



RSPCA 'ASSURED': COVERING UP CRUELTY ON AN INDUSTRIAL SCALE

**an investigation into animal suffering and
widespread regulation breaches on 45 RSPCA
Assured scheme farms in England & Scotland**

www.animalrising.org



Report compiled by Dr Alex Lockwood
on behalf of Animal Rising
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Cover photo of dead and dying chicks taken at an
RSPCA Assured farm, 8th March 2024

CONTENTS

Statement on our findings	5
Statement on not naming farms	7
Summary of investigations	8
Legal summary	10
Investigations in detail	
Pigs and boars	12
Hens and ‘broiler’ chickens	22
Salmon and trout	28
The RSPCA Assured scheme	34
Historical investigations	35
Final thoughts	36
Appendices: Investigation checklists	38



Chickens crammed into overcrowded sheds at an RSPCA Assured farm in Sussex, 28th March 2024

Statement on our findings

The RSPCA are assuring factory farms.

Over the last 30 years, the RSPCA have been putting their trusted brand on animal products via their RSPCA Assured scheme, previously known as Freedom Food. The scheme's marketing and PR actively promotes a fairytale image where animals enjoy green fields and happy lives in well cared for farms. But this portrayal is a lie. The most well-known and well trusted animal charity in the UK (and possibly the world) has knowingly misled the British public and made money from that betrayal.

They're not fairytale farms, they're factory farms.

Over the years, the reality of these farms has been revealed time and again in high profile exposés. Each time, the investigation has shown immense animal suffering and horrific cruelty (including widespread disease, the dead amongst the living, and animals in unremitting distress). The RSPCA always say it is just "one bad apple", suspend that farm and assure the public everything is fine.

But it isn't one bad apple. The barrel is rotten.

We believe the public has the right to know the truth. So we've just done the largest investigation in UK history - 60 investigations on 45 farms over 4 months - to show once and for all that these are not just one bad apple, but that the whole barrel is rotten. This report documents intense suffering and distress of the animals - most of which is permitted by the RSPCA Assured scheme regulations. The report also documents the widespread, regular and taken-for-granted regulation breaches, as well as, in many cases, illegal behaviour. Verified by a specialist barrister in animal welfare, we found **280 legal breaches and a further 94 breaches of DEFRA codes of practice.**

We have found pigs lying dead in the middle of pen aisles. Chicks dead from dehydration and starvation. Salmon and trout with eyes and body parts missing. Laying hens having lost their feathers from distress. Pigs dragging themselves across the floor because their legs aren't working. Sheds holding up to 64,000 chickens at a time. Publicly, the RSPCA claims to be against intensive farming. Yet they continue to put their stamp of approval on these farming methods through their assurance scheme, and then use it to

promote eating animals to children through school programmes. Is this really the priority of our oldest animal charity?

This is not the first time this scheme has been exposed. There has been at least 33 undercover investigations over the last 16 years, showing similar cases of suffering. The issues with this scheme are fundamental and ongoing.

We've rescued animals from the RSPCA.

We had to rescue some animals from RSPCA farms. Charlie is a pig around 3 months old. She was found in an overcrowded pen with a growth above her eye. There were concerns that this could be cancerous, or at least a painful cyst, placing pressure on her eyes (possibly impacting vision). We rescued her so she could receive veterinary care, to eradicate discomfort and the threat of it being harmful in her future. Now she can live a free and natural life.

An industrial-scale cover up.

Our exposé shows it is not possible to fix this industrial scale cover-up. The RSPCA are selling a myth and profiting from it to the tune of around £4m a year in fees from farms where animals live and die terribly. The Assured scheme has failed. It is a marketing arm of the intensive animal agriculture industry, fooling consumers in the aisles of M&S, Tesco, Sainsbury's, and Waitrose. The public don't want to pay for animal suffering - but that's exactly what is happening, because they are being lied to. The RSPCA need to start telling the truth to the public and drop the scheme.

The RSPCA can stop this now - and lead the way.

The RSPCA was founded 200 years ago to prevent cruelty to animals. While it continues to care for dogs and cats, and while the majority of its staff are animal lovers, the organisation has **badly** lost its way. But it can still lead the way by dropping its Assured scheme, and work to protect all animals, including farm animals.

**Rose Patterson, Dan Kidby, Ben Newman
Directors, Animal Rising**

*A laying hen steps on another dead hen at a cramped
RSPCA Assured farm in Tyne and Wear, 17th April 2024*



“Some of these RSPCA Assured farms do not even comply with basic legal requirements even though they hold themselves out to the public as being a ‘higher welfare’ supplier. This is effectively fraud, particularly when a welfare conscious consumer selects a product based on that sense of higher welfare and ethical treatment of sentient beings.”

**- Ayesha Smart,
specialist barrister in animal welfare
and Crown Court Judge**

Statement on not naming farms

Although we have full and comprehensive records of every farm we have investigated over the last four months, including their name, location and RSPCA Assured scheme status, we have decided not to name any individual farm in this report.

We have made this decision to ensure the focus remains on the scheme as a whole and the RSPCA's betrayal of the British public, as it can be understood in specialist barrister Ayesha Smart's statement above (in full on page 11). Through our engagement with farmers, we know how much individual farmers are themselves struggling. This is not about a handful of farms failing animals and consumers, but a system-wide issue. The RSPCA Assured scheme is 'effectively fraud' and, if the RSPCA is to lead the way for animal protection, must be dropped immediately.

We have submitted all our evidence to the authorities. All information is available on request for purposes of fact checking. Contact us at rspca@animalrising.org.

Summary of Investigations

60 investigations on 45 farms over four months revealed **animal suffering on every farm**

- **multiple RSPCA Assured regulation breaches**
- **280 breaches of legal regulations (see next page)**
- **verified by vets, academics and legal professionals**

Between 29th January and 15th May this year, Animal Rising conducted 60 investigations at **45** RSPCA Assured Scheme farms across England and Scotland.

On every farm visited, investigators found evidence of animal suffering - and much of that cruelty to animals is 'allowed' within the RSPCA Assured scheme's standards and operating procedures. Dead and decomposing bodies of animals, chickens thrown into bins, pigs and chicks dying covered in their own faeces and unable to escape from pens, sheds and encasement mechanisms, were 'standard' across these RSPCA Assured farms, documented in photography evidence, videos and written reports made by the investigators wearing industry-advised biosecurity clothing and personal protective equipment (PPE).

Selected findings of cruelty and suffering

While there was animal suffering found on every farm, there were many instances that stood out in extremity:

- at an **RSPCA Assured farm in Norfolk**, investigators found dead and dying baby chicks suffering from starvation and dehydration, with living chicks pecking at the dead.
- at an **RSPCA Assured farm in Somerset**, investigators found a dead pig's decomposing body in the alleyway between pens, where other pigs were dying from viral and bacterial infections, as evidenced by vet reports.
- at an **RSPCA Assured farm in Wiltshire**, investigators found two dying pigs convulsing in a pool of excrement, unable to get up, separated from others and left to experience terrible suffering.
- at an **RSPCA Assured farm in Scotland**, investigators found salmon infested with lice, with missing eyes and other body parts, open wounds.
- at an **RSPCA Assured farm in Scotland**, fish were transported for 54 hours.

In one case, when the suffering of the animals was beyond bearable to the investigators, the RSPCA was called to investigate the traumatic scene and treat the animals. These calls have been documented in the dossier of evidence. All of these instances of suffering, along with those you will find later in this report, have been passed to the RSPCA, the media and, if appropriate, the police.

The 69% of the British public who identify as 'animal lovers' (according to the RSPCA's own 'Kindness Index') would be surprised and upset to find the levels of suffering found on these Assured farms, such as:

- severe overcrowding;
- chickens unable to exhibit species-specific behaviours;
- hens carried and swung around by their legs;
- pigs with tails cut off (the RSPCA 'advise' against);
- calves separated from mothers to secure their milk.

Each of these instances of suffering, huge to the animal, falls within the regulations of the RSPCA's scheme.

Selected findings of welfare regulation breaches

Investigators found many examples where the treatment of animals breached the RSPCA's regulations, such as:

- at an **RSPCA Assured farm in Scotland**, trout kept out of water for more than the allowed time during hot water de-icing (many were seen to die).
- at an **RSPCA Assured farm in Kent**, catchers carrying and throwing hens by their legs.
- at an **RSPCA Assured farm in Somerset**, pigs had no enrichment to alleviate their boredom.
- at an **RSPCA Assured farm in Kent**, hens trapped outside sheds were unable to get back inside.
- at an **RSPCA Assured farm in Kent**, severe feather loss of chickens in distress.

Expert reviewers on investigation materials

The full dossier of evidence gathered from the RSPCA Assured farms has been submitted to the authorities and is available to reporters who want further information.



Professor Andrew Knight
Veterinary Professor of Animal Welfare and author.



Ayesha Smart
Specialist barrister in animal welfare law and Crown Court judge.



Dr Alice Brough
Ex-commercial pig vet with extensive experience on RSPCA farms.



Mark Borthwick
Doctoral fellow studying behaviour and behaviour change on salmon farms.

RSPCA Assured farm = factory farm?

The RSPCA Assured Scheme was established in 1994 as a means to provide the UK public with a way to make consumer choices around 'higher welfare' animal products sold as food. Launched as Freedom Food, it rebranded in 2015 as RSPCA Assured.

While the RSPCA's own marketing purports not

to support "intensive" farming, a majority of the investigations found that, instead, the RSPCA was giving its approval to industrial units that are classified by DEFRA as intensive farming (or 'factory farms'). Rather than the images portrayed through marketing and social media, the reality is up to 64,000 chickens in sheds, and pigs crammed into dirty and dangerous industry units.

“Not one bad apple, but a rotten barrel” - the investigations that reveal a systemic failure of the RSPCA Assured scheme across the UK.

What happened when we made a report to RSPCA Assured

We reported the conditions on one farm to the RSPCA in late March. The RSPCA then took nearly a month to confirm that they had launched their investigation into what we found.

Our investigators attempted to phone in the report within 48 hours, but this call was not answered. We tried again. We finally received an email after six days saying the evidence had been put into a report.

On the 18th April we received confirmation a referral had been made, but it was unclear how many days after it was reported this referral was actioned.

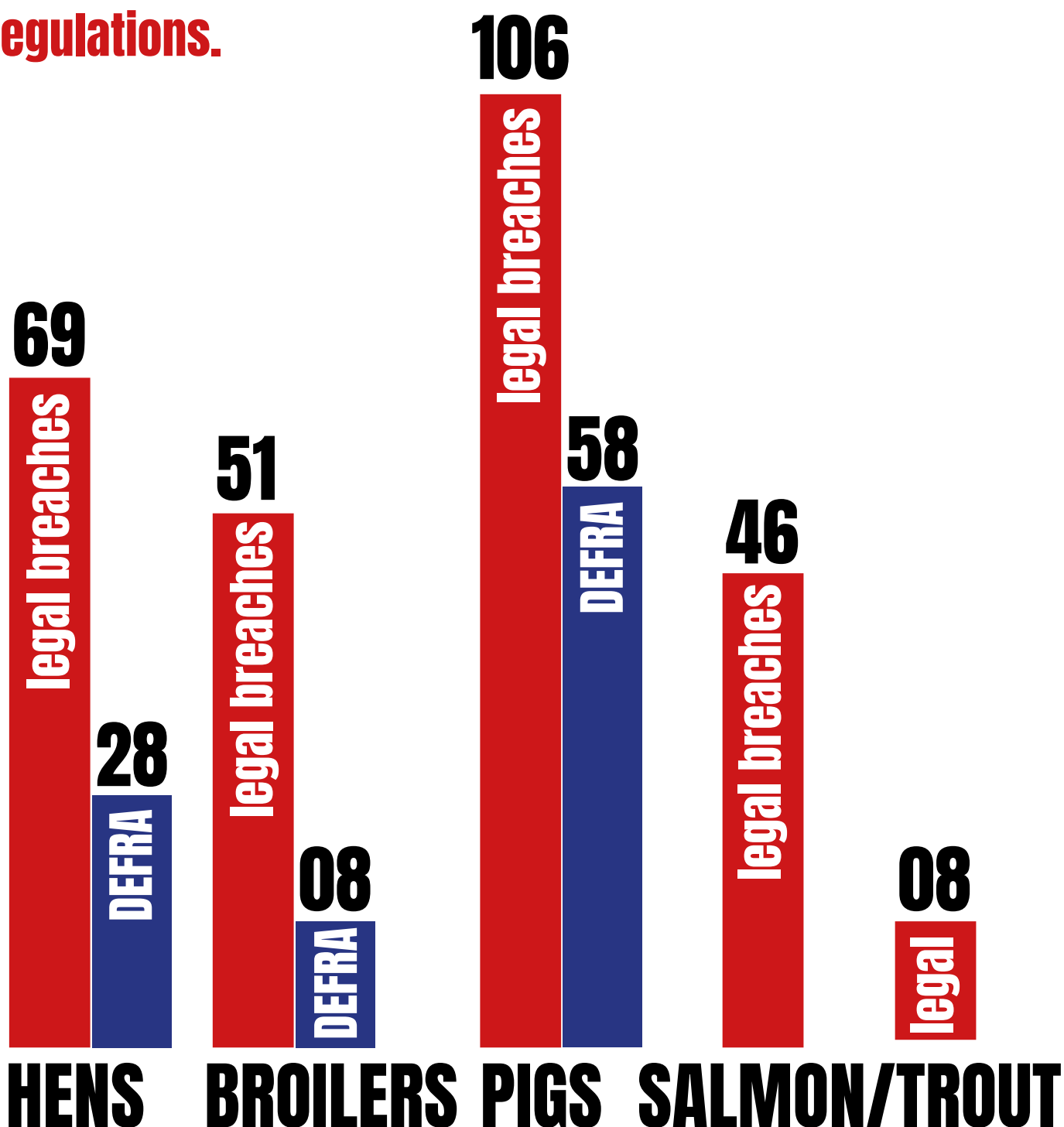
As of 31st May, we still do not know the outcome of our report of the appalling conditions we found. The farm remains operational and, as far as we can ascertain, remains RSPCA Assured.

Right: A dead pig in a bin with injuries and with one leg tied from reported farm, 22nd March 2024



Legal summary

Specialist animal welfare barrister Ayesha Smart reviewed all of our investigation footage and found a total of **280 breaches of the law** and a further **94 breaches of DEFRA regulations**.



Breaches of the law were found under the following regulations:

- The Animal By-Products (Enforcement) (England) Regulations 2013
- Paragraphs 24 of Schedule 1 to the Welfare of Farmed Animals (England) Regulations 2007
- Paragraphs 25 of Schedule 1 to the Welfare of Farmed Animals (England) Regulations 2007
- Section 4 Animal Welfare Act 2006
- Paragraph 2 (1) of Schedule 1 to the Welfare of Farmed Animals (England) Regulations 2007
- Paragraph 2 (2) of Schedule 1 to the Welfare of Farmed Animals (England) Regulations 2007
- Section 4 Animal Welfare Act 2006 – A person commits an offence if— an act or a failure, causes an animal to unnecessarily suffer
- Section 9 Animal Welfare Act 2006
- Paragraphs 5 of Schedule 1 to the Welfare of Farmed Animals (England) Regulations 2007
- Paragraph 5 of Schedule 5 to the Welfare of Farmed Animals (England) Regulations 2007
- Paragraphs 6 of Schedule 1 to the Welfare of Farmed Animals (England) Regulations 2007
- Paragraph 18 of Schedule 1 to the Welfare of Farmed Animals (England) Regulations 2007
- Paragraph 13 of Schedule 1 to the Welfare of Farmed Animals (England) Regulations 2007
- Paragraphs 9 of Schedule 1 to the Welfare of Farmed Animals (England) Regulations 2007
- Paragraphs 10 of Schedule 1 to the Welfare of Farmed Animals (England) Regulations 2007
- Paragraphs 25 of Schedule 1 to the Welfare of Farmed Animals (England) Regulations 2007
- Paragraphs 26 of Schedule 1 to the Welfare of Farmed Animals (England) Regulations 2007
- P13, Schedule 1 Welfare of Farmed Animals (England) Regulations 2007
- P8 of Schedule 2 to the Welfare of Farmed Animals (England) Regulations 2007
- Paragraph 5 of Schedule 5 to the Welfare of Farmed Animals (England) Regulations 2007
- Paragraphs 14 of Schedule 1 to the Welfare of Farmed Animals (England) Regulations 2007
- Paragraphs 16 of Schedule 1 to the Welfare of Farmed Animals (England) Regulations 2007
- Paragraph 2 (1) of Schedule 1 to the Welfare of Farmed Animals (England) Regulations 2007
- Paragraph 2 (2) of Schedule 1 to the Welfare of Farmed Animals (England) Regulations 2007
- Paragraph 4 (2) of Schedule 5 to the Welfare of Farmed Animals (England) Regulations 2007
- Paragraphs 6 of Schedule 2 to the Welfare of Farmed Animals (England) Regulations 2007

Expert Reviewer: Ayesha Smart



Ayesha Smart is a specialist barrister in animal welfare law. She also sits part time as a Crown Court judge in criminal proceedings. Throughout her career she has routinely prosecuted for the RSPCA, local authorities and private organisations in animal welfare proceedings. She also provides expert advice to animal welfare groups, the media and in government consultations.

Ayesha reviewed every investigation in this report. Her statement:

“What is evident in abundance from the footage that I have reviewed, is that farms simply do not adequately inspect these animals, ensure that are provided with a suitable living environment or address their pain or suffering in a timely manner. Many animals are left to die, and fester amongst other animals, without timely disposal. Some of the conditions that animals are living in are appalling and it is abhorrent that animals are still being kept in this way despite there being a protective legal framework.

“Some of these RSPCA Assured farms do not even comply with basic legal requirements even though they hold themselves out to the public as being a ‘higher welfare’ supplier. This is effectively fraud, particularly when a welfare conscious consumer selects a product based on that sense of higher welfare and ethical treatment of sentient beings.

“Few UK farms are actually inspected by an official regulatory body each year, and this clearly needs to change to ensure that there is compliance with the basic requirements. The serious lack of oversight inside farms leaves the opportunity for animal abuse or neglect to go entirely undetected. Had it not been for this investigation, then the state of these farms on the ground would not be exposed.”

Our Investigations in detail

PIGS

We conducted 18 investigations on 12 RSPCA Assured pig farms, in some cases returning a second or third time due to the poor conditions in which we found the pigs.

The RSPCA Assured scheme makes a promise to the British public that animals farmed under its scheme live good lives. According to the charity, “RSPCA Assured pigs must be provided with plenty of space, comfortable bedding and materials to root in and manipulate, to ensure they are comfortable and able to carry out natural rooting behaviours.” This was **not** the experience for pigs on the farms we investigated.

For sows giving birth, “the RSPCA standards require farrowing sows to be provided with a warm, comfortable environment with plenty of straw to help cushion and protect their piglets.” Again, this is **not** what we found.

In addition, “the RSPCA standards never allow the routine use of mutilations” although on our investigations we concluded that there was indeed evidence of ‘routine’ mutilations such as tail-docking.

The RSPCA’s failure to give pigs a ‘good life’ under the Five Domains

According to the RSPCA’s own Knowledge Base, the Five Domains Model of Animal Welfare “is increasingly used globally when considering the lived experience of

animals”. A progression from the Five Freedoms, the Five Domains explores the mental state of an animal, and acknowledges that for every physical aspect that is affected during their farming and slaughter, there may be an accompanying emotion or experience that can affect their lives. That is: mental experiences are equally important as physical ones for animals to enjoy life.

The Five Domains states that minimising or resolving negative physical or mental states does not necessarily result in positive welfare. It may provide, at best, a neutral state. To have the chance of a good life, animals must be given positive experiences that can be enjoyed.

Such positive experiences include, according to the RSPCA’s Knowledge Base, “anticipation, meaningful social connection, satisfaction, and satiation” and experience these while expressing natural behaviours.

To enable this, those who farm animals are required to provide them with opportunities for interactions (with their environment, people, and other animals) that not only allow but encourage animals to make choices and express behaviours that are rewarding to them. Such opportunities were lacking on these farms.

Expert Reviewer: Dr Alice Brough, BVM&S MRCVS

Alice is a veterinarian with several years' experience as an industry vet in commercial pig production. Her clients from 2015 to 2019 spanned every size and system of pig farming and stretched across England and Wales, with hundreds of farms under her care, many of which were RSPCA Assured.



While there are multiple units seemingly in breach of UK animal welfare law and the RSPCA's standards, demonstrating that imposing such standards or improving legislation doesn't necessarily equate to better lives for animals, there are those that do not appear to be breaking laws or standards from the clips of footage shown. Yet, we are seeing significant suffering, both physical and mental.

Pigs are subjected to cramped, filthy conditions with a lack of comfort, enrichment and stimulation to keep them occupied enough not to fight or cannibalise each other; something we see evidence of on several of the units. Sheds containing younger pigs tend to look more acceptable, with more space and an early influx of fresh bedding. However, pigs will often remain in these same pens for five months, and it is my experience that welfare issues can develop fairly quickly after arrival, owing to their rapid growth, inappropriate conditions, and inadequate care.

I am concerned that there are pigs who should have been euthanised

long before the investigations took place, for welfare reasons. There is widespread disease, sometimes with multiple issues on a single unit, requiring mass medication of antibiotics and resulting in significant mortality, suggesting problems are not identified or treated promptly enough to prevent suffering.

Even basic care is lacking on some of these 'higher welfare' units, which is unsurprising given the numbers present, some with several thousands of pigs under the care of a small number of people in a 'factory farm' setting.

Sheds with large numbers can be extremely stressful in terms of social dynamics and an ability to move away from other pigs in the event of hierarchy, sexual frustration or feed-related disputes, leading to the high incidence of wounds on pigs' bodies.

83% of units investigated had pigs with docked tails, some of which were extremely short, and some of mixed lengths in the same location. I would class this as 'routine' mutilation, which is technically illegal,

and going against the suggested 'minimal amount removed' in the RSPCA's standards allowed as a last resort to mitigate tail biting. If the standards were indeed 'high welfare', there should be no need to mitigate vice behaviours like tail and ear biting, as the pigs' needs would be sufficiently met to keep stress lower than the threshold for developing horrifying coping mechanisms like this.

While these investigations offer a snapshot of what is happening on RSPCA Assured pig farms, it is reflective of my experience across hundreds, even at pre-arranged inspections, and indeed I have seen a lot worse from the scheme.

In my opinion, to refer to RSPCA Assured pigs as 'high welfare' is extremely misleading, and for the RSPCA to be involved in such cruel industrial exploitation of animals is deeply disappointing given their outward, honourable intention to prevent cruelty to animals. In short, the pig industry and the RSPCA are failing to provide anything close to a life worth living for pigs.



Dr Alice Brough writes: “Here is my summary of the evidence provided across the 18 investigations on 12 pig farms.

Legal Breaches

1. Lack of prompt euthanasia
 2. Lack of appropriate enrichment
 3. Poor hygiene, particularly around water provision sites
 4. Failure to correctly store/dispose of dead animals
- Faeces all around drinkers causing contamination.
 - A dead pig is left between pens for likely 48 hours +. There is blood in the passageway, along with a dead pig – so pigs are pulled out and shot outside pens but then not disposed of immediately and correctly into locked dead bins.
 - A pig is left with what is likely to be a large inguinal hernia, at serious risk of rupture and externalisation of gastrointestinal tract; removal to a hospital pen might have been appropriate earlier on in the course of development of this swelling, but now euthanasia is indicated and would likely have been for some time.
 - Enrichment across several of the farms comprises
- either nothing, relying on straw which in many instances is scarce or contaminated, or we see a single chain hanging from the ceiling, a piece of plastic on a chain, and a long-chewed away rope. Beyond this, manipulable material is extremely scarce in several of the farms.
 - Some of the farms are providing extremely poor living conditions, with a large build-up of excrement. Pigs appear filthy with no clean, dry lying area. The footage shows bare floors, rough concrete for lying on with a complete lack of bedding, while in other pens there is only wet bedding.
 - One pig is in lateral recumbency trying and failing to right themselves, there are marks in the pool of excrement they are forced to lie in, from paddling their legs, with another pig urinating almost on top of them.
 - Another dying pig is seen covered in wounds, hock and forelimb abrasions, with staring eyes and grimace indicative of pain.
 - A pig is seen with kyphosis – ‘humpy back’ – she is emaciated, small and possibly experiencing some ataxia or abnormal locomotion due to the spinal defect.
 - The causes of kyphosis can be genetic (due to selection for long loins), nutritional or traumatic.



Pigs should be euthanised as soon as it becomes apparent that it is causing a problem (as in this case); this pig is well beyond that, and therefore the stockperson has separated this pig from her group to prolong a life of suffering that cannot be alleviated.

- Lights were already on in the shed when investigators arrived at night, which doesn't allow for proper rest and diurnal cycles.

Further RSPCA Standards Breaches

1. Routine mutilations, some very short tail docks
 2. Lack of appropriate bedding and comfort
 3. Some not split-sexed
- 10 out of 12 farms had docked tails – so ~83% docked, some very short, some mixed lengths in the same pens and some with intact tails in otherwise fully-docked groups; pigs with long tails could be targeted in the event of vice behaviour developing.
 - Many of the farms had minimal or no clean, dry lying area with sufficient straw bedding.
 - Some provided only an uneven, solid, dirty floor.
 - Some had only soiled straw.
 - Some had a significant build-up of excrement.

- Small pigs should be well-bedded for thermal comfort, and are not.
- In one shot it appears that a larger proportion of the pen is dunging area than lying area; 'reverse dunging', so having to bed the dunging passage where the water drinkers are, meaning straw will become wet very quickly. This may be due to the presence of enteric disease – diarrhoea – and can be affected by other factors like thermal comfort.
- It is clear on some farms that pens are likely not washed out between batches, with significant cobwebs and dust, and caked-on faeces on walls in pens with young pigs.
- It looks as though there has been an attempt to split-sex on some of the farms; however it is almost impossible to do this completely as there will not be an even number of gilts and boars for the pens, and therefore we can see a high proportion of mixed groups. Some don't attempt to split, as RSPCA standards stipulate its requirement only for pigs being taken above 110kg, which is normal slaughter weight.
 - Gilts can be targeted by boars and be crushed, suffocated, or otherwise injured with an inability to escape. Many will go to slaughter pregnant.

A dead and decomposing pig left in the aisle between pens at an RSPCA Assured farm in Somerset, 23rd March 2024



Welfare Issues

1. Cramped conditions
2. Widespread disease
3. Widespread injuries (fight wounds, tail and ear biting)
4. Boar stud 'normal' conditions

Conditions:

- The stocking density on these farms looks typical for RSPCA Assured, and that is, generally, cramped with little room to move, delineate areas for different activities, or express normal behaviours.
- Pigs are crowded in very large groups, and in one shot we see a pig being mounted in the middle of this mass of pigs, unable to escape.
- Pigs shown fighting with nowhere to escape. These are sexually mature males in a pen of perhaps 50-60 pigs.
- Pigs are seen having to step over each other to reach feeders, disturbing those lying down and causing pigs to vocalise.
 - Deprivation of rest and sleep can seriously affect welfare.
- There is a lot of noise; vocalisations suggestive of unhappy pigs.
- It looks like 'ventilation' is just moving dust around, with a thick layer on surfaces and thick in air on one farm. On others it looks incredibly dusty under foot – these atmospheric conditions could be contributing to the widespread coughing heard on many of the farms.
- Low ceilings on some pens, not in a great state, with possible effects on air quality for larger pigs.
- Some red eyes/conjunctiva can be seen which can be suggestive of high atmospheric ammonia, an extremely aversive air pollutant.
- A beheaded bird is seen hanging from the ceiling – perhaps put in place to scare off wild birds.

Disease:

- Variation in size of pigs throughout footage is indicative of possibly long-standing disease issues not identified promptly or addressed appropriately.
- Coughing can be heard throughout much of the footage, some dry, persistent and some deeper, 'chesty', some productive, suggestive of possibly multiple pathologies and a mix of respiratory pathogens, along with a clearly noxious environment in many instances.
- Multiple umbilical and inguinal hernias present of varying size, some with associated diarrhoea staining; intestines can become trapped in hernias and cause gastrointestinal issues.
 - Several hernias seen larger than would be appropriate to send to slaughter, and therefore these pigs should be euthanised to prevent catastrophe, or, at best, prolonged suffering.
- Gastrointestinal disease present on several farms.
 - Severe diarrhoea in multiple groups.
 - Hanging, flicking tails indicative of gastrointestinal discomfort.

- Lameness present on several farms.
 - One pig with severe forelimb lameness, who doesn't appear to be spray-marked suggesting possibly not under treatment.
 - Several seen with mild-moderate lameness.
 - One pig with deformed front legs looks to be marked for slaughter; likely a birth defect.

Fighting/vice behaviours:

- Extensive evidence of fighting in some pens; significant skin wounds covering their whole bodies with some evidence of infection/necrosis.
- Tail biting and ear biting present – vice behaviours due to stress.
 - One pig has both ears chewed almost completely off, they are swollen/infected, and they now have a head tilt and shaking head suggesting discomfort.
- A fresh injury across one pig's back/flank is a possible 'riding' injury (attempts at mating/sexual frustration) and has bled.
- Abrasions over hind leg/lateral rump are likely from other pigs in the pen, another sign of stress/inappropriate environment.
- Swollen ears seen are aural haematomas from bashing on environment/feeders, or more likely damage from other pigs (as others in clips have bite marks on their ears) – this is a vice behaviour like tail-biting, indicating issues with environment/health/welfare.

Some vet reports were provided from one of the farms, containing the following information:

Post-mortem examination findings (at least 13 carried out over 3 visits):

- Viral lung lesions and pleural interstitial pneumonia
- Endocarditis
- Pericarditis
- Pleurisy
- Peritonitis
- Oedema of colon +/- inflamed intestinal tract

Differential diagnoses (likely a combination):

- E.coli, bowel oedema disease
- Underlying viral disease (PRRS, Influenza, Enzootic Pneumonia)
- Secondary bacterial infection, Glässer's disease

Treatments provided:

- Karidox (doxycycline antibiotic) and Lincocin (lincomycin antibiotic) courses through the water.

Comments:

- Cough ongoing but still heard consistently throughout
- Significant mortality since finishing Karidox (21 dead)



Pigs forced into overcrowded pens at an RSPCA Assured farm, 22nd March 2024

Intensive pig farming hides under RSPCA Assured label

A total of 7 of the 12 of the pig farms we are reporting here were conducted on what DEFRA classify as 'intensive' farms; that is, holding over 2000 pigs >30kg at any one time.

This contravenes the RSPCA's own claims not to support intensive ('factory') farming – as evidenced by our video footage and photography, and investigation reports, verified by a pig veterinarian.

For example, at an 'intensive' RSPCA Assured farm near Bridgewater, Somerset, we found numerous

examples of animal suffering and scenes of death that the British public would, we expect, find upsetting.

You can check for yourself which RSPCA Assured scheme farms are classified as 'intensive' via the DEFRA Environmental Permitting Regulations search function.

Yet this is the statement on 'factory farming' taken from the RSPCA Assured's own website, in the Q&A section:

Can RSPCA Assured Meat Be Factory Farmed?

"No, we do not allow factory farming on our scheme. Both the RSPCA and RSPCA Assured strongly oppose intensive farming practices, which are characterised by the use of close confinement systems (e.g. cages and crates), low space allowances for the animals, and barren environments, none of which are permitted on RSPCA Assured certified farms.

"We also strongly condemn the use of fast-growing breeds. We regard this practice as cruel and unethical and we do not permit the use of such breeds on any RSPCA Assured certified farms.

"We believe that by increasing the proportion of animals being farmed to higher welfare standards and reducing the number of farmed animals overall, we will see a reduction, and eventually an end, to the intensive farming of farm animals."

Farm Location	Date	Animals	INVESTIGATOR FINDINGS OF SUFFERING / DISEASE / DYING
Somerset	15/02/24 22/03/24 27/04/24	Pigs	Dead pig in alleyway. Pigs dying due to viral infection, pigs breathing heavily. Abscesses on lower stomachs. Our investigators were horrified and traumatised. Found a decomposing and gas inflated dead pig (could be same pig found previously); one pig had a missing eye, one had had their ear bitten with multiple wounds on their body, multiple pigs looked malnourished and there was obvious bullying going on. One aggressive male pig was forcibly chasing and attempting to mate with a smaller female, she had wounds/scratches all over her body. There was lots of screaming. Bins full of pigs and sheep, dead pigs had rope tied around their legs. Crowded, lacking enrichment.
Somerset	19/02/24 29/04/24	Pigs	Scratches and swollen ears, biting marks, eye infections, starving and frail piglets Still incredibly dusty and dirty, water feeders were dirty and food supplies were getting low. Looked very busy but dont believe were overcrowded. Some had scratches and one with swelling under eye.
Wiltshire	23/02/24 24/02/24 26/04/24	Pigs	Two dying pigs, unable to move, covered in mud and faeces, spray painted and separated from others, one other with injured leg.
Suffolk	27/02/24 07/03/24	Pigs	Pig with eye infection. RSPCA Assured farm registered as an 'intensive farm' (>2000 pigs) with DEFRA
Oxfordshire	05/03/24	Pigs	Dead pig in with others, sow with piglets found dead in bin. Few light fittings, equipment hanging off walls, dust everywhere.
Norfolk	13/03/24	Pigs	Pig with wound, distress from overcrowding.
Peterborough	10/04/24	Pigs	Lots of pigs, some quite crowded. The freedom farrowing crate shed was much noisier and busier, we could only see through the cracks in the walls. The sows were friendly and inquisitive, very interested in getting our attention and coming up to us.
Wiltshire	19/04/24	Pigs	Mixture of 'finishers', 'growers', sows and boar. Farm was very dirty, some sheds had zero enrichment. Sows had scratches and marks. Sheds had metal adjustable roofs hanging above pigs (looked very dangerous).
Shropshire	20/04/24	Pigs	Large filthy sheds. Zero enrichment, dangling wires, thick layers of waste. Coughing pigs. Temp too low: 9 degrees.
Norfolk	29/04/24	Pigs	Significant aggression between pigs
Oxfordshire	01/05/24	Pigs	Pigs with growths
Oxfordshire	02/05/24	Pigs	Visibly dirty air and walkways. Lots of coughing pigs. Thick dirt and dust above pens. Drinker spilling and causing wet ground. No enrichment, except one hanging chain. One pig with deformed ears, others with broken or deformed legs. Lots covered in spray paint.
TOTALS	18 investigations	12 farms	



RSPCA Assured farm investigation, Wiltshire

23rd and 24th February 2024

Under DEFRA codes of practice, this farm is considered to be conducting intensive ('factory') farming (>2000 pigs over 30kg on site).

On our first visit we found two dying pigs, unable to move. One (right) was lying in excrement and seemed to be convulsing and spasming; the other had wounds on their legs and was clearly very unwell.

We saw another pig with an injured leg (above). There were poor conditions throughout, thick with urine and faeces in the dark conditions.

When we returned the next evening to see if conditions had changed, the dying pig was gone. The other two were still present.



A boar lies listless and depressed in isolation at an RSPCA Assured farm in Cambridge, 11th April 2024



BOARS

Boars are often forgotten and forlorn, used only for artificial insemination so not a ‘consumer’ product concern

Dr Alice Brough writes:

These individually housed animals are effectively in isolation except for the small, barred windows for contact with the boar on either side. The pens shown will be within legal limits, but provide minimal stimulation and allow for only minimal freedom of movement, and almost no expression of normal behaviour.

Boars tend to be forgotten within the pig farming system, and although smaller in numbers and used in different ways, their suffering can be extensive. Most commercial pig farms in the UK use artificial insemination (AI) for breeding, and many are supplied by a small number of large genetics companies from their ‘stud’ farms. They will still be culled at a fraction of their natural lifespan.

My experience of stud farms is that it is a miserable existence. Most live alone in small pens with minimal or no stimulation, other than to be brought out for

semen collection or stressful blood sampling. Those that live in a pair or a three can often end up fighting very severely, causing deep lacerations sometimes requiring euthanasia. Semen collection usually involves having them mount a ‘dummy’ and a worker to manually stimulate and direct the ejaculate into a collection vessel. This usually begins at once a week, increasing to four times a week in older boars.

I was performing frequent euthanasia for lameness that didn’t respond to treatment. Stud boars are giant, used for their ability to produce a ‘good meat pig’ and therefore keep growing, and their musculoskeletal system can struggle under the weight. While a male wild boar will be around 60-100kg, breeding boars can be around 400kg.

In most boars, semen production will reduce beyond two years; however, many will be culled due to size, aggression or genetic drag before this de-generation occurs.

Farm Location	Date	Animals	EVIDENCE OF SUFFERING / DISEASE / DYING
Cambridge	06/04/24 11/04/24	Boars	Approx 80 enormous Boars (male pigs) in single cubicles approx 3 metres by 2 metres, lots of straw in sections but exisiting in their own waste with small barred windows to communicate. Some had enrichment (plastic jug hanging from ceiling), others none. They looked very sad but interested in human interaction, one boar was trying to get out of his cubicle (we have footage).
TOTALS	2 Investigations	1 farm	



CHICKENS

A dead chicken on perching grates at an RSPCA Assured farm in Kent, 28th April 2024

We conducted 22 investigations on 18 RSPCA Assured chicken farms, exposing the suffering of both laying hens and ‘broilers’ raised for meat. As with nearly all historical investigations, we found the animals existing in horrendous but commonplace conditions that often fell short of any welfare standard, let alone ‘higher welfare’ RSPCA Assured scheme regulations.

Laying Hens

In a year, the British public eats 13 billion eggs. The majority of these come from the 40.5 million egg-laying hens farmed in the UK each year. According to the RSPCA, their Assured scheme guarantees “good animal welfare no matter the system” and claims that Assured free-range hens must be provided with:

- Environmental enrichment both inside and outside.
- Shade and shelter, including trees and bushes which protect the birds from bad weather and predators.
- Access to dust pits giving them the opportunity to dustbathe and keep their feathers healthy and clean.

These were **not** the conditions we found. In all of our

investigations, we found the basics were absent. Instead intelligent, feeling birds were living in cramped misery. Professor Andrew Knight, a renowned veterinary professor of animal welfare, reviewed footage from 16 of the 19 farms we investigated, split across laying hens and chickens farmed for meat. These are his findings:

“In these farms, many hundreds of laying hens often appeared crowded onto perches at very high stocking densities, within large, apparently windowless sheds. In one farm chickens on the top tier appeared to have insufficient free space to stand fully upright. Despite the chickens being tightly packed there sometimes appeared insufficient perching area for all, with some chickens forced to roost on filthy flooring –

indicated by some lower legs being caked in faeces and straw. This is stressful for chickens. They prefer elevated perches, having evolved this as a predator-avoidance behaviour.

Sometimes chickens were observed perching on lower feed troughs, although perches must be positioned at a height that prevents birds from perching on the edge of the feed track. This results in faecal contamination of feed. Metal slatted flooring was also sometimes used. This can damage feet. In one farm this appeared the only flooring type.

The sheds also appeared to include little to no environmental enrichment. Enrichment devices were sparse and appeared mostly limited to empty, suspended water containers, plastic objects or tassles, upturned buckets, crates or bales onto which chickens might presumably jump, or an occasional metal perch.

Inability to exercise highly motivated natural behaviours such as scratching, foraging, exploring and dust-bathing due to lack of environmental enrichment, results in chronic stress. This can manifest as feather pecking. Many birds had signs of severe feather loss as a result, visible on the backs and necks of the chickens. This unavoidably results in further stress, and pain.

Rather than providing appropriate space and environmental enrichment to address this, beak-trimming is common within the industry. This involves removing part of the upper and lower jaws, typically with a hot blade, without painkillers. This causes acute and chronic pain. Beak-trimmed birds were visible in the footage. Unnatural manipulation of light/dark cycles was also evident, with shed records showing as much as 22 hours of light, on some days. This can increase hen productivity, but provides insufficient opportunity for rest.

Hygiene appeared poor, with many surfaces caked with faeces, which was also visible within feed trays and water bowls. Several birds appeared partly covered in faeces. Several large buckets full of broken eggs were also visible in some footage. This can attract rodents, who can attack birds and spread diseases.

Some chickens (living and dead) were visible outside cages (and occasionally even outside sheds), or trapped under caging with no access to food and water. Such escaped and trapped birds indicates poor maintenance and threatens the health of those birds. Dead bodies were also visible. In one case corpses were piled into a wheelbarrow outside a shed. Corpses – especially when not enclosed within a container – pose a hygiene risk and can attract rodents. Hygiene equipment such as hand sanitisers sometimes had substantial build-up of cobwebs, indicating long disuse.

In another case a live electrical wire, emitting visible sparks, lay across a floor covered in feathers. This posed a clear risk to chickens as well as a fire hazard.

The air quality also appeared poor in some cases,

Expert Reviewer: Professor Andrew Knight, BVMS



Professor Andrew Knight BSc./BVMS, PhD (Griff.), PhD (Winch.), MANZCVS, DipECAWBM (AWSEL), DipACAW, FRCVS, PFHEA

Andrew Knight is a Veterinary Professor of Animal Welfare. He established a Centre for Animal Welfare and two animal welfare degrees at England's University of Winchester in 2015. He's also an Adjunct Professor in the School of Veterinary Medicine, College of Environmental and Life Sciences, Murdoch University, Western Australia (one of Australia's leading veterinary schools), and in the School of Environment and Science at Griffith University, Queensland. He is a British, European, American and New Zealand Veterinary Specialist in Animal Welfare; a Fellow of the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons, and a Principal Fellow of Advance HE. He has many publications, websites, and social media videos on animal welfare issues, which have attracted numerous awards. He edited the Routledge Handbook of Animal Welfare (2023). This summarises all main animal welfare issues, and key animal law in all major world regions. It's available fully open access via www.aknight.info/aw-book.

with dust and particulate matter clearly evident. In another case windbreak mesh had large holes, allowing ingress of wind and rain.

Some birds had obvious medical problems. One was holding her wing at an unnatural angle, consistent with an untreated fracture or dislocation. Some hens appeared to be collapsed and dying, or dead. Another appeared to have pus exuding from her cloaca.

Rough handling was also evident. Workers were removing chickens to crates, with multiple chickens

suspended by their legs and then roughly thrust into crates, upside down. This would likely have resulted in significant injuries. A significant proportion of ex-laying hens commonly arrive at the abattoir with fractures, from such handling.

All of the chickens crowded into these barren sheds, with minimal opportunities to exercise highly motivated natural behaviours, experience chronic stress. These birds are highly sentient, and such treatment of them is not ethical. Unfortunately, these conditions are common within the laying hen industry.”

Laying hens crowded behind metal doors at an RSPCA Assured farm in Kent, 22nd March 2024



'Broiler' (Meat) Chickens

Again, according to the RSPCA, "every year, over one billion chickens are slaughtered for meat in the UK ... reared in bare, dimly lit and overcrowded conditions."

The RSPCA Assured scheme is meant to be a promise to prevent this misery - but rather, it acts as a cover up for it. The Assured scheme 'promises' chickens:

- more space than they get under the law or some other standards.
- enrichment, such as perches, straw bales and objects to peck at.
- windows for natural daylight.



And yet Prof. Andrew Knight found that "**within our videos what appeared to be many hundreds of meat chicken chicks were crowded at high stocking densities, within vast, apparently windowless sheds, which included little to no environmental enrichment.** The only enrichment devices visible were occasional plastic bottles, sometimes suspended out of reach of the chicks, preventing their use, occasional straw bales, a role of what appeared to be cardboard, an apparently random pile of wooden planks, and in one instance a perch – albeit with insufficient space per chick for concurrent use by most of the flock.

Broken equipment on the other hand appeared accessible to the chicks, indicating poor maintenance on some farms:

- In one case an automatic feed dispenser, supporting rod and associated electrical motor and wiring appeared collapsed, resting on the ground rather than suspended above, which would have allowed access only to the feed bowl as intended.
- Numerous chicks were seen on and immediately around the electrical motor and wiring, which was potentially hazardous.
- A dead chick stuck inside an upturned feeder, whilst in another a dead chick was within the feed tray itself.
- Lines of water dispensers dry and unable to dispense water (as demonstrated by failure to respond to manual stimulation), indicating mechanical failure.
- In other cases water dispensers were heavily contaminated with faeces and flooring material (sometimes completely full of these), indicating a marked failure of hygienic maintenance so severe that some affected water dispensers were unusable.

- a broken water nipple dispenser resulted in water continually running, soaking the underlying flooring.

Scattered around shed floors a large number of chicks were observed collapsed, apparently unable to right themselves or walk. Some showed rapid, laboured breathing, or were apparently dying. Others were clearly dead (**above**), and in early or advanced stages of decomposition. Some appeared to be suffering from diarrhoea, and in one case, from a broken wing.

The strains of chicken bred for meat have been genetically selected over many generations, to grow as rapidly as possible, and to have enlarged breast muscles. Unfortunately, however, these extremely elevated growth rates place severe strain on the cardiovascular system, and the joints, soft tissues and bones of the legs, resulting in conditions such as splayed legs, which can result in severe difficulties in walking. A number of such chicks were seen. A proportion of chickens hence die prematurely, and many others become lame. Increasingly severe leg pain and inability to support growing body weight results in immobility for many chickens as they become older and heavier. They spend ever longer on urine-soaked flooring, which commonly results in chemical irritation of the skin for older, heavier chicks.

Many of these birds suffer severely. All crowded into these barren sheds, with minimal opportunities to exercise highly motivated natural behaviours such as foraging and exploring within a naturalistic environment, and dust-bathing, experience chronic stress.

These birds are highly sentient, and such treatment of them is not ethical. Unfortunately, these conditions are common within the meat chicken industry."

Laying hens at an RSPCA
Assured farm in Kent,
22nd March 2024



Farm Location	Date	Animals	INVESTIGATOR FINDINGS OF SUFFERING / DISEASE / DYING
Lake District	28/01/24	Hens	Crowded sheds, dead found in wheelbarrow outside.
Kent	29/1/24	Hens	Rough catching, thrown in crates, screaming from hens as handled.
Kent	02/02/24 29/03/24	Hens	Multiple dead chickens outside sheds, been there for days, Some live chickens also stuck outside sheds. Chicken looking sick/dehydrated/starving trapped under layers, dead chicken under layers, many with feather loss, other dead chickens.
Leicestershire	17/02/24	Hens	Overcrowded (larger shed), some hens had injuries from being pecked
Cornwall	29/02/24	Hens	RSPCA guidelines stuck to door. Found hens in cages. Found numerous hens with moderate-severe feather loss and peck marks.
Kent	18/03/24 28/04/24	Hens	Huge sheds, 64,000 hens per building, split into 4 sections, 16,000 hens per section. Very crowded, some hens trapped in an area unable to get out, some dead, Found one dying chicken on the floor, the rest were very miserable.
Nottinghamshire	23/03/24 29/03/24	Hens	Very busy sheds, electrical deterrent wires laying on floor. All pop doors mechanical easy to open.
Sussex	28/03/24	Hens	Intensive, dead chickens, abscess/infection on rear of a chicken, bulging/tumour in crop, chickens with feather loss.
Suffolk	03/03/24	Hens	Alive chickens trapped outside sheds, with some dead chickens.
Kent	06/04/24	Hens	Very crowded. Hens with feather loss. Some trapped under platform, potentially could starve/dehydrate to death.
West Sussex	09/04/24	Hens	Three sheds, one emptied and partly cleaned. One chicken badly pecked at. Couldn't see any enrichment inside or outside, with no shaded areas outside. Potential biosafety/hygiene issues with no visible PPE kit/ stations and also dog prints in entry to a shed.
East Yorkshire	15/04/24	Hens	Hens trapped underneath perches, released with removable ramps. Waste building up in places/across ramps.
Tyne and Wear	17/04/24	Hens	Dead hens in barn, one being pecked and walked over. Overcrowding look, poo stained barns. Dead hens in bin. Paper work with records of culls, suppliers, RSPCA approval.
Somerset	02/02/24	Broiler	M&S social media farm. Dead chicken in barn, dirty water trays.
Norfolk	08/03/24 17/04/24	Broiler	Baby chicks, only days old. At least 20 already dead and more were in devastating conditions, many dying before us. They pecked at the dying and would walk over them.
Suffolk	19/04/24	Broiler	Some feather loss.
Suffolk	20/04/24	Broiler	Eight sheds, all full and hot, one was recording 30.5C degrees and no water was available despite the heat. Dead birds found and looked as though they had been there for a while. A few hay bails, a frame perch, and a plastic bottle on a string for "enrichment." No outside access. Locked wheelie bins containing dead birds, a little under half full.
Devon	02/05/24	Broiler	One shed was horrific. Approx. 70-80 had died, some dying. Concerns surrounding water and piles of wood.
TOTALS	22 investigations		18 farms



A salmon with missing eye and deformed eye socket at an RSPCA Assured farm, 15th May 2024

SALMON & TROUT

We conducted 18 investigations on 14 RSPCA Assured fish farms, exposing the treatment of fishes who are often forgotten when it comes to ensuring they live good lives. We found some of the most painful scenes of suffering anywhere in the animal agriculture industry: fish eaten alive by lice then boiled alive to remove the lice so their flesh can be sold in supermarkets.

“Amidst increasing evidence that fish are more intelligent than once thought,” it reads on the RSPCA Assured scheme website page regarding salmon and trout, “research continues to suggest that they have the mental capacity to feel pain and suffer like any other animal.”

It is for this reason that the suffering on the fish in every industrial fish farm is so horrifying. The suffering is ubiquitous, As our expert reviewer Mark Borthwick states of the suffering, “what we’re seeing here IS compliance, which means the standard is set in the wrong place.”

Compassion in World Farming calls salmon “fundamentally unsuitable for farming” and we, again, agree. We do not understand how the RSPCA as an animal charity - the oldest and most well-known in the

world - can rubber-stamp this terrible distress that we found at every farm.

According to Mark Borthwick “because the RSPCA is process-driven rather than product-driven”, the fact that our footage shows endemic evidence of diseased fish does not mean the scheme is noncompliant.

That is, very often the cycles of processing fish require treatment of the diseases, especially lice. And yet much of this treatment is inhumane, bearing in mind that the RSPCA accept that fish have the capacity to feel pain and suffer like any other animals.

However, the overwhelming number of dead, diseased, and harmed fish at several sites, make the claim that the

scheme guarantees 'humane' treatment much harder to stand behind. Some of the images of damaged mouths and noses were the worst experts had ever seen. What is clear from the footage is that **this suffering is part of the scheme.**

Many individuals and organisations have already made this point, including the RSPCA's President Chris Packham, Wild Fish, Animal Equality, OneKind, Off The Table, the investigator Don Staniford, Ocean Rebellion, Compassion in World Farming and more.

As verified by Mark Borthwick, here is a long summary of the many welfare violations and regulation breaches that have been evidenced in our investigation footage:

- "Schooling behavior, the fish are swimming together. Salmon don't school in nature, they are solitary predators when they are at sea. This is a maladaptive stress response to the stocking density. They are at a stocking density way greater than the permitted 17kgm³ in this area. Just because you have that many salmon does not mean they will evenly distribute themselves throughout the cage to maintain that. This is because salmon have a drive to be near the light during the daytime, which overwhelms their drive to be in suitable conditions. When you track salmon with collars, they will crowd together even if it means they are in oxygen deprivation. see: Solstorm, David, et al. "Dissolved oxygen variability in a commercial sea-cage exposes farmed Atlantic salmon to growth limiting conditions." *Aquaculture* 486 (2018): 122-129.
- Salmon with damage to their nose area. This is often from abrasion via nets.
- Spotty damage is either from poor handling, or from lice damage. It also is yellow, which can be from jaundice. Jaundice is commonly caused by PRV (piscine orthoreovirus).
- Salmon with substantial dorsal fin damage; can be caused by abrasion during handling, often from nets, or from impellers in pipes, or damage from sea lice.
- Moribund fish that can't swim straight, and have visible lice sea lice damage.
- Salmon has their upper jaw missing. This would affect ability to feed and express natural behaviours.
- Salmon's detritus (poop) is (oddly) salmon color. This can be because they are eating food which is dyed pink to help their meat achieve the pink colour. It can also be that they have been eating other salmon. Could be indicative of a health issue with the salmon.
- Many have missing noses, suspect a machine has been poorly adjusted which damages the salmon.
- Salmon with exophthalmia. This can be caused by nutrient deficiency, infections, or damage.
- Fish so damaged they should be euthanised.
- Spine damage, or a swim bladder problem.
- Scoliosis.
- Ruptured ulcers.
- White circles look like a fungal infection. These are comorbid, but nutrition malfunction can contribute.

Expert Reviewer: Mark Borthwick



Mark Borthwick is an OOC DTP Doctoral fellow studying behaviour and behaviour change on salmon farms. He was formerly the Head of Research at the Aquatic Life Institute, and has worked on aquaculture policy for Global GAP, Westminster, Holyrood, the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Animal Welfare, and the Biden Administration.

Mark's Statement:

"As part of this project I have reviewed footage from 13 salmon farms. It's clear that severely diseased and damaged animals are the norm, and without exception, all the animals that I have seen in this footage are living in very poor conditions.

"Many of these salmon have mouths so damaged that they cannot eat, fins so damaged they struggle to swim, and are suffering from multiple comorbid fungal, viral, and bacterial diseases. There is no way we would treat a land-based animal like this.

"This suffering is not caused by a single lapse in standards and practice, but rather, a farming system that is fundamentally not fit for purpose. I question the factual basis on which the RSPCA is certifying these animals, as the RSPCA's own standards are not being met, and these animals are clearly being kept in cruel conditions."



A salmon with a severe ulcer at an RSPCA Assured farm in Scotland, 15th May 2024

Fish farms riddled with lice, injury and disease

Earlier this year, the Scottish Environmental Protection Agency (SEPA) identified 19 fish farms on lochs along the west coast of Scotland as posing the most risk to endangered wild salmon by infecting them with sea lice. Many of these are RSPCA Assured scheme approved.

At one of these RSPCA Assured Scheme fish farms, our investigators found widespread evidence of lice, including on lumpfish, who are 'sacrificial' fish used up in the production of salmon.

The lumpfish is covered in sea lice - showing that they are also suffering in this process. This is a huge welfare

issue in itself. Other welfare issues at this fish farm included:

- salmon eye damage.
- scoliosis.
- dead fish.
- fish with severe swim bladder problems, which is why they can't swim straight. This can be caused by sudden surfacing, or bacterial infections.
- fish with severe spinal deformities.
- many fish with missing dorsal fins.
- ulcers (see above).
- cataracts.

Crowding operations fail to meet RSPCA Assured standards

At another farm, we witnessed multiple instances of suffering and injury from overcrowding. The AWC's 2023 update to the opinion on Welfare of Farmed Fish at Time of Killing (WATOK) says this: "Crowding is stressful and the number of occasions it is applied to any group should be minimised. The RSPCA and Humane Slaughter Association recommend that crowding duration should not exceed two hours. Oxygen levels should be monitored during crowding and supplemental oxygen delivered if necessary. Operators should be trained to recognise fish density and stress responses, so that this can be balanced with efficiency of fish capture/treatment and duration of crowding."

Mark Borthwick states: "I have never seen this operation take less than two hours, and [in the footage] I do not see any oxygen monitoring equipment, or any oxygen diffusers. The pumps used to move fish around are responsible for some of the damage we have seen."



A salmon with a damaged nose and head at an RSPCA Assured farm in Scotland, 4th April 2024

Farm Location	Date	Animals	INVESTIGATION FINDINGS OF SUFFERING / DISEASE / DYING
Scotland	15/03/24 20/03/24 24/03/24	Salmon	Shocking footage of salmon without eyes, open wounds, living in overcrowded conditions to maintain confusion so salmon don't fight. Fish being crowded and pumped onto a wellboat. Unacceptable overcrowding according to RSPCA standards.
Scotland	20/03/24	Salmon	Multiple scenes of blind salmon infested with lice, many with open wounds. The official lice count during the week of recording at this farm was 0.31 adult female sea lice per fish. Head wounds.
Scotland	20/03/24	Salmon	Young smolts being pumped into the pens.
Scotland	24/03/24	Salmon	Salmon with lice, wounds, popeye. Evidence of the use of seal deterrents which don't appear to work as there's evidence of seal-damaged dead salmon (regs say deterrants should only be used if they are efective). Multiple bins of dead salmon.
Scotland	25/03/24	Salmon	Thermolicer treatment where salmon are pumped onto a boat, passed through hot water to kill the lice and then pumped back into the pen. Dead salmon seen floating after treatment (boiled alive).
Scotland	26/03/24	Salmon	Overcrowding, seems to be against RSPCA regs. Salmon getting stuck in grading machine.
Scotland	26/03/24	Salmon	Two workers inspect the salmon, while one writes on a clipboard. Likely a regular lice count. During the count workers drop fish four times. After the count all 18 fish filmed are tossed approx 6ft high over the handrail back into the pens.
Scotland	21/04/24 15/05/24	Salmon	Salmon with popeye, swimming in circles, wounds, wild birds stuck in nets
Scotland	24/04/24	Salmon	Findings being collated.
Scotland	26/04/24	Salmon	Findings being collated.
Scotland	26/04/24	Salmon	Salmon transported by vessel called Ronjafisk for 54 hours, RSPCA standards are 8 hours.
Scotland	19/05/24	Salmon	Artificial lighting.
Hull	10/03/24 16/04/24	Trout	Found dead fish stuck to grids, fish dead upside down rotting, fish pieces found floating in water. Water was pretty dirty. Dead cormorant found dead next to one pool. One pond had fish, thick with mould and algae. Dead bird found floating on water.
Scotland	20/03/24	Trout	Serious overcrowding, but note that trout regulations on crowding are not as well defined as salmon. Trout dropped from scoop net are in too large a volume to be able to stay in water, the fish are not adequately covered and so are out of the water for more than 15 seconds. Washing down decks and blood going into the sea is breach of regs.
TOTALS	18 investigations		14 farms

An aerial view of a fishing boat deck. Several workers in high-visibility gear (yellow, red, blue) are visible. Large white rectangular bins are scattered across the deck. A blue mechanical device is on the right. The scene is busy with industrial equipment and workers.

Fish suffer asphyxiation while being slaughtered

At one RSPCA Assured trout farm, the fish *in the black pentagonal bin below* were kept out of the water for minutes, well about the regulation that states fish can only be kept out of the water alive for a maximum of 15 seconds before being slaughtered or euthanized.

This image of industrial capture and slaughter is not the image the RSPCA would like the British public to believe is being 'assured' by their scheme. Yet this is standard practice, as is obvious from the investment into industrial-scale machinery and expert machine handlers to scoop up and kill the fish.



The RSPCA Assured Scheme

On 6th July, 1994, the RSPCA established the Freedom Food label which was renamed the RSPCA Assured scheme in 2015. The scheme involves the labelling of meat, dairy, eggs, and fish and claims they come from 'higher welfare' sources. For a product to be RSPCA Assured, the farm, haulier and slaughterhouse must all be assessed to their welfare standards.[1]

They claim that this scheme promotes better practices in the farming of animals and allows shoppers to buy in line with their values. Participating outlets and farms must meet certain criteria for animal welfare above the legal baseline. The RSPCA's goal is to reach "at least half of all farmed animals in the UK being reared to the RSPCA's welfare standards by 2030".

Set up to administer the RSPCA's farm animal welfare labelling scheme, RSPCA Assured Ltd is a wholly-owned subsidiary of the RSPCA, 100% owned by the RSPCA, with four RSPCA trustees and four non-executive directors, and standards set by the RSPCA. The Assured scheme is funded through membership fees and logo licensing fees from farms, hauliers and slaughterhouses as well as making a profit from sales of Assured products. [2]

RSPCA Assured encourages consumers to purchase their products via their own advertising campaigns and working with supermarkets and fast food chains who also promote their products. Their marketing portrays their approved farms as happy farms with animals roaming free, with clean, spacious conditions, one advert even showing turkeys in a forest with fairy lights hanging in the trees.[3] M&S and McDonald's sell and promote RSPCA Assured products, with RSPCA Assured also promoting McDonald's on their website, awarding them for their commitment to Farm Animal Welfare, and re-share their advertisements on LinkedIn.[4][5] Further promotion of McDonald's is done on their website which features recipes containing RSPCA Assured animal products.[6]

The scheme also approves practices that the RSPCA claims they oppose, for example intensive farms and the gassing of pigs at slaughter. [7][8] From our investigations, the vast majority of RSPCA farms are classified as "intensive", and their membership fees cover farms with more than 30,000 chickens.[2]

Our investigation found that:

- The standards promised by the RSPCA Assured scheme are barely above the legal baseline or, in some cases, even unlawful.
- Certified RSPCA Assured farms are consistently breaching the criteria set out by the scheme, and are frequently in contravention of basic animal protection laws.
- The scheme certifies practices that the RSPCA have historically campaigned against.
- The RSPCA's marketing materials relating to the scheme are completely inconsistent with the reality of systemic cruelty on their farms.

Notes:

1. <https://www.rspcaassured.org.uk/about-us/>
2. <https://business.rspcaassured.org.uk/resources-for-farmers/rspca-assured-membership-licence-fees/>
3. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AUj7GYvfKrc>
4. McDoanIds - https://www.linkedin.com/posts/rspcaassured_change-a-little-change-a-lot-eggs-2023-activity-7110908335809277952-vbfg/
5. https://www.linkedin.com/posts/rspcaassured_wow-people-love-mcdonalds-relaunched-breakfast-activity-7162086430360485888-QDeV/
6. <https://www.rspcaassured.org.uk/recipes/>
7. <https://www.rspca.org.uk/documents/1494939/7712578/Large+Scale+Farming+information+sheet+Jun18.pdf/261631b1-7c39-bf7a-f38b-760c2ab491e7?t=1553271777541>
8. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2024/03/07/vegan-protesters-accuse-rspca-supporting-gas-chambers/>

The history of investigations into the RSPCA Assured scheme shows it has *never* been ‘one bad apple’

Our exposé is not the first time that suffering and regulation breaches have been exposed on RSPCA farms. Ten animal protection organisations have collectively released at least 33 undercover investigations into RSPCA Assured farms in the last 16 years, showcasing extreme animal cruelty.

Earlier in 2024, the Amazon Prime documentary *Pignorant* showcased the severe suffering experienced by pigs in RSPCA Assured gas chambers, and also shows a worker beating a pig to death with a metal bar on an RSPCA Assured farm. This documentary takes a strong focus on the failure of the RSPCA Assured scheme to protect animals, and its role in misleading the British public.

The failure of the RSPCA Assured scheme to act on suffering and provide even basic regulation and enforcement on its farms is reflective of a wider problem within the industry to offer basic levels of protection to animals.

2011 had some of the “worst abuses” out of them all with workers stubbing out cigarettes into pigs’ faces.

Almost all of the salmon farms in the UK are assured by the RSPCA, but following a series of damning exposés from organisations such as Viva!, Animal Equality, and Wildfish which found sea lice infections, overcrowding and graphic injuries, the RSPCA’s own President Chris Packham called for a moratorium on salmon farming and a boycott of all salmon farms (including from RSPCA salmon farms).

Between 2009 and 2017, Animal Aid inserted secret cameras into 15 slaughterhouses as part of a campaign for greater transparency. They found that the one RSPCA Assured slaughterhouse in Essex they investigated in

Two of the laying hen farms and two of the salmon farms we investigated as part of this report have already been subject to undercover investigations in 2023 and 2020 by other animal organisations and deeply disturbing conditions were found then too. Only one of these farms was suspended by the RSPCA and they were reinstated just one month later. On our repeat visit to these farms we found similar suffering and breaches of laws.

The failure of the RSPCA Assured scheme to act on suffering and provide even basic regulation and enforcement on its farms is reflective of a wider problem within the industry to offer basic levels of protection to animals. In 2022, Animal Equality published a report entitled “The Enforcement Problem” and detailed how animal farming falls consistently foul of regulations due to near total lack of monitoring and enforcement of farming.

It is clear that there is long-term and widespread failure of this scheme. Eleven animal organisations (ourselves included) have independently and collectively worked to expose the truth behind what is happening on RSPCA farms for many years. It is clear the RSPCA needs to drop the Assured scheme.

We wish to express thanks to these organisations exposing the truth behind RSPCA Assured in recent years, and give thanks to all those we cannot mention.

Animal Justice Project
Animal Aid
Animal Equality
Viva!
Direct Action Everywhere
Joey Carbstrong
Hillside Animal Sanctuary
Wildfish
Surge
Scottish Salmon Watch



Final thoughts

Our findings from this investigation into 45 farms found that the RSPCA Assured scheme is misleading the British public about the reality of farming in the UK and, in turn, failing the animals they claim to care for. It is impossible to monitor all farms, with each farm having a pre-arranged visit just once per year.

By attaching their name to this scheme the RSPCA are not only betraying their supporters and the animals; but our British values at the very heart of this nation of animal lovers.

Worse than this, their rubber-stamping exercise has overseen - and arguably legitimised - the significant proliferation in intensive animal farming over the last three decades. Importantly, the RSPCA claims to be against intensive farming, but the majority of RSPCA Assured farms that we investigated were legally registered as "intensive farms". Inconsistencies like these are at the heart of the failings of the scheme.

We are not the first to expose the RSPCA and the deceit of their Assured scheme, and there are many previous investigations from other animal protection organisations shown in this report. Often these investigations are followed by the farm getting dropped from the scheme, investigated, and quietly reinstated. By investigating 40+ RSPCA Assured farms at once, we seek to show that breaches are not isolated instances of 'one bad apple', but



that the whole barrel is rotten.

Moreover, this exposé clearly demonstrates that it is not possible to protect animals from cruelty and neglect in the food system generally. RSPCA Assured farms are meant to be the gold standard for animal welfare, guaranteed by annual farm assessments. But these supposedly monitored farms have been shown to not only fall short of RSPCA Assured standards, but often even basic animal protection laws - in fact, in our investigation, 280 breaches of the law. The reality is, there is no nice way to farm animals and certainly not at anything close to this scale.

The RSPCA needs to lead the way and set a bold focus in its farmed animal work towards building public support behind ambitious political goals of a plant-based transition and nature restoration. Ideally, this should aim towards ending animal farming and fishing and fully transitioning to a plant-based food system. The RSPCA could pursue these goals with actions such as:

- Lobbying for these policy outcomes to the government.
- Building coalitions with other organisations to pursue this goal.
- Working to transition key institutions like universities, councils, hospitals, religious institutions, workplaces, schools, etc. And implement the member's vote

at last year's Annual General Meeting (AGM) by changing RSPCA offices/events and branches to 100% plant based catering.

- Supporting the general public to eat plant-based by running educational programmes in communities promoting entirely plant-based eating, as part of a societal shift.
- Support farmers and rural communities in transitioning away from animal agriculture by creating schemes and funds.
- Working on policy proposals for a plant-based transition and working to build unity behind these with key stakeholders.
- Working with sister organisations to push for international policies towards a plant-based transition.
- Protect the animals currently in animal farming by repurposing RSPCA Assured infrastructure to focus on investigating and rescuing animals from animal agriculture industries and giving them good lives, presenting a positive vision of the future.

Taking on this issue would be challenging, but it is the right thing to do. The RSPCA, as the oldest and largest animal organisation in the UK, has the opportunity to lead the way to a sustainable future where animals are free from suffering. We want to work closely to pursue this mission and hope for the RSPCA to be allies to achieve this change.

Appendices

The following investigator checklists are summaries of the RSPCA Assured scheme regulation documents that we used to guide our investigations, checking everywhere for how animals were kept in relation to the stated standards. These checklists are a combination of the key elements of longer RSPCA documents alongside our instructions to investigators to carry out their tasks methodically to be able to record clearly and accurately breaches found on the farms. Each investigation was recorded in an overview document which is again available to journalists alongside the footage from the investigations.

Investigator checklist of RSPCA Assured scheme regs for pigs

Food and water

Food

- Food must be accessible each day and be provided with foraging substrate
- Ration feeding - trough space for all pigs to feed simultaneously
- Ad lib when using a dry feeder with no full head barriers - 6 pigs per feed place
- Ad lib when there are full head barriers - 10 pigs per feed place
- Ad lib when there is the opportunity to mix water with feed - 14 pigs per feed place
- Do pigs have access to feed and foraging substrate?
- No animal products must be fed to the pigs except milk and unfertilised eggs
- Are there other animal products in their feed? See if you can find feed packets
- Feeders must be hygienic
- Look for dirty troughs
- Feed must be stored in a way that prevents contamination
- Is the feed stored correctly? Is there feed left out where rats/mice/wild birds could access?
- Piglets must not be weaned before 28 days of age, or 21 days if being moved into specialised housing
- How old are the piglets that are separated from their mothers?
- Medicated feed must be clearly identified and labelled
- Is medicated feed obvious and labelled?

Water

- Pigs over two weeks of age must have permanent access to sufficiently fresh water. If a wet and dry system is being used there must be additional drinkers in the pen
- <25kg - max 100 per trough
- 25-40kg - 84 per trough
- >40kg - 67 per trough
- Is there sufficient access to water that is clean?

Environment

- There must be no features of the environment likely to

cause injury or distress

- Look out for sharp objects, broken equipment, etc
- Buildings
- Records must be kept of total area and number of pigs in relation to age, weight, feeding and drinking, and bedding space per building
- Try and find these records
- Pigs must not have access to electrical installations or toxic chemicals
- Do the pigs have access to electricity, or can you find any chemicals being misused?
- Thermal environment and ventilation
- The thermal environment must not be too hot or too cold
- Pregnant sow group - 15-20 degrees
- Lactating sow - 15-20 degrees
- Suckling pig first 72 hours - 25-28 degrees
- Suckling pig after 72 hours - 20-22 degrees
- Weaner first stage - 28 in week one, reducing by 2 degrees per week
- Weaner second stage - 20-22 degrees
- Finisher - 15-18 degrees
- Take the temperature of the building (?)
- There must be effective ventilation to avoid high humidity, condensation and draughts
- Is the building humid or draughty?
- Aerial contaminants must not reach a level which they are noticeably unpleasant to a human observer
- Are your eyes stinging, coughing, sneezing, etc.

Laying area/floor

- Pigs must have access to a lying area that is sloped to provide drainage or bedded to a sufficient extent to provide dry areas. Bedding must be comfortable, absorbent, provide thermal comfort
- Is there suitable bedding (straw, sawdust, shredded paper) that is dry
- Pigs must be mucked out twice a week (at least a third of the pen) and must have a clear visual indication of the area that has been mucked out
- Can you see where the pigs have been mucked out?
- Pigs must not be closely confined
- Do pigs look like they have sufficient space
- If pigs have fought to the extent that injury has resulted,

changes to the environment and/or management must be put in place

- Can you see injuries from fighting? Are there new and/or old injuries?

Farrowing systems

Farrowing crates are not RSPCA approved

- Are pigs in farrowing crates?
- Pigs in the farrowing system must have clean bedding and enrichment material. Shredded paper must not be used
- Does the sow have sufficient straw bedding for rooting and nesting, and enrichment
- Sows must be able to turn around easily at all times
- Is there space for the sows to turn around?

Indoor farrowing

- A separate piglet drinker must be provided
- Do piglets have access to separate water source

Environmental enrichment

- There must be access to enrichment that encourages expression of rooting, pawing and chewing. Suitable materials include straw, peat and silages. Additional enrichment must be provided if abnormal behaviours are being expressed (straw bales, footballs, etc)
- If there enrichment available to the pigs
- If there are incidents of stereotyped behaviour (e.g. tail or ear biting), the stock keeper must keep a record and seek ways of avoiding/eliminating the problem. If it is recurring, a modification program and enrichment must be implemented immediately
- Can you see evidence of tail or ear biting? Or any other abnormal behaviours? Especially incidents that look like they have been going on for a prolonged period of time

Lighting

- In a 24 hour period, housed pigs must have access to an area that provides at least 8 hours of continuous light and 6 hours of continuous darkness. Records must be kept of lighting regimes
- Are there lights on during the night? Have a look at lighting records if you can find them

Outdoor and free-range production

- Breeding pigs must be stocked at no more than 30 adults per hectare
- See if you can find records of stocking density
- Facilities must be provided to minimise the risk of sunburn - mud wallows, shaded area, sprinklers
- Do pigs look burnt? Are there facilities to prevent sunburn?

Management

Stock-keepers

- Must handle animals in a positive and compassionate manner, must not be pulled or dragged, and the use of electric goads and sticks is prohibited
- Watch how the pigs are being handled by the staff, whether it is rough and if they are using goads or sticks
- Identification
- Permitted identification methods are ear tagging, slap marking, tattooing and ear notching of piglets
- Look out for multiple notches in ears and other types of identification

Equipment

- Any defect in equipment must be rectified immediately
- Look for broken equipment

Inspection

- Stock-keepers must inspect the pigs twice daily, record observations and deal with any welfare problems without delay
- Try and find records, look out for welfare issues that have clearly been persistent over a long period
- Protection from other animals
- No poison that 'causes suffering' can be used
- Look out for poisons for rats/mice

Trial work

- No trial work that could cause unnecessary pain, discomfort or distress, or that are invasive, must be carried out
- Are prohibited procedures being carried out? Look out for records of procedures
- Preparation for transport
- Pigs must have access to water up to the point of transport
- Is there a constant supply of water?
- Fasting must not exceed 18 hours for any pig prior to slaughter, but a period of fasting is recommended before transporting to prevent vomiting
- Look for records of feeding

Agricultural shows

- Sticks must not be used to use pigs
- Can we find shows they are attending to see welfare at these?

Health

Health and welfare planning

- Pig units must have a written Veterinary Health and Welfare Plan (VHWP) available on the farm
- Pre-weaning mortality levels
- Post weaning mortality
- Pigs humanely killed as unfit
- Body condition of sows
- Incidence of tail biting
- Incidence and type of lameness
- Injuries
- Disease problems affecting or likely to affect the farm
- Look out for these records
- Record for the herd are required that includes disease and vaccination plan, biosecurity, emergency slaughter, treatments, hygiene policy, and safe disposal of pharmaceutical waste
- Look for records, look for pharmaceutical waste that has not been disposed of correctly
- Casualty animals
- There must be provisions for humane killing without delay - free bullet, shotgun, penetrative captive bolt, chemical euthanasia by overdose
- Look out for equipment that could be used for killing
- All carcasses must be stored in locked bins and disposed according to legislation and disposed at end of each working day
- Look out for dead pigs around the farm that are not in locked bins, especially those that have been there for a while
- Manual blunt force trauma cannot be legally be used to kill piglets of any age or weight, including in emergencies
- Are piglets being killed by 'thumping'?

- Pigs in severe pain that is uncontrollable must be humanely killed promptly
- Are there pigs on the farm that are in pain?

Biosecurity

- Each unit must include foot dips
- Look out for foot dips, do they look like they are used, is the disinfectant in them clean?

Medicines

- Medicines must be labelled and stored in accordance with instructions, kept in a secure and lockable store and disposed of appropriately
- Look for medication that is not being stored properly, and of records to see what they pigs are being given, including vaccinations

Segregation pens

- Injured, ailing or distressed pigs must be segregated, treated without delay, and if necessary, humanely killed
- Look out for segregation pens, and sick and injured pigs that are still in the main pens

Foot and leg health

- Attention must be given to the condition on feet and regularly inspected for excessive growth or infection
- Look out for injured feet

Mutilations

- Injurious procedures must not be carried out - teeth clipping, tail docking, nose rings etc (except if the farm has permission due to welfare-related reasons)
- Look out for mutilations
- Teeth clipping will be permitted if there are a number of pigs with facial scarring or udder damage. Tusk trimming in permitted
- Look out for facial damage or udder scarring, and whether teeth have been clipped
- Surgical castration is not permitted, but the use of Improvac is with permission
- Look out for castrated pigs or equipment used for castration

Transport

- Pigs must not be presented for sale at livestock markets
- Can we find out whether they are being taken to livestock markets?
- Pigs must be slaughter as close as possible to the point of rearing
- Can we find out which slaughter houses farms are using?
- Pigs must be unloaded immediately at the slaughterhouse

- Look out for pigs sitting on trucks for a long time
- Floor of vehicles must be covered with bedding (sawdust, straw, etc)
- Is there enough bedding on the floor to provide comfort and thermal comfort

Casualty animals

- Sick or injured animals must not be transported (unless for veterinary treatment)
- Are sick/injured pigs being taken to slaughter?
- Handling/loading/unloading
- Pig boards must be used as a handling aid when necessary, the use of electric goads is prohibited
- Look out for electric goads

Slaughter/killing

- RSPCA Assured pigs must have spent their entire lives on approved farms and been transported by approved haulier
- Check whether the haulier is Assured
- Casualty animals
- Pigs that are not able to walk must be killed without delay
- What is happening to animals who are struggling to walk? And why can they not walk?

Lairage

- Pigs must be unloaded into a lairage when they arrive at the slaughterhouse, it must provide protection from weather conditions
- Can you see the lairage? What are the conditions like?
- Pre-slaughter handling
- Pigs must be handled calmly, quietly and firmly, sticks and electric goads are prohibited
- Look for prohibited equipment and rough treatment of pigs

Slaughter/killing methods

The permitted methods of killing are

- Electrocution
- Free bullet (followed by bleeding)
- Penetrative captive bolt (followed by bleeding)
- Electronarcosis (followed by bleeding)
- Exposure to carbon dioxide until death (followed by bleeding)
- Carbon dioxide associated with inert gases
- Inert gases

Stunning

- Pigs must be stunned prior to slaughter, rendering them unconscious. Unconsciousness must remain until death
- Are pigs being effectively stunned and killed whilst they are unconscious?

Investigator checklist of RSPCA Assured scheme regs for broilers

Chickens farmed for meat

Chicks

- Chicks must be hatched according to the RSPCA welfare standards and from an approved hatchery
- Try to find out where the chicks have been sourced from
- Day old chicks must be handled carefully
- Watch for rough handling of chicks
- Chicks must be exposed to natural daylight as soon as possible, and no later than 7 days of age
- Do the chicks have windows in their shed that will let in natural light? There should be lighting records as well
- Where spot brooders are used, food and water should be close by, but not in range to be affected by the heat (especially metal containers that could heat up)
- Look at the placement of brooders, and of food and water nearby
- Feeders and drinkers must be kept clean and free from litter
- Look out for dirty or contaminated food and water

Food and water

Food

- Food must be provided at all times
- Look out for feeders - make sure they have food in them, are they clean
- Must be appropriate for their stage of production, satisfies nutritional needs. No feed growth promoters or animal derived protein in feed
- See if you can find bags of feed, have a look for contents of the feed
- Food must be hygienically stored and not be allowed to remain in a contaminated or stale condition
- Look for feed storage - is it getting damp or stale, is it stored hygienically
- 25mm of linear (single sided) or 16mm of circular feeding space must be provided and accessible for each bird, and chickens must not have to travel more than 4m to reach food .
- Is there enough space for the birds to access the feed? Are they spaced throughout the shed?

Water

- Must be provided with clean and fresh water at all times
- Look out for drinkers - do they have water in them, are they clean
- Minimum number of drinkers = nipples 1 per 10 chickens, cups 1 per 28 chickens, bell 1 per 100 chickens
- Is there enough space for the birds to access the water? Is there space throughout the shed? Are the drinkers working? Are they an appropriate height for the chickens to reach?
- Chickens must not have to travel more than 3m to reach water
- Are the drinkers evenly distributed through the shed
- Tanks must have fitted lid
- Look out for water tanks on the farm - are they covered?

Environment

- All chickens must be provided with accommodation
- Are there chickens who have been left outside overnight?
- All accommodation must have the following information displayed at the entrance to each building:
 - Total floor area available to the birds
 - Total number of birds placed
 - Total number of drinkers and feeders
 - Target air quality parameters
 - Lighting levels and regimes
 - Emergency procedures
- There must be nothing in the environment that is likely to cause injury or distress that can be avoided
- Look out for sharp objects, broken feeders/drinkers/mesh, etc. no access to electrical installations, electric matting, electric wire
- Outside the shed must be kept clean and tidy and not provide shelter for wild birds or rodents
- Look out for rubbish or unkempt surroundings

Floor and litter

- Flooring must allow for effective cleansing and disinfection, must not become wet, and must be completely covered in litter
- Look out for wetness and areas without litter cover
- Litter must be stored and managed hygienically, kept dry and friable (loose and free flowing), an average depth of 5cm and allow birds to dust bathe (wood shavings are the preferred substrate)
- Look out for poorly stored litter, poorly kept litter in sheds such as dampness and not free flowing

Lighting

- A minimum of 8 hours of continuous light, and minimum of 6 hours and maximum of 12 hours continuous darkness. Except birds who are a maximum of 7 days of age and three days prior to slaughter, when the minimum period of continuous darkness must be at least 2 hours. Lighting patterns must be recorded
- Look for lighting records by the entrance to the shed, are the lights on the whole time you are in the shed?
- Natural daylight must be provided at all times during the natural daylight period, if windows are made of glass, they must be safety/toughened glass. Windows should be properly sealed to prevent draughts
- Look for adequate windows that should provide natural light during the day, are any of the windows broken?
- Birds must be exposed to dawn and dusk periods - either naturally or artificially with lights turning on/off gradually
- If you are in a shed when lights come on/off, is it done gradually?

Space requirements and flock size

- Flock size should not exceed 30,000 birds for indoor systems and 15,000 for free-range
- Stocking density and flock size must be recorded so look

out for these

Air quality and thermal environment

- Aerial contaminants must not reach a level at which they are noticeably unpleasant to a human observer. Assessment for ammonia and dust to be recorded one a day:
- 0 = weak: odour and dust not/hardly noticeable, easy to breathe
- 1 = moderate: odour and dust distinct, experience watery eyes and/or coughing
- 2 = strong: odour and dust irritating, experience stringing eyes and/or mouth, and/or excessive coughing/sneezing
- Is the air quality affecting you in any of these ways? A score of 1 or 2 must be improved upon immediately
- Air quality must be assessed on a daily basis
- Ammonia 20ppm
- Carbon dioxide 3,000ppm
- Carbon monoxide 50ppm
- Inhalable dust 10mg/m³
- Hens have access to a thermally comfortable environment at all times so heat/cold stress does not occur
- What is the temperature like? Look out for records of minimum and maximum temperature

Environmental enrichment

- For every 1,000 birds, there must be at least 1.5 standard, long chopped straw bales, 2m of perch space and one pecking object (ck block, vegetables, hanging wooden blocks, etc)
- Look out for these enrichment items
- Perches must be easily accessible for birds, perches should be 10-30cm from the floor

The range

- The outdoor area must consist of pasture mostly covered by vegetation and chickens must have access to a well-drained area for resting
- Is the ground muddy and wet?

Access to the range

- Birds must be provided with access to the range for at least half their lifetime and chickens kept in free-range systems must have continuous daytime access to the range
- Look for records of when they have been allowed outside
- The maximum distance a chicken within a shed must travel to reach a pophole is 14m, there must be at least 2 popholes in the shed and at least 1 per 700 birds
- Are there enough popholes and are they evenly distributed across the barn
- Popholes must be at least 45cm high and 50cm wide
- Estimate the size of the popholes

Verandas

- Damage to gale breakers and mesh-type material must be repaired promptly
- Look out for damaged material
- The side of the veranda must be solid from ground level to at least the top of the pophole and roof must be waterproof
- Look at the material of the veranda and whether it is suitable
- Litter must be provided in the veranda
- Is there sufficient litter?

Shade and shelter

- Overhead shade/shelter must be of sound construction, be

sufficiently high to allow the birds to stand underneath, and evenly distributed across the range. There must be at least 8m² per 1,000 birds

- Is there sufficient cover that is evenly distributed across the range

Management

Managers

- Records for each shed should be kept and include
- The breed of chicken being reared
- Details of the number of birds placed
- Incoming and outgoing stock
- Daily mortality (the cause of death must be stated)
- Number culled (including reasons for culling)
- Details of the number of birds removed for slaughter
- Average weight of birds removed for slaughter
- Feed consumption
- Daily water consumption
- Maximum and minimum temperatures
- Relative humidity
- Ventilation
- Medications provided
- Look out for these records at the entrance to the shed

Stock keepers

- Must be able to recognise the signs of normal behaviour, good health and welfare, and must treat the chickens in a positive and compassionate manner
- Are the stock keepers treating the chickens correctly

Inspection

- Chickens and facilities must be inspected three times a day, at least one of these inspections must identify chickens in poor health or injury, any welfare problems must be dealt with without delay
- Look out for sick and injured chickens, especially those who look like they have been poorly for a long period
- Work practices must ensure chickens do not become fearful, movement through sheds must be slow and deliberate to alleviate fear and reduce possible injury to birds
- Are staff moving slowly through the sheds? Are the chickens scared of humans?

Independent welfare audits

- There must be at least two welfare audits per year, one of which must take place in the last 10 days prior to the slaughter of the flock. Record must be kept for each shed
- Look for records of the welfare audit

Equipment

- Equipment must be inspected daily and defects must be rectified immediately
- Look for faulty equipment

Protection from other animals

- A Wild Animal Control Plan must be in place. No glue traps or poisons that 'cause animal suffering' must be used. Wild birds must be kept out of sheds with netting or similar material over ventilations ducts
- Keep an eye out for poisons, netting, glue traps
- Other animals (e.g. cats and dogs) must not be permitted in the hen house
- Look out for paw prints

Health

Health and welfare monitoring

- A Veterinary Health and Welfare Plan (VHWP) must be in place and reviewed at least annually - includes health and welfare conditions currently affecting and likely to affect the birds, for each condition a trigger level must be set (a maximum figure set for a condition that if exceeded requires action to be taken to reduce the level of that condition), it must include:
 - Lameness
 - Any health and welfare conditions that have been identified for concern by the vet or Farm Assurance scheme personnel
 - Emaciation
 - Runts
 - Hock burn
 - Foot pad burn
 - Breast blisters
 - Back scratches
 - Dirty feathers
 - Ascites/oedema
 - Cellulitis
 - Joint lesions
 - Septicaemia
- Look out for records of these assessment records and for chickens who have these conditions

Health and welfare

- Any mutilation of chickens is prohibited
- Look out for mutilated chickens
- Birds must be humanely killed without delay if they are in severe pain that is uncontrollable, are injured, ailing or distressed, have difficulty walking or reaching food, have a gait score of 3 or more (see below), or are runts
- 0 = the bird displays smooth, fluid locomotion
- 1 = the bird has a slightly defect in its gait that is difficult to define precisely
- 2 = the bird has a definite and identifiable gait abnormality, but this does not affect its ability to move
- 3 = the bird has an obvious defect that affects its ability to move (bird welfare is compromised)
- 4 = the bird has a severe gait defect
- 5 = the bird is incapable of sustained walking on its feet
- Look out for any struggling chickens
- There must not be overtly lame birds and no recurring injuries of a similar nature seen on a number of birds
- Look out for injured or ill birds, especially if there is a number of them with the same issue

Breed

- Breeds used must be accepted for use by the RSPCA
- There could be records of the breed being used (currently trying to get access to the list of breeds that are accepted)

On-farm casualty killing/slaughter

- The only permitted methods of on-farm killing are hand held electrical stunning immediately followed by neck cutting, neck dislocation, and captive bolt
- How are staff killing the chickens?
- Carcasses must be disposed of strictly
- Look out for chickens in bins or bags

Medication

- The use of antibiotics as feed additives is legally prohibited
- Are antibiotics just being added to the feed even if the

chickens aren't ill?

- Medication must be kept in a secure, lockable store
- Look out for medication that is being stored inappropriately
- Pharmaceutical waste, needles and other sharps must be disposed of safely

Look out for pharmaceutical waste left about the farm

Biosecurity

- Record of visitors must be kept and protective clothing must be worn by visitors
- Look out for records of visitors
- When entering/leaving the shed, all farm personnel and visitors must dip footwear. There must be a physical barrier between the entrance to each bird area and separate footwear or new disposable overshoes worn on each side of the barrier
- Look out for footwear dip near the entrance of the shed and shoes dedicated for the bird area
- Hand sanitisers or hand wash must be within reach of the entrance of the bird area and used before entering and exiting the bird area
- Look out for hand sanitisers, do they look like they are being used

Transport

Catching

- No bird must be deprived of food for more than 10 hours prior to slaughter and must have access to water up to the time of catching
- Do chickens have access to food and water before being caught
- If birds visibly unfit before loading they must be humanely killed without delay
- Are sick or injured chickens being loaded for slaughter
- Birds must be approached calmly and quietly to avoid stress and be treated gently and with care
- Catchers handling chickens roughly
- Chickens must be picked up and carried with both legs and no more than three birds in one hand
- Chickens being carried by one leg and more than three in one hand
- Transport containers must be closed carefully to ensure no part of the birds body is trapped
- Rough closing of the containers

Transport

- All birds must be transported by an RSPCA Assured approved haulier
- Try to find out who the haulier is
- Transport containers must be thoroughly cleaned before each use and well maintained
- Look for dirty and broken containers

Slaughter/killing

Lairage

- Hens must be unloaded immediately on arrival at the slaughterhouse and place in a lairage that protects from direct rays of sun and adverse weather
- Are the hens sitting on trucks for prolonged periods, especially if they are exposed to the weather

Shackling

- Live hens must only be shackled if they are being slaughtered on the farm they are reared for finishing and are not

- being transported by vehicle
- Look out for shackling at the slaughterhouse if they have been transported
- If loose birds are found they must either be taken to the hanging-on area or if injured, immediately and humanely killed away from the line
- Look for loose hens and what the workers do with them

Electrical stunning

- All birds must be stunned prior to bleeding either using a electrical water bath, dry stunner incorporating an electrically live metal grid or bar, or hand operated stunner
- Are the chickens being stunned before bleeding?
- Birds must be checked immediately post-stunning to ensure they have been stunned or killed. If they have not been properly stunned, they must be humanely killed or re-stunned without delay

- Are there chickens who haven't been stunned?

Manual head only electrical stunning

- Birds must be restrained in a cone before stunning to enable accurate positioning of electrodes
- Are chickens being restrained correctly?
- If the bird has not been properly stunned, electrodes must be re-applied immediately
- Look for chickens who have not been stunned properly

Bleeding

- No more than 10 seconds between stunning and decapitation, and the head must be macerated immediately
- How long between stunning and decapitation, and is the head macerated immediately

Investigator checklist of RSPCA Assured scheme regs for hens

Food and water

Food

- Food must be provided at all times
- Look out for feeders - make sure they have food in them, are they clean
- Must be appropriate for their stage of production, satisfies nutritional needs, includes insoluble grit designed for poultry. Extra fibre, correct sodium and amino acid content and scatter feeding can help minimise feather pecking. No feed growth promoters or animal derived protein in feed
- See if you can find bags of feed, have a look for contents of the feed
- Food must be hygienically stored and not be allowed to remain in a contaminated or stale condition
- Look for feed storage - is it getting damp or stale, is it stored hygienically
- 5cm of (actual) linear track (10cm single side) or 4cm of circular feeding space must be provided and accessible for each bird.
- Is there enough space for the birds to access the feed? Are they spaced throughout the shed?
- Hand replenished feed systems with no integral store of food are prohibited
- Look out for food systems that are not automatic (usually looks like a bucket with a tray underneath where food falls into) - is there feed in these?

Water

- Must be provided with clean and fresh water at all times
- Look out for drinkers - do they have water in them, are they clean
- Minimum number of drinkers = nipples 1 per 10 hens, cups 1 per 10 hens, circular trough space 1cm per hen, linear trough space 2.5cm per hen
- Is there enough space for the birds to access the water? Is there space throughout the shed? Are the drinkers working? Are they an appropriate height for the chickens to reach?
- Tanks must be covered at all times

- Look out for water tanks on the farm - are they covered?

Environment

- All sheds should have a checklist of key points relating to welfare displayed at or near the entrance to each building
- Total useable area available to the birds
- Total number of birds and stocking density
- Total number of drinkers and feeders
- Target air quality parameters
- Lighting levels and regimes
- Emergency procedures
- Nest box area available for each bird
- Look out for these checklists at the entrance to sheds
- There must be nothing in the hens' environment that is likely to cause injury or distress that can be avoided
- Look out for sharp objects, broken feeders/drinkers/mesh, etc. no access to electrical installations, electric matting, electric wire
- No access to the droppings pit. Droppings pit must be checked daily and a record of this check made
- Holes/access to droppings pit, birds in the droppings pit, record of the daily check
- Surrounds of the shed must be kept clean and tidy
- Look out for debris or rubbish around the shed

Floor and litter

- Flooring must allow for effective cleansing and disinfection, hens must have access at all times to well maintained litter and a well-drained area for resting. Litter must be:
 - A suitable material and particle size
 - Managed to maintain it in a dry, friable condition
 - Sufficient depth of dilution of faeces
 - Allow birds to dust bathe (not just straw or large wood chip)
 - Be topped up daily if necessary
 - Managed hygienically
 - Stored in a dry, hygienic, rodent-free premises
- Look out for build up of faeces on floor, damp litter, access to litter
- Useable area of shed must be at least one third litter with

- sufficient litter
- Depth of litter must be at least 5cm for the first two months and 10cm after 2 months, make sure there is at least a third floor with litter (not just slatted)

Lighting

- Minimum of 8 hours continuous light (either artificial or daylight) and minimum of 6 hours continuous darkness. Lighting patterns must be recorded
- Look out for lighting records, lights on throughout the night
- Lighting in nest boxes must only be used in the morning
- Are the lights on at any other time?
- Birds must be exposed to dawn and dusk periods - either naturally or artificially with lights turning on/off gradually
- If you are in a shed when lights come on/off, is it done gradually?

Space requirements and flock size

- All hens must have sufficient freedom of movement to be able to stand normally, turn around and stretch their wings, and have sufficient space to perch or sit quietly without repeated disturbance - stocking density must not exceed 9 hens per m² of useable area
- Cramped conditions, records of stocking density by the entrance
- Barn = maximum flock size 32,000, maximum flock size 4,000. Free-range = maximum flock size 16,000 birds, maximum colony size 4,000, each flock must have separate feeding, watering, lighting and ventilation facilities
- Stocking density and flock size recorded at the entrance of the shed, sufficient food, water, lighting and ventilation for each flock

Air quality and thermal environment

- Air quality must be assessed on a daily basis
- Ammonia 20ppm
- Carbon dioxide 3,000ppm
- Carbon monoxide 50ppm
- Inhalable dust 10mg/m³
- Look out for these records
- Air quality must not be noticeably unpleasant to a human observer
- How is the air quality affecting you? Coughing, burning eyes, etc
- Hens have access to a thermally comfortable environment at all times so heat/cold stress does not occur
- What is the temperature like?

Nest boxes

- Nest boxes provided at not less than 1 per 5 hens if individual or 1m² of nesting substrate per 120 hens for group nesting, they must be enclosed and draught-free
- Look at the quality of the nest box, there should be records by the entrance of number of nest boxes
- Nest boxes must have substrate that encourages nesting behaviour, managed hygienically, does not consist of wire or plastic-coated wire that can come into contact with the birds
- Look at the flooring of the boxes and what they are made out of, suitable floor substrate include stress, astro turf or dimpled rubber mats

Perches

- Hens should have 15cm of perch - slatted flooring is included in this, slats must have at least 1.5cm gaps
- Look out for the amount of perches and estimate gaps in

slats

- Raised perches must be at least 20cm from the wall, at least 30-80cm (horizontally) between perches and 50cm (vertically) between perches, perches must not be directly above each other (like a ladder) and must be fixed (not swinging)
- Estimate the distances between perches, check they are not in a ladder system and check they are fixed

Multi tier systems

- There should still be easy access to sick or injured hens, encourage free movement around the system, if tier is above head height facilities must be provided to ensure workers do not have to climb on the side of the tiered structure, must have manure belts
- Look for easy ways of accessing tiers and that all hens have easy access to the floor area and popholes, look for manure belts
- Distance between tiers must be at least 0.5m but no more than 1m, those that are over 2m must have a walkway for workers to walk unhindered along the length for inspections
- Estimate height of tiers and walkways on tiers over 2m
- The maximum distance a hen has to travel to a pophole is no more than 20m and no more than 8m to reach food or water
- Popholes, food and water are sufficiently distanced throughout the barn

Enrichment

- For every 1,000 birds there must be at least 2 items of enrichment inside the shed that is permanently available and includes some destructible enrichment
- Look out for hanging knotted rope, pecking blocks, vegetables, plastic bottles with coloured water, straw bales, plastic wrapped bales

Free-range

Management

- Must have continuous daytime access to the range, must have access to the range within three weeks of entering the house, it must encourage birds outside and away from popholes, and prevent and/or manage muddy/worn areas
- Look at the ground around the sheds, is it managed to prevent mud?
- Natural cover and artificial shelters must be provided and distributed to encourage hens to move around the range, a 'corridor' of shade/shelter to encourage hens away from the sheds, enrichment (e.g. feed crops, herbs, trees and fruit bushes), areas for perching and dust baths, vegetation cover as close to the shed as possible
- Look out for vegetation (natural cover and forage), artificial shelter, enrichment, etc.
- There should not be standing water outside the popholes, should have vegetations and/or drainage material
- Look at the ground around the popholes for standing water, vegetation and drainage

Shade and shelter

- Shade.shelter must be provided at all time when hens have access to the range that is no more than 20m from the popholes and evenly distributed across the range
- Take note of where the shelter is around the range

Popholes

- Popholes must be opened no later than 9am for birds aged

- 21 weeks and older and closed at dusk
- If there during the day, see what time popholes open/close, make sure they aren't open at night
- For flocks 1,200 birds or fewer there must be at least 2 popholes at least 50cm wide and 45cm tall and evenly distributed throughout the barn. Hens must not have to travel more than 20m to reach a pophole. Minimum total pophole length
 - 300 birds - 1m
 - 301-600 birds - 1.5m
 - 601-900 - 2m
 - 901-1,200 - 2.5m
- Count the number of popholes and estimate size, check they are evenly distributed

Stocking density

- No more than 2,000 hens per hectare
- There should be a record of stocking density in the shed

Natural cover and enrichment

- Natural cover (trees, shrubs, other canopy forming plants) must make up at least 5% of the total range area, and natural elements that provide dustbathing, perching and foraging in a minimum of 2 areas
- Look for natural cover and enrichment

Management

Managers

- Must maintain records of production data (dated and signed), which includes
 - Incoming and outgoing tock, including number of birds placed in each house
 - Number of ill, injured or dead birds identified each each inspection
 - Number of culled and reason for culling
 - Feed consumption
 - Water consumption
 - Maximum and minimum temperatures
 - Ventilation
- These records might be at the entrance to the shed, keep an eye out for them

Inspection

- Hens must be inspected three times a day to identify birds that are sick, injured or behaving abnormally, nest boxes must be inspected at least once a day, any welfare problems must be dealt with appropriately and without delay
- Look out for records of inspections, and for clearly ill/injured birds that should have been treated, or dead birds, especially those that have clearly been there more than a couple of hours
- Movement throughout the unit must be slow and deliberate, to alleviate fear and reduce possible injury, hens must be handled in a careful, positive and compassionate manner
- Look for hens being handled roughly

Equipment

- Equipment should be check daily and defects rectified immediately, if it can't be rectified there and then, measures should be put in place to safeguard hens from suffering
- Look for broken equipment, especially equipment that could affect the hens

Protection from other animals

- A Wild Animal Control Plan must be in place. No poisons

that 'cause animal suffering' must be used. Wild birds must be kept out of sheds with netting or similar material over ventilations ducts

- Keep an eye out for poisons, netting
- Other animals (e.g. cats and dogs) must not be permitted in the hen house
- Look out for paw prints

Health

Health and welfare monitoring

- There must be no recurring injuries of a similar nature seen on a number of birds
- Look out for multiple birds with the same injury/illness
- Ailing hens, and hens suffering from injury such as open wounds or fractures, or from prolapse must be segregated, treated without delay and, if necessary, humanely killed. Segregated area must be within the main house
- Look out for ill and injured hens, especially those who have clearly been ill/injured for a prolonged period, look out for a segregation area
- Feather loss must be assessed monthly and recorded, scoring is done separately for the back/vent and head/neck. If feather loss exceeds the threshold the immediate action must be taken to alleviate the problem
- Score 0 = no/minimal feather loss - no bare skin visible, no or slight wear, only single feathers missing
- Score 1 - slight feather loss - moderate wear, damaged feathers or 2 or more adjacent feathers missing, bare skin visible up to 5cm in dimension
- Score 2 - moderate/severe feather loss - bare skin visible at more than 5cm maximum dimension
- Look for hens with feather loss, especially multiple hens, look for records of feather loss or management
- Levels of mortality above 0.2% within the first two week must be subject to investigation with recorded results
- They should be recording mortality rates so look for these-

Medication

- Written procedure must be in place and followed for the safe disposal of pharmaceutical waste, needles and other sharps
- Look for any pharmaceutical waste, needles, etc, on the farm, especially in the barn
- Medication must be kept in a secure, lockable store and records kept of usage
- Look for medication left out or not stored correctly, look for records of medications given to individual hens or the flock

Biosecurity

- Record of visitors must be kept and protective clothing must be worn by visitors
- Look out for records of visitors
- On each occasion of entering/leaving a poultry house, all farm personnel and visitors must dip footwear with defra approved disinfectant that is replaced with fresh solution regularly
- Look out for a food dip close to the entrance of the shed, does it look like it is replaced regularly?

Casualty killing/slaughter

- On farm slaughter/killing permitted are hand-held electrical stunning followed by neck cutting, neck dislocation, and captive bolt. Equipment that crushes the neck must not be used
- How are the hens being killed onsite?
- All carcasses must be disposed of strictly according to current legislation and records kept of disposal

- Look for bins and bags with dead hens in, look for records of hens being killed and disposed of

Transport

Depopulation

- It is a legal requirement for free-range birds to have access to the range on a daily basis, including the day prior to depopulation
- Look out for hens being kept inside all day
- Only RSPCA Assured approved catching team can be used for depopulation
- See if you can find out what teams are being used
- Catching must take place in low or blue lighting and 'never put speed of operation before hen welfare', hens must be caught individually with two legs, not carried by a single leg, no more than three birds to be carried in one and
- Look out for poor conditions whilst catching is happening and rough handling and rushing

Transport

- All birds must be transported by an RSPCA Assured approved haulier
- Find out who the haulier is and whether they are Assured
- The haulier must ensure that all birds are fit to travel
- Are they loading sick or injured birds?
- Transport containers must be clean, well maintained and free from sharp edges which may cause injury or distress
- Are there dirty or broken containers?
- Pullets must be unloaded immediately upon arrival
- Are there young hens sitting in trucks and now being unloaded?

Slaughter/killing

- All hens must be sent to RSPCA Assured abattoir for slaughter
- Check if the abattoir is Assured

Lairage

- Hens must be unloaded immediately on arrival at the slaughterhouse and place in a lairage that protects from direct rays of sun and adverse weather
- Are the hens sitting on trucks for prolonged periods, especially if they are exposed to the weather

Shackling

- Live hens must only be shackled if they are being slaughtered on the farm they are reared for finishing and are not being transported by vehicle
- Look out for shackling at the slaughterhouse if they have been transported
- If loose birds are found they must either be taken to the hanging-on area or if injured, immediately and humanely killed away from the line
- Look for loose hens and what the workers do with them

Stunning

- Birds hitch fail to be properly stunned must be humanely slaughtered before entering the scalding tank
- Look out for live hens entering the scalding tank

Bleeding

- Hens must be decapitated and heads be macerated immediately
- Look out for hens who are not properly decapitated and heads that have not been macerated

Investigator checklist of RSPCA Assured scheme regs for salmon

Management

Inspection and records

- Fish must be inspected at least twice daily and any welfare problems must be dealt with without delay. Records of the inspections must be kept
- Look for records of inspections, look for any fish who have issues that look like they have been prolonged and not dealt with
- Dead and dying fish must be removed 'as frequently as necessary' (at least twice a week)
- Look for dead fish, especially those who may have been there a while
- Equipment defects must be rectified immediately
- Look for broken equipment, especially if it poses a danger to the fish

Health

- There must be a Veterinary Health and Welfare Plan in place
- Look for records of this

- There must be no recurring physical damage occurring on fish attributable to features of their environment, husbandry procedures or unrecognised disease challenge
- Look for multiple fish with the same injuries/illnesses
- Fish suffering from physical damage or disease symptoms must be segregated and treated or humanely euthanised without delay
- Look for sick and injured fish who have not been segregated

Casualty killing

- Permitted methods of killing are a 'priet of appropriate size' (a wooden or metal stick to hit them with) or a 'mechanical percussive device'. Under no circumstances should a fish be left to die in the air
- Look for killing equipment or fish being killed with these methods or other methods, and for fish being left to die in the air

Medicinal products

- Prophylactic use of medicinal products is prohibited. Re-

- cords must be kept of any treatments being given
- Look for records of medications being given to the fish

Sea lice

- Sea lice damage must be recorded during sea lice counts. Any fish with damage must be removed and dispatched humanely without delay
- Condition of fish - good/thin
- Site of lesions
- Skin condition
- Fish behaviour - lively/moribund
- Look for sea lice infections and the effect they are having on fish

Mortality recording and reporting

- Mortality rate of seawater salmon would be 1.5% or less. Anything over should be reported to the RSPCA and an investigation should take place
- Look for records of mortality, if there are dead fish, how many, can a percentage be worked out

Mutilations

- Mutilations involving the removal of sensitive tissue are prohibited, marking methods that cause distress or injury must not be used
- Look for signs of marking or mutilations

Husbandry practices

Handling

- Live fish must not be held by the tail only or thrown on solid objects, time out of the water must never exceed 15 seconds
- Look for bad handling of fish and how long they are out the water for
- Hand nets must be of suitable size and kept clean
- Look for dirty nets or s that are too small for the fish

Grading/crowding at freshwater lochs and seawater sites

- Only a portion of the enclosure should be crowded rather than the whole enclosure. And fish must not be crowded for more than two hours
- Look for whole enclosures being crowded, or crowding happening for more than two hours
- Fish must not be over crowded (see below for measures of overcrowding)
- Look for a lot of fish at the surface

Protection from other animals

- The killing of seals by the salmon industry is prohibited (it later says that shooting seals is permitted in 'exceptional circumstances'), bodies of killed seals must be recovered
- Look for seals being killed or for killed seals
- Humane precautions must be taken to protect fish from other animals that could cause them harm. The primary means should be through physical exclusion
- Look for these precautions and for wildlife gaining access to the fish
- Enclosure nets (including top nets) must be checked for holes and fouling weekly, and daily for trapped wild animals, who must be removed without delay
- Look for damaged nets or wildlife trapped in nets (dead or alive), especially those who could have been there a while

Genetic selection and modification

- The RSPCA is opposed to breeding procedures that adversely affect welfare. Genetic modification is prohibited
- Try to find out what the fishes breeding is?

Equipment

Enclosures

- The minimum depth of the enclosure must be 5m
- Look for enclosures that are too small
- Netting must be smooth and no-abrasive to limit injuries, must be adequately tensioned and weighted to prevent distortions, nets should be checked regularly for holes
- Look for poor quality netting
- Biofouling must not be allowed to build up
- Look for dirty enclosures

Feeding

Feeding methods

- Food must be dispensed in a way that prevents competition, overfeeding must be avoided
- Look for fighting during feeding and for excess food floating in the enclosure

Environmental quality

External water quality

- Water quality must be maintained within an acceptable range and steps taken to rectify the situation as quickly as possible
- Look for visibly poor water quality

Lighting

- Lighting must be maintained 'at a suitable level'
- Unclear what a suitable level is, look for very dark or very light conditions

Environmental impact

Aesthetic

- Sites must be kept tidy and all waste must be disposed of appropriately
- Look for mess and dirt, especially biological waste

Seawater

Seawater stocking density

- All fish must be sourced from a RSPCA Assured population
- Can we find out where the fish have come from?
- Maximum stocking density is 17kg/m³
- Look for records of stocking density

Transport

General transport

- Modes of transport must be RSPCA Assured
- Find out whether the transport company is Assured
- Handling fish must be kept to a minimum and no live fish must be out of the water for more than 15 seconds
- Look for fish out of the water for a prolonged period

Site staff responsible for moving fish

- No dead fish must be transported, sick or injured fish must be humanely destroyed and not transported
- Look for sick/injured/dead fish being loaded for slaughter
- The drop at the end of the pipe must avoid injuring the fish and allow fish to disperse without others landing on top of them
- Look for fishing landing on top of each other when coming out the pipe
- Netting fish must be done with caution to prevent injuring fish
- Look for rough handling during netting

Cage side harvest

- Blood must not be discharged in the water within 5km of any fish farm. If it is being discharged into water it must be disinfected beforehand
- Look for blood being disposed of in the water

Slaughter/killing including cage-side harvest

- Humane mechanical devices must be used in preference to a manual percussive blow. One blow must be delivered with suitable force to cause immediate loss of consciousness that lasts until death
- What method of killing are they using? Is it effective in killing the fish quickly?
- Cleaner fish must be captured and killed without delay
- Look out for cleaner fish being processed
- All mucus and blood must be contained and disposed of ashore
- Look out for blood/mucus being washed into the water

Electrical stunning followed by bleeding

- Electrical processes must ensure that insensibility of the

fish is achieved immediately and is maintained until the fish dies. The system must prevent mis-stuns

- Look for fish who are not stunned properly

Cleaner fish

- Only wrasse or lumpfish are permitted as cleaner fish
- Look out for other fish within the enclosures

Catching of wild wrasse and transport of wild and hatchery reared wrasse

- Wild caught wrasse must be obtained from a RSPCA Assured vessel, hook and line fishing methods must not be used
- Can we find out where the wrasse are coming from?

Deployment of cleaner fish into the pen after transport: wild and hatchery reared wrasse and lumpfish

- Hides/refuges must be provided, hung away from the net wall and kept clean at all times
- Look for hides/refuges

Crowding density scale

- Goal - essentially no fins breaking the surface of the water
- Acceptable - fin above the water over a small part of the surface of the crowd
- Undesirable - fins and part of the fish above the water over the whole surface of the crowd. Some burrowing, gasping and vigorous activity in parts of the crowd
- Unacceptable - the whole surface of the crowd vigorously burrowing, gasping and splashing. Whole surface of the pen boiling with violent splashing

Investigator checklist of RSPCA Assured scheme regs for trout

Freshwater

General

- All eggs and fish must be obtained from an RSPCA Assured supplier
- Can we find out where they are coming from?
- If water quality 'departs from the acceptable range' steps must be taken to rectify it immediately
- It does not say what the acceptable range is, look for visibly bad water

Ongrowers - fish between 50 grams and harvest size

- Water temperature must not exceed 16 degrees
- Can we measure the water temperature?
- Fish must not be crowded for more than 2 hours
- How long are they being crowded for?
- Fish must be able to hold and adjust their position in the water easily
- Look out for fish who are struggling to swim
- Culls must be disposed of in a biosecure way
- Look out for dead fish just being dumped back into the water

Lochs (fresh and seawater)

- Nets must be managed hygienically
- Look out for dirty nets
- Deterioration of water quality due to fouled nets or over feeding must be avoided
- Look out for visibly poor water quality

Vaccination

- Care must be taken when returning fish to the tank
- Look out for rough handling and fish being thrown into the water

Management

Inspection and records

- Welfare problems that are seen during inspections must be dealt with without delay, inspections must happen at least twice daily - welfare problems of sufficient severity that they should have been noticed on previous inspections and dealt with, shall be taken by the RSPCA Assured Assessor

- as evidence of negligence of duties
- Look out for fish with welfare issues, especially those who look like that have been sick/injured for a prolonged time, look out for records of the inspections
- Removal of dead fish must happen at least twice a week
- Look out for dead fish, especially those who have been there a while

Husbandry practices

- Live fish must never be handled must just their tail and never thrown onto solid objects, and must never be out of the water for more than 15 seconds
- Look out for rough handling and fish out of the water for prolonged periods
- Fish must not be left to die in air
- Look out for fish dying in the air

Protection from other animals

- Precautions must be taken to prevent wild animal infestations using non-lethal methods, the primary methods should be physical exclusion
- Look for wildlife within enclosures
- Nets should be checked for holes, top nets should be used with a mesh size that don't ensnare birds
- Look for badly maintained nets and birds stuck in nets
- If wild animals are killed, their bodies must be collected and disposed of in accordance with the law
- Look out for dead wildlife around the farm

Feeding

Feeding methods

- Food must be distributed in a way that prevents competition
- Watch for fighting during feeding times
- Overfeeding must be avoided
- Look for excess food floating in the water

Health

- There should be no recurring physical damage on fish attributable to their environment. Fish condition must be monitored for signs of disease
- Look for injuries that multiple fish have the same injuries or diseases
- Fish suffering from overt physical damage or disease symptoms must be segregated and humanely euthanased without delay
- Look for diseased/injured fish that have not been segregated

Casualty killing

- Sick or injured fish that are not recovering must be killed without delay by a non-recoverable percussive blow to the head using a priest or mechanical percussive device
- Look out for suffering fish, and for fish being killed

Mutilations

- Mutilations involving the removal of sensitive tissue are prohibited and marking methods that cause distress or injury must not be used
- Look out for signs of mutilations

Sea lice

- Sea lice damage must be recorded during lice counts. Any fish with severe damage caused by lice should be killed

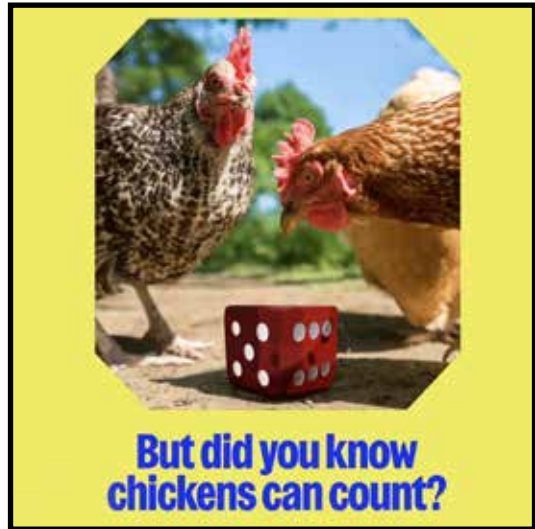
- without delay
- Condition of the fish: good/thin
- Site of lesions
- Skin condition
- Fish feeding behaviour
- Look at the condition of the fish and whether they have been affected by sea lice

Transport

- Dead fish must not be transported, and sick or injured fish should not be transported and humanely destroyed
- Look out for dead/sick/injured fish being loaded for transport

Right: A row of dead chicks at a 'broiler' farm in Devon, 2nd May 2024





imagery from recent RSPCA online video for its 'Every Kind' campaign



Dead chicks at an RSPCA Assured farm in Norfolk, 8th March 2024

www.animalrising.org