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## NFU Comment Better Chicken Commitment

The NFU has commissioned two reports to better understand the welfare claims behind the Better Chicken Commitment (BCC) together with the potential economic and environmental impacts. Poultry specialist vets, Stephen Lister and Ian Lowery of Crowshall Veterinary Services were asked to investigate the welfare aspects of BCC and ADAS (Jon Walton) an economic and environmental impact assessment.

The BCC standard contains six elements:

1. Comply with EU Animal Welfare legislation
2. Stocking density
3. Approved breed
4. Lighting/Enrichment
5. Gas stunning
6. Independent audit

### The Crowshall report

The report states that the BCC document is brief and lacks detail around the specifics of their requirements. Key findings from the report in relation to each of the six elements set out by BCC are listed below:

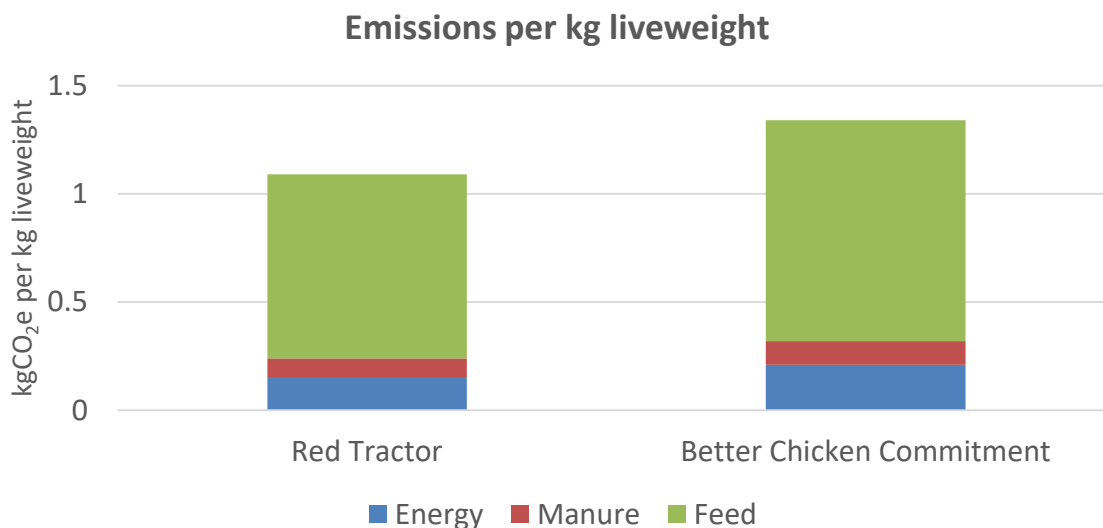
1. Comply with EU Animal Welfare legislation
  - All UK broiler production complies with EU welfare laws and Red Tractor (RT) standards exceed these minimum requirements.
2. Stocking density
  - In the UK farms wishing to stock at a higher stocking density of 38 kg/m<sup>2</sup> must demonstrate the ability to maintain bird welfare. Stockmen are required to be sufficiently experienced and units must be capable of maintaining a comfortable environment and friable litter conditions. Key welfare indicators at slaughter are used to assess and monitor the birds at these stocking densities. This approach to safeguarding the welfare of meat chickens is well supported by peer reviewed scientific literature which finds that good husbandry and factors such as capacity to ventilate sufficiently and maintain dry and friable litter conditions have a more dramatic impact on welfare outcomes than simply limiting stocking density.
  - The BCC does not explain how a maximum stocking density limit of 30 kg/m<sup>2</sup> has been arrived at. The assessment of the literature around stocking density does not suggest that reducing stocking density from 38 kg/m<sup>2</sup> to the suggested 30 kg/m<sup>2</sup> in itself would have significant effects on welfare outcomes.
  - Stockmanship is the single biggest factor in animal welfare.
3. Approved breed
  - Using the criteria suggested by BCC, welfare assessments on these slow growing breeds are conducted at extremely low stocking (18.7kgs/m<sup>2</sup>) in small pens, using bespoke diets and therefore do not reflect normal commercial growing conditions.
  - Comparison of FSA slaughter data, published scientific literature and breed standards against the RSPCA welfare thresholds demonstrates that in a number of areas, including mortality and daily weight gain, birds grown to ACP standards already perform below the RSPCA set thresholds.
  - For these reasons it is difficult to conclude that the use of slower growing breeds offer a significant advantage under commercial conditions.

4. Lighting & Enrichment
  - The assessment of the literature has not established an indication of a welfare benefit of increasing lighting to a measured minimum of 50 lux as outlined in the broad BCC requirement of “At least 50 lux of light”.
  - The reference to bales and perches is already met (and exceeded) by Red Tractor standards
5. Gas Stunning
  - The majority of UK broiler slaughter plants meet the BCC requirements for slaughter however there is no reference to low atmospheric pressure stunning which has been approved within the EU with perceived welfare benefits.
6. Independent auditing
  - Red Tractor standards are independently audited and therefore meet the BCC criteria.

### The ADAS report

Key findings from the report which compares the BCC requirements with those of Red Tractor (RT) are as follows:

- **Productivity:** lower stocking and slower growth significantly reduces output. The output for RT is 332kg/m<sup>2</sup>/annum; for BCC this reduces to 220kg/m<sup>2</sup>/annum.
- **Cost of production:** £1.81 for a chicken grown to RT standards and £2.14 for a chicken grown to BCC standards. This represents an increase of around 18% for BCC.
- **Feed conversion ratio** and feed use: FCR of 1.58:1 for RT and 1.92:1 for BCC, this difference representing 770 grams more feed being required for a BCC chicken.
- **Cost of additional growing space** in 2026: The cost of the additional space is calculated as £164m if BCC reaches 25% penetration of the market, rising to £620m if BCC reaches 100% penetration based on an average current capital cost of £248/m<sup>2</sup>.
- **Land use:** 2,475m<sup>2</sup> of land is needed to grow wheat and soya to produce one tonne of RT chicken and 3,008m<sup>2</sup> is required to produce one tonne of BCC chicken. This is an increase of around 22% for BCC.
- **Carcass yield:** 72% for fast-growing chickens in RT and 71% for slow-growing chickens in BCC. This difference is equivalent to around 22 grams/bird which could be worth 8-9 pence per bird at retail level.
- **Carcass balance:** Slow-growing chickens have a lower yield of breast meat but more leg meat. Each 1% change between the two could result in a 5 pence difference in value (per bird) for retail sales
- **Water use:** Water use is 22% higher for BCC than RT
- **Emissions** per kg liveweight are significantly higher as shown on the chart below:



## NFU overview of the Better Chicken Campaign

- Productivity and the environment are key focusses for the UK. The BCC 'standard' runs contrary to these social and economic priorities with less efficient production using greater resources and thus causing an increase in greenhouse gases.
- In many respects, in terms of welfare measure outcomes, the current breeds of broilers used for standard production are close to the 'approved breeds'.
- The Crowshall report shows that the stockperson and the environmental conditions are critical to the welfare of the birds. The focus on training through the industry-led British Poultry Training must be continued to ensure that this area continues to be addressed.
- Any new requirements or standards with the aim to improve the welfare of chickens should be evidence-based, backed by science and supported by outcome measures.
- Any businesses that commits to the BCC should have clear plans in place on how such a commitment will be delivered given the significant additional costs at farm level and limited availability of breeding stock as well as plans to achieve carcass balance.
- The additional production costs at farm level associated with producing chicken to the BCC requirements must be recognised and covered.

Poultry farmers would be willing to work to the standard as long as they can gain confidence from the market that the increased cost of production would be offset.

- If additional growing space is required as a result of BCC commitments then buyers must give poultry producers and breeders long term secure commitments (5 years +) to give them the confidence to invest.
- An exit strategy that works for all in the chain must be in place if the product fails to sell in sufficient volumes.
- Poultry meat is the most popular meat consumed in the UK accounting for around 50% of meat consumed. This, in part, is due to its affordability and versatility (household penetration for poultry meat is around 87%).
- There is concern in the poultry meat sector that the BCC is not consumer led.
- There is also concern amongst the farming sector that if the UK switches to producing more expensive higher welfare poultry meat the affordable poultry meat will be imported – and imported from countries with lower food safety and animal welfare standards than the UK.

In Defra's 2018 survey *Attitudes towards British food purchases in the UK*, whilst 78% of shoppers agreed that it is important to support British farmers only 38% agreed they were actually prepared to pay more for British food.

- Food poverty is a significant concern in the UK. Increasing the cost of chicken meat, which is enjoyed by so many families, conflicts with food affordability.
  - Professor Louise Manning, Professor of Agri-Food and Supply Chain Security at the Royal Agricultural University, commented in a recent article that 'Defra figures (Defra Pocketbook June 2019 data) showed that between 2007 and 2018 the percentage rise in food prices was 27%. In the poorest 10% of households, between 2014 and 2016/17,

beef purchases fell by 19%, lamb (44%), pork sales stood still in this group (but fell 13% for all households) and fish, milk and vegetables showed a decline. Fruit sales bucked this trend as did poultry meat with a 2% rise in sales for all incomes. Why did poultry meat sales rise slightly? Simply because the meat remained affordable'.

- A recent (January 2019) report by the Environmental Audit Committee *Hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition in the UK* finds that food insecurity in the UK is significant and growing. Levels are among the worst in Europe, especially for children, with 19% of under 15s living with an adult who is moderately or severely food insecure making the UK the worst for child hunger in Europe. The report cites figures showing that 2.2 million people in Britain are severely food insecure.
- **In summary, BCC is a very expensive way to produce chicken (+18% on farm costs), uses more water (+22%) and produces more greenhouse gases (+23%) without a demonstrable improvement in welfare.**