



ACP FACT SHEET – THE RED TRACTOR ASSURANCE SCHEME

January 2009

Summary statement:

Assured Food Standards (AFS), the independent organisation set up to manage the Red Tractor mark, is committed to improving the standards of food production across all the main commodity products, including chicken. The Red Tractor chicken standards – known as Assured Chicken Production (ACP) - covers **all** aspects of chicken production, including key issues such as bird welfare, housing, feed, farm bio-security and health and hygiene.

There are ACP standards for indoor barn-reared and free range chicken production. In each case the standards set meet the minimum prevailing legislation for that system plus some additional requirements of good agriculture practice. The strength of the ACP system is the regular expert independent inspections of all farms to ensure that the standards are being adhered to.

ACP standards are kept under constant review. The scheme works closely with the industry and listens carefully to consumers and the underlying science and research to ensure that ACP standards support effective and scientifically sound rearing techniques to bring to the public chicken that is safe to eat and has respect for the health and welfare of the birds. Over the eight years of the ACP scheme the standards have taken the industry forward at a pace that is commercially sustainable.

ACP accepts that different systems of chicken production will have different levels of perceived welfare. Red Tractor standards have very detailed requirements for dealing with all aspects of bird welfare including health plans, disease control, and good professional stockmanship. Other chicken is on the market with no such independent assessment and inspection system for which bird welfare is unknown.

The production system will have implications for the costs of producing the chicken and the retail selling price. ACP supports the provision of consumer choice to meet different preferences and household budgets.

The Red Tractor logo is an established symbol of quality, affordable food which also includes a statement of origin in the flag device and when consumers see the Union flag in the logo, they can be sure the food has come from UK farms. The Red Tractor logo appears on more than £8 billion worth of food and drink every year and is supported by all leading retailers, a number of major brands and increasingly the food service industry.

For more information please visit www.redtractor.org.uk.

Key points:

The market:

- There are a range of production methods available for chicken.
- Indoor barn-reared chickens still account for over three quarters of the UK fresh chicken market.
- The crucial point is that different systems have different costs/price points for the product. The lower stocking density, free range and organic offers all come with an increasingly large price premium.

What Red Tractor covers:

- There are Red Tractor chicken standards for indoor barn-reared and free range chicken production, and also poussin production.
- Some poultry available at retail which is produced in indoor systems with lower stocking density is now referred to as 'standard-plus'. This is often inspected against the Assured Chicken Standards and carries the Red Tractor logo to demonstrate good food safety, bio-security and stockmanship.
- The objective of the Red Tractor standards is to ensure the birds are produced to strict criteria.
- Red Tractor standards cover food safety (salmonella etc) and all aspects of bird health and welfare.
- Red Tractor standards have very detailed requirements for dealing with all aspects of bird welfare including health plans, disease control, and good professional stockmanship.

Delivering strict standards:

- Indoor barn-reared production is highly legislated with both food safety regulations and animal welfare regulations.
- The EU 'broiler directive' sets minimum standards for broiler production that are followed across Europe.
- ACP standards are ahead of the legislation and also the food safety rules.
- Regular independent inspections are undertaken to ensure standards achieved.

Common misconceptions about standard chicken production:

- Argument that more space + access to outdoors = good welfare; is a gross simplification.
- Clearly it is possible to have poor welfare in lower density systems. e.g. the Channel 4 free range unit had bad stockmanship; bad animal disease control and bad food safety controls.
- The Channel 4 unit failed the ACP inspection badly.
- In the programmes, the welfare problems with higher density systems were exaggerated.
- The issues raised can be controlled by modern conditions and good stockmanship.
- Chickens for meat are never grown in cages. 'Battery' systems are only used for egg laying hens and in any case must be phased out by 2010
- Chickens are not routinely fed antibiotic growth promoters. These were banned by legislation in 2005 but actually banned by the ACP three years ago.
- Chickens are not routinely fed with hormones.