



British Egg Industry Council

BEAK TRIMMING: We need your help



British Egg Industry Council

May 2014

To: Everyone Involved in the Egg Industry

BEAK TRIMMING: We need your help

The UK Government is committed to bringing forward legislation to outlaw the beak trimming of laying hens from 1st January 2016. Similar legislation was brought forward by the previous Government, but was abandoned in the face of overwhelming evidence that such a step was not in the best interest of laying hen welfare.

Today the welfare arguments in favour of beak trimming are just as compelling, but there is a significant danger that beak trimming may be banned, regardless of the welfare implications, due to the strong political pressure that certain animal rights organisations have brought to Westminster.

It is vital that we now have a strong show of support from the whole of the egg industry (including family members) to ensure that the truth about beak trimming (it is not 'debeaking'!), why it is carried out, and the consequences of it being banned, are made clear to your MP. Do not be defensive or apologetic - put the point to MPs – ask them directly not to worsen laying hen welfare by banning beak trimming.

BEIC has been very encouraged by the response to our past requests to write to Defra and to MPs. **To be successful again, the BEIC needs you to write to your MP.**

This issue is of high importance and needs the action of **EVERYONE** involved in the UK egg industry.

We need you to help.....

(1) **Please write a letter to your local MP**, asking him/her:

- a) Not to support any proposal to ban beak trimming
- b) To write to the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Farming & Food, – 'George Eustice MP', to raise your concerns

... Page 1 of 10

The most effective letter will be one written by **you**, being a true statement of what beak trimming is, why it is carried out, and what the consequences of it being banned are to you. To help you we have enclosed "*Points to consider in the letter to your MP*".

It is vital that MPs receive a large number of letters raising this issue. Therefore, please also ensure that each member of your staff (and family) writes a letter to their MP. This issue would also affect them.

We have also enclosed a sample letter to your MP. If you do not write your own letter, it is far better to send the sample response than to do nothing at all.

If you use the sample letter, make sure you; add your **name, address** and the **date** to the top of the letter; write in the **name of your MP**; and **sign** the bottom.

Do not forget to write the **name of your MP above the address on the front of the pre-paid envelope**, before sending it to the House of Commons.

(2) Please return the pre-paid envelope to the BEIC (at the address shown on the bottom of page 1), with the information slip once you have sent your letter to your MP:

Please write your name, address, and the name of your local MP on the information slip.

Please remember to fill in the information slip (on page 9). This will help us to follow up your efforts more effectively.

Enclosed in this pack are:

- (1) A guide suggesting "Points to consider in the letter to your MP".
- (2) A sample letter to your MP.
- (3) A pre-paid envelope for the letter to your MP, addressed to "The House of Commons".
- (4) An explanatory note for the website www.writetothem.com (If you type in your postcode your MP will be displayed).
- (5) A pre-paid envelope to return to BEIC.
- (6) An information slip to return to BEIC.
- (7) A picture of a normal beak trimmed hen contrasted with a non-beak trimmed hen

Electronic copies of the information are available from Giles Clifton at the BEIC office, or from giles.clifton@britisheggindustryCouncil.com.

If you need any help at all, or are still uncertain who is your local MP, please contact the BEIC office (telephone; 020 7608 3760). **We are here to help you.**

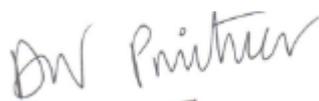
Yours sincerely,



Mark Williams
Chief Executive
BEIC

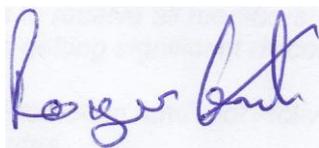
In association with

Duncan Priestner



Chairman
NFU Poultry Committee

Roger Gent



Chairman
British Free Range Egg Producers Association

An Explanatory Note on the website www.writetothem.com

This website allows you to quickly see who your MP is.

To do so simply **type in your postcode** and the details will appear.

www.writetothem.com

Points to Consider in the letter to your MP

Your personal background

Explain your own involvement with the egg industry.

Outline the number of people you employ (including yourself).

Background

The EU Council Directive on the welfare of laying hens (1999/74/EC) permits member states to authorise beak trimming in order to prevent feather pecking and cannibalism, provided it is carried out by qualified staff on hens that are less than 10 days old and intended for laying. (The vast majority of member states take up this derogation).

The Government is committed to bringing forward legislation to outlaw the beak trimming of laying hens from 1st January 2016. Similar legislation was brought forward by the previous Government to ban the beak trimming of laying hens from 1st January 2011, but was abandoned in the face of overwhelming evidence that such a step was not in the best interest of laying hen welfare.

Today the welfare arguments in favour of beak trimming are just as compelling, but there is a significant danger that beak trimming may be banned regardless of the welfare implications due to the strong political pressure that certain animal rights organisations have brought to Westminster.

What is beak trimming?

Beak trimming removes the tip of a bird's beak to minimize the prevalence of injurious feather pecking and cannibalism in laying hen flocks.

Why is there a need for beak treatment/trimming?

The problem of feather pecking and cannibalism is complex, with many factors acting as potential triggers. After receiving advice from the Farm Animal Welfare Council (an independent Government advisory body on farm animal welfare) in 2007, the Government considered a total ban on beak trimming not to be in the interest of laying hen welfare, as it is clear that birds would suffer worse welfare insults through injurious feather pecking and cannibalism. The impact of injurious pecking is greatest in systems of management which do not house birds in cages, therefore it is likely to have increased with the rise in the number of hens kept in free range systems.

What is the industry doing to obviate the need to beak treat/trim?

The industry supports the need to find ways of obviating the need to trim a bird's beak, but so far it has not been possible to avoid birds suffering worse welfare insults, such as injurious feather pecking and cannibalism. It is also of note that the RSPCA Freedom Food scheme permits beak trimming in the interest of animal welfare.

The cost to the industry of beak trimming is 3.0 – 3.5p/bird (£1.02m - £1.19m per annum), a cost it would prefer not to have to bear. Over recent years the industry has invested a considerable amount of time and money in seeking ways to obviate the need to beak trim.

The industry has worked hard to find alternatives to beak trimming including, the breeding companies incorporating information on pecking behaviour in their selection programmes. However, it will take several years before a strain of hen can be developed for mainstream commercial use in the UK that is not prone to feather pecking under commercial conditions (and even then occasional breakdowns may occur). When actively selecting for reduced aggression, for every gain breeders have to be aware that there can be an opposing negative effect that can adversely affect hen welfare. Additionally, it can take up to 8 years from identification of positive genetic traits to reach commercial level.

How is beak trimming carried out in the UK?

The only method of beak trimming allowed in the UK is the infra-red beak treatment (IRBT) technique. Current scientific evidence suggests that IRBT does not result in chronic pain or other adverse consequences for sensory function.

How does Infra-Red Beak Treatment differ from hot-blade beak trimming?

The new infra-red technique was developed around 10 years ago and the industry has been using it to beak trim birds commercially as an alternative to the traditional hot-blade technique. The procedure is carried out on day-old chicks in a hatchery and involves focusing a high intensity infra-red beam at the tip of the beak. During treatment, the chick's head is firmly retained in a rubber holder that prevents movement of its head, enabling precise and reliable treatment of the beak. One to three weeks later, the tissue behind the treated area heals and the beak tip is lost.

Does science support Infra-Red Beak Treatment?

In its 2007 opinion to Ministers, FAWC recommended that further research be carried out into the neuro-physiological effects of infra-red beak treatment. In May 2009, a 'Study to assess the long-term neuro-physical effects of infra-red beak treatment of laying hens' was completed at Glasgow University. This was joint funded by Defra and the British Egg Industry Council. The research concluded that infra-red beak treatment of day-old chicks does not result in chronic adverse consequences for nerve function, nor does it demonstrate evidence of chronic pain associated with this procedure.

What is the difference between 'Infra-Red Beak Treatment', 'beak trimming' and 'de-beaking'?

It is important to understand the difference between 'beak treatment', 'beak trimming' and 'de-beaking'. While 'de-beaking' may take place in certain non-EU countries and involves the trimming of the beak back to the nostrils, it is illegal in the UK.

Please see the illustration on page 10, which shows a laying hen which has had its beak treated as a day-old chick using infra-red light.

Action Requested of your MP

Please ask your MP to write to the Minister responsible saying that he/she believes the use of beak trimming using the infra-red treatment process now available is in the best interest of laying hen welfare and he/she supports its continued use.

.....MP
House of Commons
London SW1A 0AA

Dear

I am a poultry farmer [other] in your constituency. I farm [reside] at Currently, we have [laying hens] [pullets] on our farm and we employ..... people.

I wanted to write to you as my MP and directly raise the issue of beak trimming with you in light of the fact that the Government currently has a commitment in principle to ban beak trimming from 2016.

Beak trimming is a procedure used on day-old chicks using infra-red light to prevent injurious feather pecking and cannibalism. It has been developed in response to the need to provide a modern, up to date solution to the necessity to trim the sharp point of a hens' beak which, if left untreated, can be used as a very unpleasant weapon to inflict pain and suffering on other hens.

The importance of beak trimming has increased as the size of the UK's free range flock has increased to nearly half of the total. Aggressive feather pecking and cannibalism can be more prevalent among free range birds than those housed in enriched cages. The RSPCA's Freedom Food scheme allows beak trimming.

Prior to the development of the infra-red light treatment, beak trimming was carried out with the use of a hot-blade. Unfortunately, the arguments around beak trimming have tended to focus on a false debate – about what happened in the past, as well as misrepresentation of what beak trimming is today.

Beak trimming is not 'de-beaking'. The hens' beak is not removed. I enclose a photograph showing a hen which has had its beak treated as a day-old chick. I think you would agree that the beak on this bird looks perfectly normal.

The UK egg industry operates in the unsupported sector of agriculture. The egg industry is one of the agricultural success stories of recent years, having overcome the Salmonella crisis through the introduction of the British Lion quality scheme which sets higher standards of both food safety and animal welfare than is currently required by UK or EU legislation. Egg sales are currently growing following 15 years of investment in both production and marketing.

I consider beak treatment to be an important part of how I care for my flock. It is an essential tool in maintaining the highest standards of on-farm welfare and for the success of my business. Any ban would have very serious consequences for laying hen welfare. Beak treatment costs 3.0-3.5p a chick - clearly I would not wish to spend this money unless I considered it necessary.

I hope by writing to you I have clarified what beak trimming is. If you would like to see the procedure in person, I know that the egg industry would be very please to facilitate a visit.

I would ask you to please allow me to continue to care for my laying hens welfare by **not** supporting any measure to ban beak trimming, and secondly to write to George Eustice MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Farming & Food at Defra, stating that you consider there is no case to ban beak trimming in 2016.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

Name:

Address:

Please complete the following as appropriate and return in the pre-paid envelope to BEIC.

I have sent my own letter to my MP

YES

NO

OR

I have sent the BEIC sample response letter to my MP

YES

NO

Please specify the name of the MP you have written to.....

Thank you for taking the time to complete this form.

Fig.1 A beak trimmed hen at 20 weeks of age



Fig. 2 A non-beak trimmed hen – note the sharp 'hook'

