

# Catching of broilers

## Preparation for Catching

Catching and handling will cause stress to broilers. Most causes of **downgrading** observed at slaughter due to **unplanned catching**. Catching should be planned carefully in advance and supervised closely at all stages. The handling of birds and operation of machinery, such as harvesters and forklifts, must be carried out by appropriately trained, competent personnel. **Mortality** during the catching and transport process should not be more **than 0.1%**.

## Light

When growth has been modified through the application of restricted lighting program, it is essential to return to **23 hours of light before catching**. This will ensure that the birds will **calm** during collection. The EU Broiler Directive requires **20 lux** to be provided at least **three days prior to the first depletion**. **Blue light** has been found to be satisfactory for this purpose.

## Feed

Feed should be removed from the birds **eight to ten hours** before the expected slaughter time to reduce **faecal contamination** at the processing plant. This period should include catching, transport and holding time. **Whole wheat**, if included in the diet, should be removed **two days before slaughter**, to avoid the presence of whole grain in the gut. Use a **withdrawal period of antibiotic (if need)** prior to slaughter to eliminate the risk of pharmaceutical product residues in the meat.

## Water

Unlimited access to water should be provided for as long as possible and water should be removed **only catching time**. Access to water will be prolonged by use of multiple drinker lines.

## Pre-catch

Calculate the time to catch and to transport, and start the catch according to when the birds are scheduled to be slaughtered. Calculate the number of crates and trailers needed to transport the birds before the processing plants. Broken or damaged crates may injure birds. Lift up all feeding equipment above head height (two meters).

## Catch

Broilers should be caught and held by **both shanks** (never the thighs) to minimize the distress, damage and injury. The birds should be placed carefully into the crates or modules, **loading from the top down**. Crates or modules should never be **overfilled**. Overheating, stress and increased mortality can result from the overfilling of crates/modules. The **number of broilers per crate** or module must be reduced in high temperatures. Improperly operated catching equipment can cause stress and damage to the broiler. **Mechanical equipment** used to catch birds must be operated at **moderate**

speeds to prevent damage and stress to broilers. Never crowd or force the birds into the catching equipment.

## Transport

Transport time should be within the local current guidelines or legislation. At all times up to the arrival at the slaughter house, adequate protection from the elements is essential. Ventilation, extra heating and/or cooling should be used when necessary. Vehicles should be designed to protect the bird from the elements. Stress on the birds will be minimized in trailers designed to provide adequate ventilation. In hot weather, consider using fans while loading the birds to keep the air circulating through the crates or modules on the truck. Allow at least ten centimeters between every two tiers of crates. While waiting to be processed, use fans and foggers to keep birds cool. Heat stress will develop rapidly when the transport vehicle is immobile, particularly in hot weather. The journey plan should allow the vehicle to leave the farm as soon as loading is completed and driver breaks should be short. Unloading at the holding area at the slaughter house must be completed without delay. In cold weather, the load should be covered to minimize wind chill during transport. Check bird comfort frequently.

## Delivery

At the slaughter house, park the trucks under a cover and remove any canvas that may restrict ventilation. Good holding facilities at the slaughter house, providing the required ventilation and temperature control, are essential for good bird welfare. Holding areas should be equipped with lights, fans and foggers. Foggers should be used during periods of high temperatures if relative humidity is below 70%. In very hot weather water can be sprayed into the fans to assist evaporation. In summer conditions make sure all fans and foggers are functional in the holding areas.