up of natural resistance and meeting species-specific needs, poultry systems have access to free range throughout the breeding, rearing and production stages (weather conditions and health situation permitting).
- Management of housing and range is geared to optimising health and welfare which thus determines limits on housing and flock size, stocking densities and requirements for rotation and enrichment of pasture on the basis of experience and research.
- Breeds are adapted to organic, free range conditions and are bred and reared under this system throughout their breeding/multiplication stages.

## **3. Availability of organic chicks and pullets**

Article 42 of regulation 889/2008 recognises that organic table chicks and laying pullets are not available in sufficient quantities and, as an exceptional rule, allows non-organic three day old chicks for meat or eggs to be brought in. When the latter are not available, a further exception allows non-organic 18 week old laying pullets (with strict requirements as to their previous management\*) until the end of 2011.

\*As a first recommendation within this paper we propose to add to the restrictions given

under Reg.889/07, A 42 b) the prohibition of beak trimming to make sure that no beak-trimmed animals enter the organic system.

Whilst the 2011 deadline is clear, previous experience suggests that arbitrary deadlines do not work. There has to be both adequate research and development to overcome the technical and logistical barriers that necessitated the exception, and also adequate pressure on competent authorities, control bodies and operators to plan for the deadline. This is particularly important recognising the current reliance on the conventional intensive poultry industry and the lack of development of organic poultry production in most countries, especially in new member states where the whole organic sector is less developed.

A progressive and integrated approach is needed, which combines both development and reporting/policing steps. However, it is difficult to set a timetable without the necessary research, development and infrastructure back-up to ensure any deadlines are practically achievable. In the case of an optimal development of the sector in the whole EU, the IFOAM EU Group would like to see a timetable along these lines:

#### **Broilers**

- Organic management of the parent flocks as from 01.01.2014, with each member state having to come up with a plan for achieving this by 01.01.12.
- Further research and development is needed to identify suitable grandparent/breeding up generations (which should be managed organically) and the market infrastructure for such.

#### **Layers**

- Organic management of the parent flocks as from 01.01.2014, with each member state having to come up with a plan for achieving this by 01.01.2012.
- Further research and development is needed to identify suitable grandparent/breeding up generations (which should be managed organically) and the market infrastructure for such.
- Research and breeding of suitable dual-purpose breeds is crucial, at least programs for using the mail offspring. In the organic sector there is no place for a system that includes necessary killing of animals that can't be used.

NB: The regulation requires that both organic pullets and/or chicks must be used if they are available. IFOAM EU notices that in more MS this is not being enforced. As a first step it has to be taken care, that organic pullets and fattening chicks available on the market are used. Additional to these initiatives research and developing projects should be started to develop a fully organic production chain back to the grandparent and breeding flocks.

### **4. Definitions**

Please see Annex I

### **5. Standards and provisions**

Please see Annex II

## **6. Breeds and strains**

Current breeds result in a number of welfare problems (e.g. leg problems, metabolic problems, – for broilers) and ethical challenges. (e.g. killing of male birds of egg strains – for laying hens)

Feather pecking is a complex issue with many possible causes. In addition to nutrition and management, one of the main reasons for appearance of feather pecking and cannibalism are inappropriate breeds. All available breeds show feather pecking and cannibalism in flocks numbering more than 100 birds. So one of the most important activities for research and development is to find appropriate breeds and build up organic parent flocks of these breeds. After these results are available the appropriate breeds shall become obligatory in the medium term.

## **7. Proposals for changes of the existing Regulation**

### 8.1.: Stocking density for young fattening chicken (from week 0 to 4):

We propose: 21 kg/m<sup>2</sup> during the first four weeks of age

Reasoning:

The stocking density according to the EU-regulation 889/2008 Ann.III, fattening poultry, in fixed stables says: max. 21 kg/m<sup>2</sup>, and max. 10 animals/m<sup>2</sup>. Notice: both figures must be respected.

During the first four weeks in which the poultry is in a heated building we do not think it is good practice to have an upper ceiling of 10 animals/m<sup>2</sup> as they do not use this much space and it is costly to build a building that can be heated for the animals. With reference to CO<sub>2</sub>-burden we do neither recommend to heat up all that space. IFOAM EU Group therefore proposes to make a correction for the weeks that the animals are kept in a heated and protected area. The weight of the animals at week 4 is about 850–900 g, which is far lower than the weight of the conventional animals that are ready to be slaughtered by that age.

### 8.2.: Calculation of length of Pop holes:

We propose to change to a calculation on the basis of the number of animals:

4 m/600 animals for all chicken

Reasoning:

The proposal changes the reference value from calculating on the basis of floor m<sup>2</sup> to calculate on the basis of number of animals. By this:

- Farmers offering more m<sup>2</sup> inside the house to each animal than the minimum requirement will not be forced to cut bigger openings.
- Length of openings/animal will not be reduced when the henhouse is equipped with a multilayer system
- It is recommended that the same dimensions will apply for all other kind of chicken as well, at all stages of their lives.

8.3.: Desinfektants: It is recommended to delete “formaldehyde” in Annex VII of regulation 889/2008 because other less problematic measures are available against Coccidiosis (e.g. Paracox).

## ANNEXES – referring to points no. 4 and 5 in the position paper

### Annex I:

#### 4. Definitions

Practise has shown that the lack of clear definitions in the relevant Regulations is a reason for varying interpretations between Member States and control bodies. Therefore the IFOAM EU-Group finds it of utmost importance to agree on clear definitions as a basis for a harmonised implementation:

	Subject	Suggestion for Definition	Comments
4.1	Laying pullets	Young animals of the species gallus gallus intended for egg production of an age of less than 19 weeks	
4.2	Laying hens or parent stock	Animals of the species gallus gallus kept for egg production from 18 weeks	
4.3	Broilers	Animals of the species gallus gallus kept for meat production	
4.4	Usable area (nutzbare Stallfläche)	<p>Same definition as in Council Directive 1999/74/EC of 19 July 1999 laying down minimum standards for the protection of laying hens, Art. 2,2 (d): An area inside the poultry house at least 30 cm wide with a floor slope not exceeding 14 %, with headroom of at least 45 cm. Nesting areas shall not be regarded as usable areas."</p> <p>In multi level systems raised areas that should be regarded as usable area must be equipped with a manure collecting/removal system.</p>	<p>The existing use of the word netto area should be replaced with the word "usable area"</p> <p>There has been much misunderstanding and discussion about multi-storey poultry houses. We think under the right conditions these can improve welfare. The conditions need to be</p>

			defined.
4.5	<b>Ground floor area (nutzbare Bodenfläche)</b>	Lowest level in the stable, must be solid (no grids) and covered with a litter material and must be accessible for the birds without restriction	Defining ground floor area might be useful to: - Limit the number of birds in aviaries, and thus limiting the maximal increase in usable area in aviaries - Define precisely the size of windows (e.g. 5 % of the ground floor area)
4.6	<b>Outdoor area/open air (Außenbereich)</b>	Unroofed area outside the poultry house under influence of all weather conditions and daylight. Consists of open air run and pasture. Minimum size according to 889/Ann. III.	
4.7	<b>Open air run (befestigter (Vor)Auslauf)</b>	Unroofed outdoor area on concrete or pavement with sufficient and adequate litter but probably covered or closed with a net to the sky in case of pest-alarm.	
4.8	<b>Pasture (Grünauslauf)</b>	Unroofed outdoor area mainly covered with vegetation (more than 50 % of the minimum size given in 889/Ann III).	

4.9	<b>Veranda/wintergarden</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Additional roofed, not insulated outdoor part of the house with outdoor climate and natural and artificial illumination</li> <li>2. A veranda must have a solid (hygiene!), littered floor.</li> <li>3. A veranda must at least at the longest side be equipped with wire fencing or netting</li> <li>4. A veranda must have a height of : 2 m on average but at no point less than 1.5 m</li> <li>5. The veranda must be accessible during all light hours (natural and artificial illumination) via openings of a combined length of 4 m opening per 600 animals, which are equipped with automation for pop hole opening. The combined length of pop holes may be reduced in case of adverse weather conditions but must allow access to the veranda.</li> <li>6. If the veranda is not at the same ground level as the hen house and the difference in levels exceeds 80 cm in layers or 40 cm in broilers or laying pullets, measures have to be taken to allow easy access to the house (e.g., ramps).</li> </ol>	
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NB: A definition of "one poultry house" is just as important as the proposed definitions above. The IFOAM EU-Group is still in the process of finding a position on this critical and central issue. As soon as this process is finalized the information will be spread.

## Annex II

### 5. Standards and provisions

#### 5.1. General rules for chicken:

	Subject	Suggestion	Comments
5.1.1	<b>Maximum Stocking density in multilayer systems*</b>	<p>6 laying hens/m<sup>2</sup> usable area 9 laying hens/m<sup>2</sup> ground floor</p> <p>Provided the animals have access to a veranda [in line with the definition] the allowed stocking density on the ground floor could be raised to a max. of 12 hens/m<sup>2</sup>. When calculating the stocking density in such a system the m<sup>2</sup> in the veranda can be taken into account one by one.</p>	<p>Even though the multilayer systems do offer a possibility to use the house better, It is necessary to fix a maximum stocking density at the ground floor. The ground floor should not be too crowded because:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Roughage feed is offered at the ground floor, access to the roughage should be easy and comfortable.</li> <li>2. Less animals at the floor would normally make it easier to get out, because it is less crowded at the floor, no matter that the length of pop holes corresponds to the number of birds in the house.</li> <li>3. When consumers are invited into a poultry house it is important that the feeling is good. If the house is too crowded with animals, it can be a very overwhelming feeling.</li> <li>4. Barn eggs allow 18 laying hens/m<sup>2</sup> ground</li> </ol>

			<p>floor. We believe we need a clear distinction.</p> <p>5. Taking a veranda into account when calculating the stocking density brings an incitement to build a veranda, and a veranda is considered to be a welfare measure</p> <p>It should be noticed that if there is a veranda, the stocking density at the floor is raised but not the stocking density per usable area. It makes sense that it is only the stocking density at the floor that will be raised, as it is only the floor that is enlarged by a veranda, there will not be more feeding strings or perches by offering a veranda.</p>
5.2.2.	<p><b>Taking the presence of a veranda into account for calculating the indoor stocking density in a <u>single layer system/ground floor system.</u></b></p>	<p>In case a veranda is present in a single layer system/ground floor system, the m<sup>2</sup> in the veranda can be directly included when calculating the stocking density in the inner house, but only to a maximum of up to 7 hens/m<sup>2</sup> usable area in layers and 12 in broilers or laying pullets/m<sup>2</sup> usable area.</p> <p>The ground floor (m<sup>2</sup>) in the veranda is calculated one by one.</p>	<p>The veranda should not be mixed up with the outdoor area. A veranda is still considered as indoor area, but with distinct requirements concerning the quality of the environment in the veranda.</p> <p>As such, it seems fair that the farmer can profit from the “extension” of the indoor area to a certain degree. However, there should still be a clear distance to barn eggs that allow 9 hens/m<sup>2</sup>.</p>

## 5.2. Specific rules for laying pullets:

	Subject	Suggestion	Comments
5.2.1	Maximum Flock size	10.000 per house	It is recommended not to mix animals from different flocks. A flock size of 10.000 animals makes it possible to provide 2- 3 normal laying flocks, taking into account the mortality rate of young pullets. Having a max. flock size of 3300 or 6600 animals it is more difficult to find somebody who will provide animals if you only need e.g. 700 animals.
5.2.2	Minimum indoor area:	from week 0–7: 24 animals/m <sup>2</sup> usable area from week 8–18: 12 animals/m <sup>2</sup> usable area	It is recommended to make a differentiated system to take into account the growing rate and the physical needs of the animals, as in the first weeks the pullets need protected climate.  A stocking density of 12 is chosen in order to make it half of 24 and therefore easy to part the group.
5.2.3	Minimum length of perches:	week 0–7: 4 cm per animal week 7–18: 12 cm per animal	The house must have aerial perches to encourage natural behaviour and match conditions in the future laying house (and therefore reduce the likelihood of the birds developing habits such as feather pecking).

5.2.4	Access to pasture:	from when they are fully feathered, but not later than 10 weeks (weather and health permitting)	
5.2.5	Maximum external stocking density for pasture :	1 m <sup>2</sup> /bird	

\*The proposals concerning stocking density in multi-storey systems are herein put forward without prejudice to any future consideration of parity or equivalence as between multi-storey and ground-floor systems.