



HOW TO CONTROL VENT PECKING ?

With the development of alternative systems of production, vent pecking could be a challenge for some farmers, mainly due to environmental factors. It must be prevented and managed from an early age. Due to environment and difficulties controlling some external factors, cage-free systems are more sensitive to vent pecking than enriched or traditional cages. Larger number of birds in the same pen is the main factor.

GENETIC POINT OF VIEW

Since 2008, Novogen has put a lot of emphasis in the R&D program on behavioural traits. To allow a good adaptation of our birds in various environments. Novogen is raising its pure line in an environment similar to the environment of its progeny (Commercial Layers). A mix of enriched cages and floor selection system were established to select birds that are adaptable to all conditions. The good performances of Novogen products in alternative systems or under challenging conditions is due to the implementation of this program several years ago.

ORIGIN

The origin of this behaviour can be multifactorial. It may be due to management, nutrition, diseases, genetics... Typically, a layer with a slow cloacal retraction becomes a target of aggression and can be killed within a few hours. The same risk applies to hens with visible injuries or bleeding. In terms of nutrition, a deficiency or an excess of some nutrients can trigger the layers to peck other birds. In fact, any new stress can start a vent pecking issue.

MEASURES TO BE DONE

- Check the body composition and energy intake (per bird and per day)
- Calcium, Phosphorus, Sodium and Chlorine intake
- Check light intensity, uniformity and fluctuation
- Disease issue, internal and external parasites
- Stay 10 minutes in the flock without moving, to observe bird's behaviour
- Eggs with blood on the eggshell

MANAGEMENT IMPACTS

How to react shortly in the short run if this undesirable behaviour is observed in closed houses ?

Introduce a dark period during the day.

- After peak laying, 1 or 2 hours of dark will give enough time to cloaca to go back in the right position. You will save many birds until you solve the origin of this problem.

Manage light intensity and quality.

Too high light intensity could create nervousness in closed house. Homogeneity of the light also could create some bad areas for birds. Using a lux meter is the best tool to assess light levels. Be cautious of light flickering or fluctuation, especially with some LED systems at low intensity. This can be a major stressor, even if it is invisible to humans eyes.

- Decrease light intensity if possible.
- Change the light color (no more than 2 700 Kelvin). New LED systems often allow easy switching between white, red, and green light.
 - Green light is known to calm birds.
 - Red light helps mask visible blood on injuries, reducing the risk of pecking.



House with green light

No birds with injuries in a big flock.

A hen that appears «different» is more likely to be aggressed by others.

- Create a hospital pen, to isolate the injured birds in a save environment with water and feed. Walk regularly inside the house to check and remove the injured birds as soon as possible.
- If signs of pecking are observed, increase the frequency of visits to rescue the injured birds as soon as possible and help limit the spread of the behaviour.

Observe behavior and keep birds occupied.

Observing the bird behaviour daily is the best way to understand what is happenig in the flock. There are various techniques available to keep the birds busy or to calm nervous individuals.

- Pecking-stones. Available in varying levels of hardness will keep the birds occupied.
- Balls of Alfalfa. Birds with a lack of fiber will try to find fiber in their environment. Provide tightly compacted alfalfa balls to prevent rapid consumption, as loose ones can disappear within hours. The recommended intake is approximately 1 gram per bird per day
- Envirhment toys. Items like balls, buckets or stones can help keep birds occupied and reduce stress related to behaviors. However, their effec is short-term. Laters typically lose interest within a few days to a week. To maintain engagement, it is important to rotate or change toys weekly.



2 origins of Alfalfa

NUTRITIONAL IMPACTS

Excess energy intake.

An overweight bird tend to have a slower cloacal retraction than a bird with a normal condition.

- Decrease dietary energy intake as needed.
- Regularly communicate with your local nutritionist to birds' actual requirement.

Calcium and Phosphorus deficiency.

Any lack of Calcium or Phosphorus could create this behaviour (with also a low eggshell quality), because they are implied in the muscular contraction.

Sodium deficiency.

A lack of sodium (and/or Chlorine, but less often) can result in reduced feed intake and general nervousness in the flock. In response, birds may develop pecking behavior to compensate.

Fiber intake.

The benefits are significant, particularly in preventing various forms of pecking behaviour.

- Promotes satiety, helping birds feel full and calm.
- Increase eating and drinking time and therefore lowers the risk of aggression or pecking.
- Drier droppings, wich contribute to a drier litter, creating a better environment and improving birds behavior.

SANITARY IMPACTS

Some health issues also indirectly contribute to vent pecking, with conditions such as enteritis and Egg drop Syndrome (E.D.S.) being commonly associated. Therefore, it is important to have an effective health and sanitary management to reduce the risk. Check the sanitary status of the flock regularly with your veterinarian.

CONCLUSION

Alternative systems imply spending more time with birds to observe & check their behaviours. Returning to basics is essential. Any vices must be corrected in a short time, otherwise the situation could be unmanageable. Nutrition and Management can help to prevent and solve this kind of problem. However, they cannot replace the human feeling and knowledge of birds.

For more details, consult our website with the nutrition guide and all the management guides, and our NovoCenter.