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# The Case for Ending Beak Trimming

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Animal Welfare  
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## Summary

**Feather pecking** and **cannibalism** constitute the greatest **economic** and **welfare** pressures to poultry production today. The current response to this ongoing issue is **beak trimming**. This is an invasive practice that, by amputating a portion of the beak of the bird, can reduce both plumage damage and **mortality** associated with injurious forms of feather pecking that widely occur in the current production systems. However, such **mutilation** of a central sensory organ of the bird poses a significant **welfare threat** in itself as it results in pain and sensory loss. It also constitutes the maiming of millions of sensitive and highly intelligent animals each year in the United Kingdom (UK). Given this understanding, beak trimming is widely regarded as **unacceptable** by the public.

The **ethical and societal concerns** that accompany beak trimming have led several countries to impose legal bans. In the UK, a **ban** was planned **for 2010** but was delayed to allow alternative solutions to prevent feather pecking and cannibalism to become more established. **In the twelve years since** improved management strategies and genetic selection of the birds has been put forward by research to solve this issue. Nonetheless, despite these promising options, beak trimming is still authorised and **widely used** in UK farms.

Routine beak trimming was/is due to stop *as soon as reasonably possible*<sup>1</sup>, yet, there is no target date or informed route to properly implement **adapted environmental and management practices** in farms, and for the UK to finally move away from this **archaic** practice on **sentient**<sup>2</sup> beings. Research advances on alternative solutions to beak trimming along with the growing **public interest** in animal welfare in food production should push the government to implement a **long-due** transition towards better, **more sustainable**, and **humane** animal production methods in the poultry industry and beyond.

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<sup>1</sup> [Code of practice for the welfare of laying hens and pullets](#). DEFRA 2018

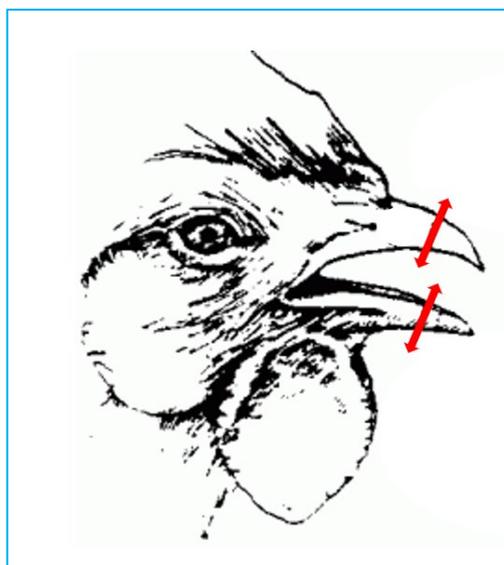
<sup>2</sup> *Sentient* describes a being that can feel pleasure and pain.

## Beak trimming: Procedure and justification

### Procedure

Beak trimming, or **debeaking**, is the process of amputating the sharp tip of the upper and lower beaks of a bird, usually up to a third of it (*Figures 1 and 2*).

Beak trimming is usually performed on **day-old chicks** in the hatchery, and can still be carried out on young birds up to 10 days old. The procedure involves a specialised machine using infra-red (IR) technology, also known as an **IR beak trimming system**<sup>3</sup>.



*Figure 1. The upper and lower beaks are cut back up to a third. Illustration adapted from "Practical Poultry Raising, Peace Corps Manual M11"*



*Figure 2. Close up of a battery hen (Gallus gallus domesticus), Italy. Credit: Stefano Belacchi / Essere Animali / We Animals Media.*

<sup>3</sup> As Infra-Red Beak Trimming is the only option authorised in the UK, this report mainly focuses on this method.



All *mutilations* (see [Box 1](#) for definitions) of poultry are banned under the Animal Welfare Act 2006, **except for beak trimming**<sup>4</sup>.

Beak trimming is **widely practised** on laying hens and chicks, which represents about 38.2 million animals in 2021 in the United Kingdom (UK)<sup>5</sup>. Although it should not be necessary on meat chickens who are slaughtered before their sexual maturity, it is also sometimes practised on these birds.

Mutilations such as beak trimming should **only be practised when essential** to avoid a worse welfare outcome, and the ultimate aim is for routine beak trimming to stop as soon as *reasonably possible*<sup>6</sup>. This guidance yet leaves important uncertainty as to *when* this might be the case.

As a form of **mutilation**, the practice of beak trimming **must continue to be questioned** going forward.

## Current justification

Beak trimming should be/is (exclusively) used to reduce the risk of **injurious feather peaking**, which is a behaviour where one hen uses her beak to peck, pull or remove the

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### Box 1. Mutilation:

*"[...] a procedure which involves interference with the sensitive tissues or bone structure of the animal, otherwise than for the purposes of medical treatment."* The Animal Welfare Act 2006

*"[...] a procedure carried out other than for therapeutic or diagnostic purposes and resulting in damage to or loss of a sensitive part of the body or the alteration of the bone structure."* The Council of Europe Recommendation concerning Pigs (entered into force June 2005)

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<sup>4</sup> [The Mutilations \(Permitted Procedures\) \(England\) \(Amendment\) Regulations 2010](#)

<sup>5</sup> [E&W Hatcheries Survey, DAERA and RESAS, 2022](#)

<sup>6</sup> [Code of practice for the welfare of laying hens and pullets. DEFRA 2018](#)



feathers of another bird. This behaviour is observed on **most farms** (from 52<sup>7</sup> to 86%<sup>8</sup> of flocks/farms depending on the research). Severe peaking results in important **plumage loss**<sup>9</sup> and **skin damage** that increases susceptibility to infection<sup>10</sup>. In some cases, this can escalate to **cannibalism**, thus causing significant and **chronic pain** to the birds and potentially leading to their death<sup>11</sup>. Therefore, it has a serious impact on both bird welfare and flock productivity.

As beak trimming involves the amputation of the sharp tip of the beak, it limits the damage resulting from severe feather pecking. As such, beak trimming is associated with improved plumage condition in adult birds<sup>12</sup>, and has been found to reduce mortality in both cage<sup>13</sup> and non-cage poultry systems<sup>14</sup>. **However, beak trimming addresses the symptoms rather than the causes of feather pecking.**

Then, as poultry strains got selected for high productivity and low input costs, other traits or behaviours such as feather pecking **might have been selected**<sup>15</sup>. Then, **the development of**

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<sup>7</sup> [Bestman et al. \(2003\)](#). Farm level factors associated with feather pecking in organic laying hens *Livestock Production Science*, 80, pp. 133-140.

<sup>8</sup> [Lambton et al. \(2010\)](#). The risk factors affecting the development of gentle and severe feather pecking in loose housed laying hens, *Applied Animal Behaviour Science*, Volume 123, Issues 1–2, Pages 32-42, ISSN 0168-1591.

<sup>9</sup> [Drake et al. \(2010\)](#). Influence of rearing and lay risk factors on propensity for feather damage in laying hens. *Br. Poultry Sci.* 51, 725-733.

<sup>10</sup> [Green et al. \(2000\)](#). Cross-sectional study of the prevalence of feather pecking in laying hens in alternative systems and its associations with management and disease. *Vet. Rec.* 147, 233–238.

<sup>11</sup> [Nicol et al. \(2013\)](#). The prevention and control of feather pecking: application to commercial systems. *Worlds Poultry Sci. J.* 69, 775–788.

<sup>12</sup> [Sepeur et al. \(2015\)](#). Comparison of plumage condition of laying hens with intact and trimmed beaks kept on commercial farms. *Eur. Poultry Sci.* 79.

<sup>13</sup> [Guesdon et al. \(2006\)](#). Effects of beak trimming and cage design on laying hen performance and egg quality. *Br. Poultry Sci.* 47, 1-12.

<sup>14</sup> [Weeks et al. \(2016\)](#). Implications for welfare, productivity and sustainability of the variation in reported levels of mortality for laying hen flocks kept in different housing systems: a meta-analysis of ten studies. *PLoS One* 11, e0146394.

<sup>15</sup> [Su et al. \(2006\)](#). Divergent selection on feather pecking behaviour in laying hens has caused differences between lines in egg production, egg quality, and feed efficiency. *Poultry Sci.* 85, 191-197.

severe feather peaking is enhanced in conditions where birds have difficulty in coping with environmental stressors<sup>16</sup>, such as overcrowding (*Figure 3*). Addressing genetic predispositions to feather peaking as well as the stressors to provide a better-suited environment for the birds offer the best prospect for preventing and/or controlling feather pecking.



*Figure 3. An organic egg farm in Italy. Credit: Stefano Belacchi / Essere Animali / We Animals Media*

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<sup>16</sup> [Rodenburg et al. \(2013\)](#). The prevention and control of feather pecking in laying hens: Identifying the underlying principles. *World's Poultry Science Journal*. Vol. 69, Issue 2, Pages 361 - 374

## Welfare implications of beak trimming

### The beak: a central and sensitive organ

The avian beak is full of blood vessels, pain receptors, and sensory nerves that assist the bird to navigate its **social and physical environment**. In particular, the *tip* is the area of the chicken beak that contains the most **sensory receptors**<sup>17</sup>. As such, experts suggest that these specialised structures located in the tip of the beak are crucial to fine tactile discrimination necessary for conducting complex oral tasks.

### Infra-red beak trimming: the solution?

For the last decade in the UK, **infra-red (IR) beak trimming** has been the only beak trimming method routinely permitted, as it replaced conventional methods such as hot blading or cold-cut trimming. This procedure involves focusing a **high-intensity IR beam** at the tip of the beak, which penetrates the hard outer horn, damaging an area of the underlying dermis and sub-dermal tissues. During this procedure, the chick is suspended by the head while going through an automated carousel<sup>18</sup>.

Moving away from the hot blade to IR technology is claimed to represent a welfare improvement in the poultry industry as it *limits* acute and chronic pain as well as the risk of complication. However, this “**replacement**” is far from being a perfect solution.

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<sup>17</sup> [Gentle & Breward \(1986\)](#). The bill tip organ of the chicken (*Gallus gallus var. domesticus*). *J. Anat.* 145, pp. 79-85

<sup>18</sup> [Opinion on Beak Trimming of Laying Hens](#) – Farm Animal Welfare Council, November 2007



## Consequences of (IR) beak trimming

As mentioned previously, the beak is a **complex** innervated organ used **constantly** by the bird to perform a wide range of **functional and social behaviours** such as grabbing food, building nests, interacting with peers, as well as keeping healthy by preening and removing ectoparasites. Partial amputation of this organ – regardless of the method - therefore results in **pain, sensory loss**, reduction of the bird's ability to manipulate items in its environment<sup>19</sup>, and facilitates **higher levels of ectoparasite** (northern fowl mites and chicken body lice) infestation<sup>20</sup>.

Equally important, several research papers have reported that beak trimming is followed by rapid **changes in heart and respiratory rates** and **blood pressure** in several species such as chickens and ducks, as well as sustained increases in circulating **stress hormones** (corticosterone) in chickens more specifically<sup>21</sup>. These findings evidenced the experience of **pain** (see [Box 2](#))

following beak trimming. Furthermore, scientific studies found that IR trimmed birds **feed less** than untrimmed birds until 4 weeks of age<sup>22</sup>, resulting in a **decrease in growth** rate

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### Box 2. Animal pain:

*“an aversive sensory and emotional experience representing an awareness by the animal of damage or threat to the integrity of its tissues... it changes the animal's physiology and behaviour to reduce or avoid damage, to reduce the likelihood of recurrence and to promote recovery.”*

Molony & Kent (1997). Assessment of acute pain in farm animals using behavioral and physiological measurements. *J. Anim. Sci.* 75, 266e272.

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<sup>19</sup> [Gentle \(1986\)](#). Beak trimming in poultry. *Worlds Poult. Sci. J.* 42:268–275

<sup>20</sup> [Chen et al. \(2011\)](#). Beak condition drives abundance and grooming-mediated competitive asymmetry in a poultry ectoparasite community. *Parasitology* 138:748–757.

<sup>21</sup> [Beausoleil et al. \(2022\)](#). Chapter 14 - Avian nociception and pain, Editor(s): Colin G. Scanes, Sami Dridi, *Sturkie's Avian Physiology* (Seventh Edition), Academic Press, Pages 223-231.

<sup>22</sup> [Marchant-Forde et al. \(2008\)](#). Comparative effects of infrared and one-third hot-blade trimming on beak topography, behavior, and growth. *Poult. Sci.* 87:1474–1483.



from 5 days to 8 weeks compared to untrimmed chicks<sup>23</sup>. IR-trimmed birds were also **less active** up to one week old and showed significant **alterations in indicators of immune function** for at least a week after the procedure<sup>24</sup>. Therefore, although IR beak trimming offers a better alternative to the initial hot blade methodology<sup>25</sup>, there is evidence that **beak trimming still negatively impacts** the bird in the short and long term.

The replacement of the hot-blade by the IR-beak trimming technology **followed the delay of the ban of beak trimming** that was initially planned for 2010. It is important to highlight that this provisional method **should not stop the work for a complete ban on beak trimming**.

## Alternative options to beak trimming and the way forward

### Pecking: a natural behaviour that becomes pathological

Although being a natural and an adaptive part of the behavioural repertoire of the chicken and other birds, pecking can become compulsive **if the birds are in an unsuitable and stressful environment**, such as one which is too crowded, lacks enrichment or suitable surfaces for the expression of their natural pecking instinct (e.g., flock block, soil, wood).

Beak trimming focuses on the *symptoms* of the feather pecking, rather than the *causes* of this pathological behaviour. **Improving the environment** of the animals should be a priority, **instead of mutilating them to fit into our system of production**. While beak trimming is

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<sup>23</sup> [Angevaere et al. \(2012\)](#). The effect of maternal care and infrared beak trimming on development, performance and behavior of Silver Nick hens. *Appl. Anim. Behav. Sci.* 140:70–84.

<sup>24</sup> [Xie et al. \(2013\)](#). Effect of  $\gamma$ -aminobutyric acid on growth performance and immune function in chicks under beak trimming stress. *Animal Science Journal*, 84(2), 121-129.

<sup>25</sup> [Carruthers et al. \(2012\)](#). On-farm survey of beak characteristics in White Leghorns as a result of hot blade trimming or infrared beak treatment. *J. Appl. Poult. Res.* 21:645–650.



currently seen as the most cost-effective solution to injurious pecking, alternative management methods that do not involve the amputation of a crucial sensory organ are possible and should be prioritised. They are described in the following section.

## Alternatives to beak trimming

Both **genetic** and **husbandry variances** – including environment and nutrition- greatly influence severe feather peaking behaviour within poultry flocks. This behaviour occurs and spreads in conditions where the birds are in a **stressful environment**, which is the case in most poultry production systems. Relying on beak trimming as a routine strategy to prevent and/or manage feather pecking **is not sustainable** from an **ethical and welfare** perspective.

Limiting the impact of injurious feather pecking can be reached through **proactive monitoring** as well as the use of **adapted environmental and management practices**.

These practices include:

- Early access to litter has been found to reduce feather pecking, even in large flocks<sup>26</sup>. Indeed, foraging is an extensive part of birds' natural behavioural repertoire, therefore, hens with access to **foraging substrate** will spend up to 40% of their time foraging<sup>27</sup>.

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<sup>26</sup> [Gunnarsson et al. \(1999\)](#). Effect of rearing factors on the prevalence of floor eggs, cloacal cannibalism and feather pecking in commercial flocks of loose housed laying hens. Br. Poult. Sci. 40, 12–18.

<sup>27</sup> [Mishra et al. \(2005\)](#). Temporal and sequential structure of behavior and facility usage of laying hens in an enriched environment. Poult. Sci. 84, 979–991.

- **High<sup>28</sup> perches** provide birds with an escape from unwanted social interactions and undesirable environmental conditions, therefore decreasing their stress level and limiting the occurrence of feather pecking<sup>29</sup>.
- **Feeding mashed food<sup>30</sup>** that is consumed more slowly as compared to pelleted food<sup>31</sup>, as well as feeding **high-fibre, low energy diets, or roughages<sup>32</sup>**, and providing a **stable diet<sup>33</sup>** throughout lay is associated with less feather pecking. **Grain scattered** as a pecking incentive during rearing<sup>34</sup> may also reduce feather pecking.
- Less feather pecking is recorded in **lower stocking density flocks** during rearing<sup>35</sup>, as well as in flocks combining **lower stocking density and smaller group size<sup>36</sup>**.
- Birds are very sensitive to changes in their environment. Therefore, providing a constant **lighting environment**, regulated **sound intensity**, low levels of **carbon dioxide and ammonia**, and an appropriate **thermal comfort** zone is crucial to mitigate feather pecking behaviour<sup>37</sup>.

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<sup>28</sup> [Wechsler et al. \(1998\)](#). The effect of foraging material and perch height on feather pecking and feather damage in laying hens. *Appl. Anim. Behav. Sci.* 58, 131–141.

<sup>29</sup> [Lambton et al. \(2010\)](#). The risk factors affecting the development of gentle and severe feather pecking in loose housed laying hens. *Appl. Anim. Behav. Sci.* 123, 32–42.

<sup>30</sup> [Lambton et al. \(2010\)](#). The risk factors affecting the development of gentle and severe feather pecking in loose housed laying hens. *Appl. Anim. Behav. Sci.* 123, 32–42.

<sup>31</sup> [Savory et al. \(1997\)](#). Behavioural development in groups of penhoused pullets in relation to genetic strain, age and food form. *Br. Poult. Sci.* 38, 38–47.

<sup>32</sup> [van Krimpen et al. \(2005\)](#). Impact of feeding management on feather pecking in laying hens. *Worlds Poult. Sci. J.* 61, 663–686.

<sup>33</sup> [Pöttsch et al. \(2001\)](#). A cross-sectional study of the prevalence of vent pecking in laying hens in alternative systems and its associations with feather pecking, management and disease. *Appl. Anim. Behav. Sci.* 74, 259–272.

<sup>34</sup> [Blokhuys et al. \(2007\)](#). The LayWel project: welfare implications of changes in production systems for laying hens. *Worlds Poult. Sci. J.* 63, 101–114.

<sup>35</sup> [Huber-Eicher & Audigé \(1999\)](#). Analysis of risk factors for the occurrence of feather pecking in laying hen growers. *Br. Poult. Sci.* 40, 599–604.

<sup>36</sup> [Nicol et al. \(1999\)](#). Differential effects of increased stocking density, mediated by increased flock size, on feather pecking and aggression in laying hens. *Appl. Anim. Behav. Sci.* 65, 137–152.

<sup>37</sup> [Drake et al. \(2010\)](#). Influence of rearing and lay risk factors on propensity for feather damage in laying hens. *Br. Poult. Sci.* 51, 725–733.



- Access to a more complex and stimulating environment such as **outdoors spaces**<sup>38</sup> where birds can forage and exercise in **tree-covered areas**<sup>39</sup> where they would be protected from threats of predation and weather conditions (*Figure 4*).



*Figure 4. Rescued layer hens (Gallus gallus domesticus) at Farm Sanctuary (USA). Credit: Jo-Anne McArthur / We Animals Media*

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<sup>38</sup> [Lambton et al. \(2010\)](#). The risk factors affecting the development of gentle and severe feather pecking in loose housed laying hens. *Appl. Anim. Behav. Sci.* 123, 32–42.

<sup>39</sup> [Nicol et al. \(2003\)](#). Matched concurrent case-control study of risk factors for feather pecking in hens on free-range commercial farms in the UK. *Br. Poult. Sci.* 44, 515–523.



- **Environmental enrichment** such as string<sup>40</sup> and hay bales<sup>41</sup> were demonstrated efficient in reducing the prevalence of severe feather pecking.
- **Limit sharp environmental changes** between rearing and laying stages reduce the stress and therefore the development of feather pecking. When farmers conduct their **own rearing**, in **mixed groups** of hens and cockerels, less feather pecking is observed<sup>42</sup>.
- **Genetic selection** of strains that show lower propensities to develop feather pecking<sup>43</sup> and express overall lower levels of fearfulness and stress<sup>44</sup> can help prevent feather pecking.

**These management strategies have been widely studied for the past three decades in laying hens, and strongly support significant changes in hen production systems** (for a full review, see Daigle, 2017<sup>45</sup>).

Similarly, feather pecking is also an issue for other domestic bird productions such as **turkeys and ducks**. Although some strategies investigated for hens would be common sense to adapt to other poultry systems, more specific research is needed.

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<sup>40</sup> [McAdie et al. \(2005\)](#). Reduction in feather pecking and improvement of feather condition with the presentation of a string device to chickens. *Appl. Anim. Behav. Sci.* 93, 67–80.

<sup>41</sup> [Daigle et al. \(2014\)](#). Use of dynamic and rewarding environmental enrichment to alleviate feather pecking in non-cage laying hens. *Appl. Anim. Behav. Sci.* 161, 75–85.

<sup>42</sup> [Bestman & Wagenaar \(2003\)](#). Farm level factors associated with feather pecking in organic laying hens. *Livestock Production Science*. Volume 80, Issues 1–2, Pages 133-140

<sup>43</sup> [Uitdehaag et al. \(2011\)](#). Effects of genetic origin and social environment on behavioral response to manual restraint and monoamine functioning in laying hens. *Poult. Sci.* 90, 1629–1636.

<sup>44</sup> [Bolhuis et al. \(2009\)](#). Effects of genetic group selection against mortality on behavior and peripheral serotonin in domestic laying hens with trimmed and intact beaks. *Physiol. Behav.* 97, 470–475.

<sup>45</sup> [Daigle \(2017\)](#). Chapter 11 – Controlling feather pecking and cannibalism in egg laying flocks. *Egg Innovations and Strategies for Improvements*, Eds: Hester, Academic Press. P. 111-121

## Legal context

### In the UK

A **complete ban on beak trimming** in all systems of poultry production was planned for December 2010. Unfortunately, this has not been implemented yet. Instead, the Mutilations (Permitted Procedures) (England) Amendment Regulations 2010 (No. 3034) authorises beak trimming for all poultry to prevent feather pecking or cannibalism<sup>46</sup>, despite the Animal Welfare Act (2006) that proscribes procedures that involve interference with the sensitive tissues of the bone structure of animals such as chickens (see [Box 1](#) on page 5).

For all poultry, beak trimming:

- must be performed using a suitable instrument;
- any subsequent haemorrhage from the beak must be arrested by cauterisation.

For laying hens and chicks, this procedure:

- may only be carried out using **IR technology**;
- may not be performed on birds that are aged **10 days** or over;
- must be carried out by a person who has been provided with suitable and sufficient information, instruction, and training so that they are qualified to perform the procedure.

**More than a decade later, there is still no date for the implementation of the promised ban.**

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<sup>46</sup> <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2010/3034/2010-12-23>

## In Europe

The Annex of Council Directive of the European Union for the protection of laying hens provides a general ban on mutilations, but it is neutralised by a broad exemption that authorises beak trimming of chickens before 10 days of age and intended for laying<sup>47</sup>. In contrast, Annex I of the Council Directive of the European Union for the protection of chickens kept for meat production allows beak trimming only “when other measures to prevent feather pecking and cannibalism are exhausted”<sup>48</sup>.

Following ethical and societal concerns, some European countries have imposed legal bans on beak trimming (Sweden, Norway, Denmark in the egg industry). In Switzerland, beak trimming practices have been banned since 1992. This suggests that **this mutilation can be avoided in a country with high welfare standards and resources such as the UK.**

## Economic and environmental implications of intensive poultry production

### Direct economic implications of beak trimming

Beak trimming involves the **additional handling** of chicks and **extra costs**. While chicks for commercial laying hens used to be trimmed manually, the advent of more advanced technology has allowed beak trimming to become more time and cost-efficient. The cost of IR-beak trimming is estimated to be about **3 to 4p/bird**<sup>49</sup>.

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<sup>47</sup> [Council Directive 1999/74/EC of 19 July 1999](#) Laying Down Minimum Standards for the Protection of Laying Hens kept in Battery Cages. OJ L 203:53–57.

<sup>48</sup> [Council Directive 2007/43 of 28 June 2007](#) Laying Down Minimum Rules for the Protection of Chickens Kept for Meat Production, 2007 O.J. (L 182) 19 - 28 (E.U.)

<sup>49</sup> [British Egg Industry Council](#) (BEIC)

Feather pecking damages the plumage of the bird and can result in increased feed costs of up to 40%<sup>50</sup>. However, following the beak trimming, food intake drops until 4 weeks of age, resulting in a decrease in growth rate that also has economic implications for production<sup>51</sup>. Unfortunately, once feather pecking begins it might be challenging to stop, and resulting mortality can reach up to 30%. Consequently, without implementing significant changes and adaptation to the current systems, the cessation of beak trimming could have important consequences on the welfare of the animals and production.

**However**, beak trimming is once again only the tip of the iceberg of a much bigger issue, as other consequences of intensive poultry farming have to be taken into account going forward.

### Going further: Environmental and public health concerns

Other implications such as environmental and public health concerns should be taken into account when reviewing our poultry systems. Indeed, the intensification of **poultry production** systems that require to use of beak trimming due to large flocks with higher concentrations of animals is also associated with a variety of pollutants. These pollutants include oxygen-demanding substances, ammonia, solids, nutrients such as nitrogen and phosphorus, pathogens, trace elements, antibiotics, pesticides, and hormones. These contaminants have a substantial **impact on water, air and soil pollution** as well as **ecological**

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<sup>50</sup> [Blokhuis et al. \(2007\)](#). The LayWel project: welfare implications of changes in production systems for laying hens. *Worlds Poult. Sci. J.* 63, 101–114.

<sup>51</sup> [Angevaere et al. \(2012\)](#). The effect of maternal care and infrared beak trimming on development, performance and behavior of Silver Nick hens. *Appl. Anim. Behav. Sci.* 140:70–84.

**imbalances, biodiversity losses and occupational health and safety hazards**<sup>52</sup>. It is important to review our systems, for the sake of the animals and our own.

## Conclusion

To conclude, it is urgent for the UK to finally make a **significant** move away from the **archaic** practice of beak trimming that still constitutes a “**major welfare insult**”, as reported by the FAWC back in 1997<sup>53</sup>. **Twenty-five years later**, alternatives exist and should be prioritised. These include good management strategies, environmental enrichment, small flocks of lower stocking density, and the selection of suitable genetics - all these practices being general ways to **limit the suffering** and **enhance the overall welfare** of millions of animals in UK farms each year. **It is about time** to focus on strategies that respect the animal we raise, and protect our environment and our future.

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<sup>52</sup> [Gerber et al. \(2007\)](#). Poultry production and the environment – a review. Animal Production and Health Division, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. Viale delle Terme di Caracalla, 00153 Rome, Italy

<sup>53</sup> Farm Animal Welfare Council (FAWC, 1997) - Report on the Welfare of Laying Hens, Paragraph 62



Rescued chickens (*Gallus gallus domesticus*), Australia. Credit: Jo-Anne McArthur / We Animals

