



## **Media Release**

**From the**

**Universities Federation for Animal Welfare (UFAW)**

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**For Immediate Release:**

### **Develop poultry housing that allows for natural foraging behaviour say poultry experts**

The results of a study by poultry experts at the Scottish Agricultural College and the University of Guelph, Canada, into the reduction of feather pecking in laying hens have been published in *Animal Welfare*, the journal of the UK based Universities Federation for Animal Welfare (UFAW), with the conclusion that poultry housing that allows for natural foraging behaviour should be developed.

Feather pecking, and in extreme cases the cannibalism that can result, is a serious welfare and economic problem in laying hens, conventionally addressed by beak trimming. Beak trimming, involving removal of part of the hen's beak to make feather pecking more difficult, is, however, itself regarded by many as a serious welfare issue. While it is widely thought that feather pecking stems from re-directed foraging motivation, other types of enrichment such as dustbaths and novel objects have also been shown to reduce feather pecking.

In this study, Laura Dixon of the Avian Science Research Centre at the Scottish Agricultural College, Ian Duncan and Georgia Mason of the Department of Animal and Poultry Science, University of Guelph, examined these different possibilities to compare effectiveness and to inform development of a practical and effective enrichment that could be adopted to reduce feather pecking as a more appropriate practice than beak trimming.

Groups of chickens known to feather peck were provided with the different enrichments, and no enrichment, in regimes designed to eliminate extraneous effects. It was found that feather pecking levels were highest when no enrichment was provided and lowest when forages were provided, with dustbaths and novel objects in between. The findings, say the authors, support the hypothesis that feather pecking stems from re-directed foraging behaviour and confirms the importance of providing birds with forages. They suggest that it also encourages future research to determine practical and inexpensive forage substrates, perhaps straw/hay or bunches of string, for use in poultry housing.

Details of the study, and other *Animal Welfare* papers, can be accessed at the UFAW website, [www.ufaw.org.uk](http://www.ufaw.org.uk) (abstracts free, full papers free to *Animal Welfare* subscribers). The *Animal Welfare* journal is published quarterly by UFAW, an independent scientific and educational animal welfare charity. Subscription information is available at the website or contact UFAW, The Old School, Brewhouse Hill, Wheathampstead, Herts AL4 8AN. Telephone 01582 831818, email [ufaw@ufaw.org.uk](mailto:ufaw@ufaw.org.uk).

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### Note to Editors:

The Universities Federation for Animal Welfare (UFAW) is an internationally recognised, independent scientific and educational animal welfare charity. It works to improve knowledge and understanding of animals' needs in order to achieve high standards of welfare for farm, companion, research, captive wild animals and those with which we interact in the wild.

UFAW improves animal welfare worldwide through its programme of awards, grants and scholarships; by educational initiatives, especially at university and college level; by providing information in books, videos, reports and in its scientific journal *Animal Welfare*; by providing expert advice to governments and others, including for legislation and 'best practice' guidelines and codes; and by working with animal keepers, scientists, vets, lawyers and all those who care about animals.

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