

Educational video could improve the welfare of millions of broiler chickens

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The welfare of millions of broiler chickens could be improved thanks to an educational video to help farmers identify and encourage positive welfare in broilers. The video has been created following collaborative work by The Co-op, their chicken supplier, Two Sisters Food Group, and research partners the University of Bristol and FAI Farms.

Over the last four years, [The Co-op](#) has partnered with the Bristol Veterinary School and FAI Farms to undertake research into the assessment of broiler behavior by farmers. This research highlighted gaps in the current [training](#) provided to new broiler farmers. Firstly, around the importance of observing broiler behavior and secondly, how farmers could improve [welfare](#) through the encouragement of positive behaviors.

Positive behaviors are natural behaviors that animals are highly motivated to perform, and these create positive experiences for the birds, resulting in enjoyment or pleasure. Opportunities to display positive behaviors is an important way to improve the quality of life for animals. Positive behaviors for broilers include wing flapping, running, jumping, dustbathing and scratching at the litter.

The training video captures on farm footage of broilers performing positive behaviors and describes why these behaviors are important for bird welfare. It then goes on to highlight the importance of litter, describing why maintaining dry and friable litter is not only good for the health of the birds, but also acts as another source of environmental enrichment for birds to interact with and perform positive behaviors.

The training video also describes how to observe birds, encouraging farmers to take time out of their day to simply watch the birds as this is the best way to understand the behaviors of the birds and can help farmers to quickly spot when something is not quite right.

The video has been trialled with a group of experienced Coop farmers who all provided positive feedback regarding its messaging for new entrants. Ninety five percent of producers thought that the video was very to extremely effective in explaining the benefits of observing birds and 83 percent of the trial group said that they would be looking for and encouraging specific positive behaviors when observing their birds in the

future.

Annie Rayner, Research Manager at FAI farms and Ph.D. student at the University of Bristol, said: "Expression of specific behaviors that are important to an animal is crucial in ensuring they have a life worth living. Good farm management is key to providing opportunities for these behaviors. This video is a much-needed resource to train producers in what to look for and to pay attention to the behavior of their birds. With 20 million broilers a week being produced in the UK and this video being made available to the entire UK industry, we hope that this resource helps towards improving the welfare of millions of [birds](#)."

The video will be shown to all new chicken farmers within the Coop supply chain. The Coop are keen that the benefits of the training is made available to the whole of the UK poultry industry and have partnered with Poultec, the training provider for the UK Poultry Passport Scheme. The video will be part of the broiler welfare training module—which is required to be undertaken by all farmers producing chickens to Red Tractor standards. In 2018, Poultec delivered welfare training to over 500 individuals.

Dr. Siobhan Mullan, Senior Research Fellow in Animal Welfare at the Bristol Vet School, added: "We have worked with industry partners to produce and evaluate the effectiveness of this evidence-based training video. We are delighted that it will be made widely available through UK training courses and hope that, in combination with other initiatives, it will help to deliver real improvements to bird welfare."

Nathan Raines, Poultec Associate Director, stated: "I believe this is an excellent educational tool for all [broiler](#) farmers and Poultec will certainly be embedding this into all of its Broiler Welfare training courses that are delivered across the UK."

Mark Kempzell, Co-op Agricultural Manager, Poultry, said: "We're delighted to have partnered with FAI Farms and the University of Bristol to create such a useful resource that we hope will aid poultry farmers, not only within our own farming groups, but also throughout the industry, to learn more about positive behavior in broilers. As an ethical retailer, we are committed to ensuring high welfare standards across our supply chains and the feedback we've had from our own farmers has been extremely positive—it's clear that tools such as this go a long way in helping to promote best practice and we're pleased that Poultec will be rolling this out as part of their mandatory training programs."

Daniel Dring from Hook Two Sisters commented: "We are very pleased to have been able to assist in the production of this video. High-quality training is very important to our industry and this allows us to ensure our staff are made aware of the importance of bird behaviors within the poultry house in a clear format to help improve on bird welfare."

Provided by University of Bristol

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