

ANIMAL WELFARE ON ORGANIC FARMS

**FARM ASSESSMENT CHECKLIST
 LAYING HENS**

Produced in consultation with the ECOA Animal Welfare Task Force

This checklist is intended as a supplementary checklist for use with an organic inspection or for farmers to assist with determining the welfare status of the hens and the identification of areas for improvement.

GENERAL DETAILS

Farm name: _____	Person(s) present for assessment: _____
Assessed by: _____	Date & time (start – finish): _____
Type of operation: _____	
Type of bird: _____ # of flocks: _____	Flock size: _____ Age of flock: _____

LIVING CONDITIONS

1. Adult hens/sq metre of indoor floor space: _____ Meets standard? Yes No

*Organic standard: 6 hens/m²
 BCSPCA brown egg layers: 5.26 hens/m² (2.05 ft²/bird)
 BCSPCA white egg layers: 5.88 hens/m² (4.83 ft²/bird)*

2. Feeder space/bird: _____ Meets recommendations? Yes No

Type of feeder system used: _____

*Minimum recommended: pans 20-30 birds/round feeder; troughs 4-5 linear cm/bird
 Guidance: look for size uniformity in birds, and signs of aggression to determine if space is adequate.*

3. Drinker space/bird: _____ Meets recommendations? Yes No

Type of drinker system used: _____

Minimum recommended: 50-75 birds/round waterer; 6-10 birds/nipple or cup; 3-4 cms of water trough

4. Condition of feed and water: Clean Fresh Moldy

Comments: _____

5. Evidence of rodents: Yes No

Comments: _____

6. Litter in good condition and well maintained? Yes No

Comments:

7. a) Individual nest box provided: Yes No Colony nest box provided: Yes No

b) Number of nest boxes: _____ Birds/nest box: _____ OR Linear space/nest box _____

Meets recommendations? Yes No

*Guidance: look for number of floor eggs and prevalence/occurrence of egg eating.
Minimum recommended: 1/5-7 birds; communal: 120 sq.cm/bird*

8. Nesting materials provided: Yes No

9. Perch space/bird: _____

Meets recommendations? Yes No

Minimum recommended: 18-20 cm/bird

10. Air quality: Ammonia level high Dusty Good ventilation Regular temperature checks

Guidance: Ideally a meter should be used to measure ammonia – a human can become desensitized. Ammonia should ideally be ≤ 10 ppm and not more than 25ppm. Wet litter is an indicator of potential for high levels. Dust levels that impair visibility in the barn are a concern.

11. Hours of light per day: _____ Light levels (measured at bird level): _____

Maximum: 16 hours of continuous artificial light - Minimum: 20 lux (2 footcandles)

12. Dust bathing areas provided: Yes No

13. Is grit provided? Yes No N/A

(Only necessary if birds on pasture or fed whole grains)

14. Number & size of pop holes: _____ Birds/pop hole: _____

Meets recommendations? Yes No

Minimum: 1/600 birds, minimum size 45 cm x 100 cm

15. Outdoor range: Vegetation (% cover): _____ Shade provided Rotation
good drainage (no standing water)

16. Average loss from predators? _____

Comments:

BEHAVIOUR AND HEALTH

Obtain information from health records or observations as appropriate.

1. Mortality rate of existing flock: _____
 Reasons for losses: _____
Maximum acceptable level: 1-2%/month of egg laying period

2. Number of cases of cannibalism in existing flock: _____

3. Diseases identified: _____

4. Sick/lethargic birds - # seen: _____

5. Are beaks trimmed or tipped? Yes No

Comments: _____

6. Plumage condition - To determine an overall impression of condition of birds:

Mid way through the barn in an area roughly 2m x 2m determine percentage of birds with good (score 4) and poor (score 1-2) plumage condition (estimate only – there is no need to handle the birds). If the flock is less than 1500 hens do this once, if the flock is greater than 1500 birds, score 3 separate areas of the barn (try to evenly distribute the scoring area).

Area of barn	Percentage of birds with good plumage						Average % over all areas of bird
	Neck (4)	Breast (4)	Vent (4)	Back (4)	Wings (4)	Tail (4)	
1							
2							
3							
Area of barn	Percentage of birds with poor plumage						Average % over all areas of bird
	Neck (1-2)	Breast (1-2)	Vent (1-2)	Back (1-2)	Wings(1-2)	Tail (1-2)	
1							
2							
3							

Guidance: poor plumage conditions in >25% is a concern requiring changes in management practices.

7. Wounds and other body conditions.

Sample the populations as described above – it can be done at the same time. Birds do not need to be handled to do the scoring.

Area of barn	Percentage of birds with condition				Evidence of breaks or joint deformity
	Wounds on comb		Bumblefoot		
	Many	Few/None	Large swelling	No swelling	
1					
2					
3					
Average					

Guidance: the condition observed in more than 15% of flock is a concern – causative factors should be determined and management practices modified as necessary.

OTHER MANAGEMENT

1. How often are birds monitored: _____

Guidance – should be at least twice a day.

2. Emergency back-up systems in place and operational: Yes No

Emergency systems should be run at least once a month.

3. On-Farm HACCP program in place: Yes No

4. Staff knowledgeable of poultry behaviour and diseases: Yes No

5. Automated chicken catchers used: Yes No

6. Biosecurity plan: Yes No

7. Birds at end of production cycle - on farm disposal using:

Macerator Electrocutation CO₂ gassing Other (describe) Transportation to processor

Guidance: on farm disposal is recommended to prevent suffering if transportation distances are long.

9. Disposal of mortalities: Buried Incinerated Composted Other

Comments:

Quebec's "On-Farm Poultry Composting Guide" is available in French and English:

[http://www.mapaq.gouv.qc.ca/NR/rdonlyres/3C3B9C7F-7D6C-4286-AD6C-](http://www.mapaq.gouv.qc.ca/NR/rdonlyres/3C3B9C7F-7D6C-4286-AD6C-CBFF9C0552DF/0/GUIDECOMPOSTAGEVOLAILLESMORTESonfarmpoultrycompostingguideAODBT2006ANGLAIS.pdf)

[CBFF9C0552DF/0/GUIDECOMPOSTAGEVOLAILLESMORTESonfarmpoultrycompostingguideAODBT2006ANGLAIS.pdf](http://www.mapaq.gouv.qc.ca/NR/rdonlyres/3C3B9C7F-7D6C-4286-AD6C-CBFF9C0552DF/0/GUIDECOMPOSTAGEVOLAILLESMORTESonfarmpoultrycompostingguideAODBT2006ANGLAIS.pdf)

If raising pullets:

10. Proximity of chicks to heat source: Even distribution Huddled Away from source

11. Presence of elevated perches: Yes No

12. Stimulation of foraging behaviour (e.g. grain in litter) Yes No

13. Are pullets allowed outside: Yes No At what age?

Summary of concerns:

Changes since last assessment:

Recommendations:

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