

PS/MJ/ART7183

January 2000

**ASPECTS OF THE REARING OF  
BROILER CHICKENS IDENTIFIED AS  
CRUEL BY THE JUDGE IN THE 'MCLIBEL' CASE**

Mr Justice Bell gave judgment on 19 June 1997. He made the following comments:

**Overcrowding/Stocking Density**

The Judge concluded “The high density [for the last few days] is intentional and unnecessary and it probably causes the birds some level of real discomfort. In my judgment it is cruel”. Later the Judge said that “The severe restriction of movement over those last few days [of their lives] is cruel”.

**Leg Problems**

The Judge concluded that “even in a comparatively well run, modern broiler unit, something between 7% - 31% of the birds have welfare compromised by leg problems as a result primarily of their genetic breeding but with some effect from the crowded conditions in which they are kept” [in crowded conditions birds are less able to move around and exercise and so have weaker legs].

The Judge continued “I can see no reason why at least 7% of broilers, and possibly more, should have to suffer from discomfoting leg problems .... In my judgment it involves cruelty”.

**Catching**

The Judge stated “the catching at [some farms] has often been done hurriedly and clumsily under pressure of time with the result that it has been cruel, in my view”. [Catching is the process by which birds are gathered for transportation to the slaughterhouse].

**Broiler Breeders**

The Judge referred to the use of restricted diets for broiler breeders. He said “My conclusion is that the practice of rearing breeders for appetite, that is to feel especially hungry, and then restricting their feed with the effect of keeping them hungry, is cruel. It is a well-planned device for profit at the expense of suffering of the birds”.

### **Overall Conclusion**

The Judge said that “There are other cruel practices affecting chickens which are used to provide ... food; the restriction of broiler breeders’ feed with the result that they go hungry although bred for appetite, leg problems in broilers bred for weight, rough handling of broilers taken for slaughter ...”.

### **Spread of disease**

The Judge said that one of the industry’s witnesses “agreed that broiler houses provide the ideal conditions for the rapid spread of disease”. The Judge himself said that “it was clear that if there is an epidemic among shed reared broilers it is likely to be more devastating than with free range birds”.

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