



Pecking enrichment for broiler chickens

APPLICABILITY

Theme/Keywords

Broiler, welfare, enrichment, pecking

Context

Pecking enrichment can be used inside barns or in covered verandas and in all types of broiler systems.

Geographical coverage

Worldwide

Required time

Providing material is required only once at the beginning of the fattening period. Any leftovers/reminders can be removed with the litter when cleaning the barn at the end of a production cycle.

Period of impact

Positive impact on welfare throughout the whole production cycle

Equipment

Pecking enrichment (such as pecking stones, roughage);

For automatic scattering of cereal grains, further equipment such as a pipe conveyor system or grain spreaders is needed

Best in

Intensive, extensive, free-range and organic broiler production systems

Problem

Chickens naturally spend a lot of time foraging (including pecking). If broilers are kept in barren environments, they cannot fully satisfy these behaviours.

Solution

Provide environmental enrichment that sufficiently facilitates pecking. It should be modifiable, consumable and ideally consist of organic materials.

Benefits

It helps to improve the welfare of broiler chickens by allowing them to express natural behaviours, thus satisfying fundamental needs.

Practical recommendations

1. Pecking stones

Available with or without additives (e.g. grains) and in different levels of hardness. They can be placed on the floor, preferably slightly elevated, as this makes them more visible and reduces soiling.

2. Roughage (e.g. straw, hay)

Can be offered as bales or in baskets, racks or nets (consider the height: chickens should reach it easily). Bales can be used as a perch and for activity purposes, but nets might be more hygienic due to less litter contact. However, the spreading of material by animals can also improve litter quality. Consider that crop blockages can be formed due to crop entanglements, especially when offering long-cut hay. Correct storage and hygienic quality of the materials are crucial.

3. Scattering of cereal grains

Either manually or automatically. Consider that grains can fall into the litter, therefore possibly posing a hygienic issue. If feasible, offer grains in outdoor areas (e.g. a winter garden) rather than in the barn due to dust formation.



Figure 1: Providing a pecking stone for broilers as environmental enrichment (Photo: L. Quirin)



Figure 2 (left): A hay net in a broiler barn (Photo: L. Quirin) Figure 3 (right): A straw bale used as a retreat (Photo: L. Quirin)

On-farm application

System approach

The material should be evenly placed throughout the barn. Please note materials must be harmless for animals and food to prevent residue problems.



Figure 4: Straw bales in a winter garden (Photo: L. Quirin)

FURTHER INFORMATION

Further readings

[Eurogroup for animals \(2020\): The Welfare of Broiler Chickens in The EU – From Science to Action](#)

C. Souza da Silva and I.C. de Jong (2019): [Literature update on effective environmental enrichment and light provision in broiler chickens](#)

About this practice abstract and *mEATquality*

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***mEATquality*:** The *mEATquality* project aims to provide consumers with better-quality pork and broiler meat and animals with a high level of welfare by developing scientific knowledge and practical solutions together with farmers and chain partners.

The *mEATquality* project, an H2020 project, is coordinated by Wageningen Research (The Netherlands) and is a multidisciplinary team of 17 partners organisations representing 7 EU countries. The project is running from October 2021 to September 2025

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