

Compassion in World Farming's response to Tesco Statement on Resolution 17 proposed by Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall

1. TESCO: "We meet and, in a number of ways, exceed national farm assurance standards and all government legislation on chicken production"

THE FACTS: Tesco's standards for chicken production **do not even meet the Government's code of recommendations** for the welfare of meat chickens, which states "The maximum stocking density for chickens kept to produce meat for the table should be **34kg/m²**, which should not be exceeded at any time during the growing period".

Tesco allows a maximum stocking density of 38kg/m².

2. TESCO: "We have for many years been at the forefront of taking initiatives to improve chicken welfare and continue to play a leadership role on this issue in our industry"

THE FACTS: Marks & Spencer and Waitrose both require a maximum stocking density of 30kg/m² and Sainsbury's has committed to move all of its standard chicken production to Freedom Food standard or equivalent, with slower growing breeds and a maximum stocking density of 30kg/m².

Tesco has made no commitment to move to slower growing breeds or reduce stocking density.

3. TESCO: "Moving all standard chickens to the higher Freedom Food standard by 2010/11... would in effect commit us to restricting choice for our customers and pricing out many of them. This would hit our lower income customers very hard, especially at a time when they are already concerned about rising costs.

"Moving to Freedom Food standards would cost over **£1** per average weight chicken".

THE FACTS: This assertion is simply not supported by the figures. A report by the EU Scientific Committee on Animal Health and Animal Welfare (SCAHAW) concludes that a decrease in stocking density and increase in slaughter age would result in a only a small rise in production costs. These findings are echoed by the RSPCA's report¹, which shows that rearing chickens to Freedom Food standards may actually be more profitable, *even without taking into account any price premium* for marketing the birds as higher welfare, due to a lower mortality rate and a higher proportion of grade A birds. The SCAHAW report figures suggest that the actual difference in production cost would be as little as **15p** extra for a 1.5kg chicken.

4a. TESCO: "We are confident that our farms meet the higher welfare standards cited in the independent study² [referred to by Hugh in the Resolution]"

THE FACTS: Tesco's requirement for 6 hours of darkness is above the mean of 2.9 hours in the study, which would tend to reduce the level of leg disorders. However, Tesco's maximum stocking density of 38kg/m² is above the mean of 31.3kg/m² in the study, which would tend to **increase the level of leg disorders.**

¹ *Everyone's a Winner: how rearing chickens to higher welfare standards can benefit the chicken, producer, retailer and consumer*, RSPCA, September 2006.

² <http://www.plosone.org/article/info:doi%2F10.1371%2Fjournal.pone.0001545>

4b. TESCO: "In any event the report by leading expert Professor Marian Dawkins shows chicken welfare is influenced more by housing conditions than by stocking density."

THE FACTS: The authors of this report do not suggest that stocking density does not have an effect on bird welfare, but rather that stocking density is one of many factors which are important, including environment, nutrition and genetics³.

4c. TESCO: "The Cobb breed contributed to a very high level of locomotion disorders [in the study referred to by Hugh in the Resolution]... We prohibit the use of Cobb and use breeds with a much better gait score (including Ross)".

- GAIT scores measure leg disorders

THE FACTS: The majority of birds in the study were breed A (which according to Tesco are Ross). Although the study found that the level of leg disorders was higher in breed B birds (which according to Tesco are Cobb) both breeds showed high levels of leg disorders. Numerous other studies have also shown that breeds selected for fast growth, including Ross, suffer from high levels of leg disorders.

5. TESCO: "We believe that the chickens purchased for sale by the Company are already produced in systems capable of providing the Five Freedoms"

THE FACTS: Given the high prevalence of leg disorders, which have been shown to be painful⁴, and the resulting impaired locomotion and impacts on behaviour in fast-growing breeds, including those used by Tesco, the current system of rearing chickens for Tesco cannot be expected to provide freedom from discomfort, freedom from pain or freedom to express normal behaviour.

6. TESCO: "We are the only one of the major supermarkets...to carry out independent audits over and above the industry standard, to ensure our standards are being met"

THE FACTS: Tesco is doing particularly well in auditing their chicken flocks, so ensuring that they are still existing to the low standards that Tesco sets itself. Compassion in World Farming recognises that stringent auditing can offer significant benefits for animal welfare, but also that the overall benefit is hugely dependent on the standards required for auditor's satisfaction.

³ <http://users.ox.ac.uk/~abrg/papers/dawkins/Nature.pdf>

⁴ Danbury, T C, Weeks, C A, Chambers, J P, Waterman-Pearson, A E and Kestin, S C (2000) Self-selection of the analgesic drug carprofen by lame broiler chickens. *Veterinary Record* **146**: 307-311.