



## Humane Farm Animal Care Animal Care Standards Fact Sheets Laying Hens

### Beak Trimming

HFAC is aware that there is some confusion regarding the difference between beak trimming and debeaking. We do not under any circumstances allow debeaking; there are, however, humane reasons to allow beak trimming of laying hens, as long as it is practiced according to strict guidelines.

It is accepted that in colony housing systems there is a great risk of outbreaks of cannibalism. The pain and suffering of the hens that are being pecked to death is appalling and may quickly affect a large proportion of the flock.

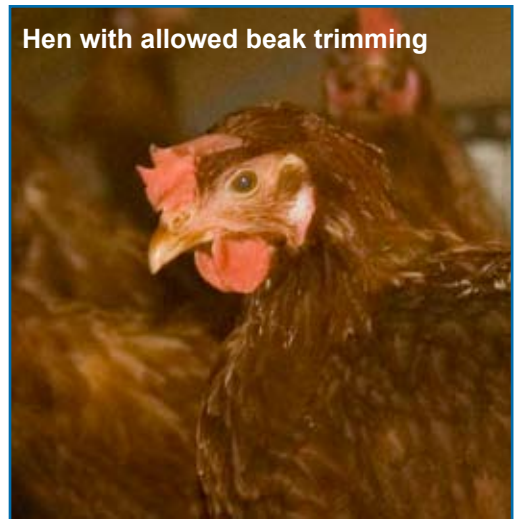
HFAC allows minimal beak trimming in order to avoid heavy feather pecking and cannibalism among laying hen flocks. Feather pecking can occur in flocks of *any* size, and in *any* production system. Cannibalism is more common in large flocks (flocks of over 60-120 birds) but can also occur in flocks of any size. Cannibalism is more common in non-cage than cage systems.

Early studies showed that hens that were beak-trimmed at 12-16 weeks of age experienced chronic pain after trimming. However, in 1997 Dr. M.J. Gentle of the Roslin Institute in Edinburgh, UK, conducted research that showed that, although chicks beak-trimmed before 10 days of age may experience short-term pain, they do not experience the long-term pain that was associated with trimming chicks at ages older than 10 days.

Our standards require that, if chicks are to be trimmed, the trimming *must* occur at 10 days of age or younger. Further, the trimming can only be carried out by trained and competent operators using approved methods. Only the tip of the upper part of the beak may be removed, in order to limit the hens' ability to tear at flesh *without* inhibiting feeding, ground pecking, or preening. The lower mandible may be "stopped" (e.g., heat treated) without any beak being removed in order to avoid distortion of beak formation in later life.

HFAC is currently reviewing new research regarding possible improvements in beak-trimming methods. If these methods offer an even more humane and practicable alternative to our current requirements, we will amend the Animal Care Standards accordingly.

Hen with allowed beak trimming



Hen without beak trimming

