



Humane Farm Animal Care

Animal Care Standards Fact Sheets

Laying Hens

Free-Range Requirements

The Animal Care Standards for laying hens do not require that hens have access to range. When range is provided, the following standards must be met.

Outdoor area

The outdoor area in free-range systems must be designed and managed to ensure that the land around the house does not become damaged, contaminated, or sodden. Chickens with access to range must have access to a well-drained area for resting while outside the building.

Exits

Hens kept in free-range systems must have sufficient exit areas appropriately distributed around the building to ensure that all hens have ready access to the range, and each exit area must allow the passage of more than one hen at a time.

Dust-bathing area

If the dust-bathing environment for free-range hens is only provided outdoors, the hens must have access to this area for at least 4 hours every day. Outdoor dust-bathing environments must have a substrate suitable for the performance of dust-bathing behavior.

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Examples of free-range environments for laying hens.

Laying Hens: Free-Range Requirements (cont.)

Vegetative cover for range area

In free-range systems, a cover of living vegetation should be maintained over the grazing area, with active management of damaged ground. Land used for cropping (except grass or hay) is not regarded as acceptable vegetation and must be excluded from calculations for grazing space allowance.

Size of range area

In systems where birds are primarily managed on range, the minimum space required is 2.5 acres for every thousand birds. The perimeter of the range should be within 400 yards of the house. If rotational grazing is used, a minimum of 1/6 of the total range area should be available at any one time.

Parasite control

When there is a risk of build up of parasites or pathogens on free-range land, rotational grazing or other disease control measures must be applied.

Overhead cover

Hens in free-range systems must have access to overhead cover to reduce regular fear reactions to overhead predators.

Shelter

To protect hens from excessively cold temperatures or other adverse weather conditions, a shelter must be accessible that is of sufficient size to accommodate all hens. The shelter must also provide sufficient protection from wind, rain, and snow. In areas where excessive heat may be a problem, a shaded area that has sufficient space so that hens do not have to crowd together, risking further heat stress, must be accessible to the birds.