**CATCHING**

**Pre-Processing Handling in Broilers:**

Pre-processing handling, the management of birds during the last 24 hours prior to slaughter, is a vital step in preparing for broiler meat processing. In this final stage of the broiler management cycle, the procedures put in place (**feed withdrawal, catching, transportation, and holding**) can substantially influence bird welfare, carcass yield and grade, and overall profitability.



**1- Feed Withdrawal**

The purpose of feed withdrawal is to allow the contents of the gastrointestinal tract (GIT) to be emptied prior to processing. This reduces the risk of fecal contamination at the processing plant (**slaughter house**), resulting in better profitability, product safety and shelf-life. It also reduces the labor costs associated with re-processing carcasses to remove or clean contamination. Feed should be removed from the flock (8 – 12) hours before the expected processing time.

****

**2- Catching Bird**

Bird stress during catching should be minimized Light intensity should be reduced to a minimum, and any sudden increases in light intensity avoided. When catching is conducted during daylight hours, the use of curtains over the main doors will help to minimize light intensity in the house and reduce stress.

Ventilation must be controlled and adjusted carefully during catching to avoid heat stress, and birds should be monitored closely for any signs of over-heating (panting).

Catching can be completed manually or mechanically. With mechanical catching 4,000 to 5,000 birds an hour can typically be caught. The potential benefits of mechanical catching (when properly managed according to manufacturer recommendations and with appropriate training) are:

1- Improved bird welfare through decreased catching stress and injury rates.

2- Lower operating costs, and improved working conditions.

However, the initial set-up costs of mechanical catching are high, and it is not suitable for use in all operations. Mechanical catching is best suited to modern facilities where houses tend to be wider and are clear span (free from internal structural obstructions).

The most common lesion associated with mishandling during catching is **bruising**. Around 90- 95% of the bruises found on broilers at processing occur during the last 12 hours prior to slaughter. Of these, typically 35 % are caused by the grower, 40 % occur during catching, and the remainder occur during transport, unloading and shackling. Having a member of staff from the processing plant monitoring the catching process may also be a worthwhile exercise.





**However, the initial set-up costs of mechanical catching are high, and it is not suitable for use in all operations. Mechanical catching is best suited to modern facilities where houses tend to be wider and are clear span (free from internal structural obstructions).**

**The most common lesion associated with mishandling during catching is bruising. Around 90- 95% of the bruises found on broilers at processing occur during the last 12 hours prior to slaughter. Of these, typically 35 % are caused by the grower, 40 % occur during catching, and the remainder occur during transport, unloading and shackling. Having a member of staff from the processing plant monitoring the catching process may also be a worthwhile exercise.**

**3- Transport**

Transport modules should not be overfilled, and local legislation must be adhered to. If the number of birds per module is too high, over-heating, increased bird stress, mortality, and a higher incidence of condemnations at the processing plant may occur. The number of birds per transport module must be reduced in high temperatures.

Transportation vehicles must provide adequate protection from the weather, appropriate ventilation, and comply with local current legislation.

Ventilation and extra heating and/or cooling should be used when necessary. Stops during transportation should be minimized, preferred the use of fans to keep air circulating through the modules should be considered. Allowing at least 10 cm between every two tiers of transport modules, or introducing empty transport modules at regular intervals throughout the load, will improve air-flow and can reduce heat stress.

In cold weather, the load should be covered to minimize chill, and bird comfort should be checked.

4- Holding

Upon arrival at the processing plant, birds need to be held in a cool, weather-proofed area. Humidity, temperature, and bird comfort should be monitored on a routine basis. If birds are observed huddling (cold distress) or panting (heat stress), then environmental conditions are not optimal and should be altered immediately.

Fans can be used to help keep the birds cool and well ventilated in the holding area. Fans should be carefully positioned to ensure a good, even air flow through the crates.

During periods of high temperature, foggers can be used to help keep birds cool. Foggers must be well-maintained, and should not be used when relative humidity is greater than 70% because the capacity of birds to lose heat will be compromised.

During periods of cold weather, it may be necessary to provide extra heating in the holding area. Adequate ventilation must be maintained at all times.

Holding times at the processing plant should be minimized and birds processed as quickly as possible. Excessive holding periods compromises carcass quality and more importantly, bird