



POTTERS POST

NEWS AND VIEWS FROM POTTERS

Welcome to the seventh issue of the Potters Post. Published twice a year (or annually if the editor is overstretched!!), it is our aim to cover current topics and issues affecting the industry and inform you of what's going on at Potters.



POINTS OF INTEREST

AVIAN FLU

2007 saw several cases of Avian Flu both in the UK and overseas. A turkey finisher flock in Holton, Suffolk was confirmed as H5N1 positive on 3rd February. However, by 12th March all measures applicable under the Declaration in both the Surveillance and Restricted Zones ended, clearly demonstrating Defra's efficiency.

At the end of May H7N2 low path AI was identified in birds on a small farm in North Wales. A tracing exercise was then carried out which centered on Chelford Market in Cheshire. Pat Troop, the Chief Executive of the Health Protection Agency released a statement regarding this outbreak declaring that, "As a routine precaution, we have tested those who were associated with the infected or dead birds and reported flu-like symptoms. We tested samples from nine people in our laboratories and confirmed infection in four. These test results confirm that human infection with the avian flu virus has occurred." It was emphasised that worldwide, almost all human H7N2 infections documented so far, including those associated with this most recent incident, have been associated with infected poultry.

Restriction zones were put in place around St.Helens, Merseyside from 7th June to 3rd July where low path AI was also identified.

As the summer continued, H5N1 was found in wild birds across mainland Europe including France and on a commercial scale was identified in two broiler breeders flocks in the Czech Republic as well as a commercial duck farm in Bavaria, Germany.

November saw the return of the same strain to Redgrave on the Norfolk/Suffolk border which

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TOP INDUSTRY PRODUCER HAS RECORD BREAKING FLOCK

Jeff Vergerson, founder of Countryside Products Ltd, has been in egg production for some 24 years. He started in the industry back in 1984 with 400 Hy-Line birds ex SAPPA. Jeff's current venture is a 6000 bird organic site at Houghton, Norfolk, which he set up in 2003. The birds are housed in 9 Liberty mobiles across a 30 acre site. The mobiles are fitted out with Potters single tier rear-roll away nests with chain feeders and nipples drinkers. In September 2006 Potters supplied flock number 4 which Jeff reported, "was one of the best flocks he had ever had!" Both Jeff and Potters were delighted with the performance of the Lohmann Tradition birds which produced at over 90% for 23 weeks. The total number of eggs to 72 wks was a staggering 315 per bird housed against a breed target of 298. Total egg mass was also over breed target reaching a cumulative of 19.8kg. Jeff was sorry to see the birds go as they were still producing over 74% on depopulation with cumulative mortality totalling only 6.5%. The frugal feed intake of the Lohmann birds more than added to the profitability of this flock, with an FCR of 1.77 against a breed target of 2.16.



In November 2007 the replacement flock was housed by Potters. Due to Lohmann Tradition no longer being available, Jeff chose to place Hy-Line, which at present seems to have been a very good decision! The flock reached 93% at 23 weeks and have remained over 90% ever since.

It is often found that egg production on alternative systems deteriorates year upon year but that is certainly not the case for Jeff. The right quality pullet and the excellent on-farm management have proved that even after 5 years, Houghton site can produce results significantly better than breed target. Long may it continue.....

CONTINUED SUCCESS DRIVES EXPANSION

Since Tim Smith joined Potters in 2006, our pullet rearing business has gone from strength to strength. Our increased nationwide coverage has opened up many new opportunities generating continual growth with the number of pullets we are rearing. Rearing pullets of the highest quality has always been and remains to be the top priority at Potters. During our 50 years experience of rearing, we have learnt that the best way to optimise pullet quality is to keep all the birds we rear and sell under our own control. The only way we can guarantee the level of control

required is to rear everything on our own company owned farms. Therefore, in September 2007, Potters purchased Woodsetts Poultry Farm in Worksop, an ex-broiler site. We had a long term rearing contract with this farm several years previously. It was paramount to us that the farm manager, Andrew Blagg, was "part of the deal" as he has worked on the farm for 21 years and is an excellent stockman. The farm holds 80,000 birds in 8 houses and is already proving to be a real asset to Potters, producing top quality pullets.

2008 MARKS 40 YEARS SERVICE FOR TWO OF POTTERS STAFF

On 1st July this year Roger Treacy, one of our rearing farm managers, will have clocked up 40 years service at Potters. This is one of two milestones for Roger as he will also be celebrating his 60th birthday on 12th August. When Roger joined the company he started working at our Wood Corner farm looking after 30,000 birds in cages. Roger then moved on to our Green End site and since 1987 he has run our Arley Lane farm which houses a total of 70,000 birds in both cages and litter and his length of experience is reflected in the quality of the pullets he produces flock after flock.

Celia Parker has also been with the Company for 40 years, starting when she was only 17 years old. During her many years service, Celia has turned her hand to most roles within the business. Her employment began with washing lorries at the weekends (Ron knew how to treat the ladies!!), then moving to work in our farms and buying offices through to where she is now, running our Accounts Department. Celia should also be highly commended for the fact that during this time she was also married to Ron Potter for 23 years!!!

There is probably nothing that Roger does not know about rearing chickens and the same can be said for Celia with the day to day running of the business. It is loyal staff such as these that have been integral in the growth and success of Potters since it was established in 1964.



Roger 10 years ago and he hasn't aged a day!



Celia starting young in the industry



RED MITE

ARTICLE WRITTEN BY GRANT HAYES, SLATE HALL VETERINARY PRACTICE AND MARIA GRANADO, WYATT POULTRY SERVICES

This is the most important ectoparasite of laying hens in all egg production systems in Europe. In 2003, ADAS estimated that the red mite problem cost the UK egg industry around £ 3.7 million per year. £2 million of this was due to lost egg production, £0.7m due to egg downgrades and £0.5m each on mortality and treatment.

The adult mites are tiny specks. They are blood feeding parasites that live most of the time away from the birds in the fabric and furniture of the building (just like dog and cat fleas). They mainly feed at night, walking across skin and feathers of the resting hens. They are most commonly detected in litter houses under nest box lids, in the slatted area, on perches and in feed tracks. They find their niche in any part of the house environment that offers a protective habitat by day and easy access to birds at night. They feed for 1 – 2 hours each day. A mite prior to a blood feed has a whitish colour, but when it is gorged with blood it is often dark red. They are seen as tiny red to blackish dots often in clusters. Shining a light on them and looking for movement is often the most reliable way of confirming that they are mite. Collecting them on white paper and smearing them across it can also help detect the blood meals, as it leaves a red smear.

After feeding, the mites retreat back to the birds' surrounding environment to hide in the cracks and crevices away from daylight. They hide here protected and lay eggs. The mites only tend to be seen on hens where there is heavier infestation.



Photo courtesy of Terry Beebe

To look at the eggs are virtually impossible to see. The mites can live up to 18 months and they produce up to 45 eggs. In the warm environment, the eggs will hatch in 48 – 72 hours. The hatches' juveniles can rapidly develop to adults within 7 days under the right conditions of warmth and access to hens. As a result, the flock can face a high level of infestation very quickly once a critical number of mites are established. Therefore, low levels of infestation need to be tackled as early as possible to reduce financial losses. In practice, low levels of infestation are often not detected or merely ignored.

Signs of Mites

The feeding nymphs and adult mites cause irritation to the hens. This is often unseen, but can manifest itself as excessive feather loss, pecking or cannibalism. In severe infestations, birds can be reluctant to go into the

henhouse or rest on the perches. The blood loss due to severe infestation can be lethal. In one flock, a sudden drop of 4% in peak egg production was seen due to mortality in productive birds that had lost too much blood to the mites. Less severe infestation can still be debilitating due to the irritation, feather loss, cannibalism and direct effects of anaemia, resulting in reduction in egg production. Low grade infestations often go undetected unless a practical monitoring programme is in place. Those people resorting to identifying infestation through looking for mites on eggs or waiting for staff to report redness and intense itching, will have a major problem to try to control for the rest of the life of the flock.

On postmortem examination, the typical picture we see is of a bird that is productive, but pale. It often has excessive feather loss for its age. Secondary peritonitis can be seen often as a result of pecking. Red mites are often still visible hiding under the wings of the carcass.

FACT



CAN'T REMEMBER IF AN EGG IS FRESH OR HARD BOILED? JUST SPIN THE EGG. IF IT WOBBLER, IT'S RAW. IF IT SPINS EASILY, IT'S HARD BOILED. A FRESH EGG WILL SINK IN WATER, A STALE ONE WILL FLOAT.

In addition to the direct impact of the irritation and blood sucking activities, the red mite has also been implicated as a vector of several significant disease organisms, such as Newcastle virus, Salmonella enteritidis, Marek's disease and Gumboro disease by transferring infectious agents from one bird to another or by acting as a reservoir of infection between flocks. This represents another good reason to ensure control.

Targeting Control Measures

As the mite spends most of its' time off the hen, then the focus for control must primarily be aimed at the environment and not the birds to be effective. Products aimed at the birds merely supplement environmentally targeted products.

Control Products

These include chemical insecticides (organophosphates, carbamates, pyrethroids) which act as rapid knock down products or have more residual environmental effects. Often the latter products are not licensed for use when the flock is housed. These products are being superseded by physical insecticides due to resistance issues. Ideally the chemical types used should be rotated each flock and the products should be applied in a targeted fashion when low level infestation is detected, to reduce the speed of mites developing resistance.

Physical insecticides are commonly in use and include

silica based, diatomaceous earth desiccants, physical abrasives, disinfectants, detergents and glues that physically disable the mites, which then die. Resistance is not known, but electrostatic application is sometimes needed, requiring more specialist equipment.

Control

The key to red mite control is how well residual products are applied during the cleaning period. A knock down product applied to the house immediately after depletion will help diminish the mite burden. This should be followed by dismantling and deep cleaning and disinfecting of equipment and applying an anti-mite product with residual action. Ideally when reconstructing equipment, any cracks or crevices should be filled (various products have been tried including silicon, sand and tar) or have residually active product applied directly to them. The deep cleaning will help identify areas which the mites inhabit and by scraping these areas of mites, will dilute the carry over between flocks. Houses standing empty should also be treated as the mites can survive in the house for up to 8 months without a feed and can re-infect subsequent flocks, if residual products are not used.

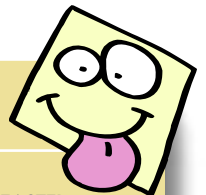
During the flock's life, the degree of control of infestation is dependent on early identification of the mites and targeting further action at those specific parts of the house affected. Action could include both filling the crack or crevice and applying a residually active product.

Monitoring the mite population can be achieved through various methods. Traps are now available of various designs, which are placed in the environment where mites are known to inhabit, prior to flock placement. A weekly schedule should be followed to check the traps to score mite levels and this should help identify mite burdens at a very early stage.

Red mite can be carried by staff in hair, or on clothing, on equipment or on dead birds. As such, potential risks for infestation include visitors, especially those who have had contact with poultry, other flocks, wild birds and especially Keyes trays, which are recycled after use.

Red mite have been observed in every type of layer production system and they are a perpetual threat that eat profit.

JOKE



AFTER THE EGG HUNT ON EASTER SUNDAY, THE YOUNG FARM BOY DECIDED TO PLAY A PRANK. HE WENT TO THE CHICKEN COOP AND REPLACED EVERY SINGLE EGG WITH A BRIGHTLY COLOURED ONE. A FEW MINUTES LATER THE ROOSTER WALKED IN, SAW ALL THE COLOUR EGGS, THEN STORMED OUTSIDE AND BEAT UP THE PEACOCK!

UPHILL CHALLENGES FACING THE EGG INDUSTRY

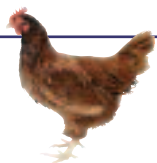
By 1st April this year all producers with an IPPC permit should have had their first audit. Potters have 4 farms with IPPC permits and like many producers are beginning to see the huge investment required to comply with the Directive. Many farmers who are already operating using the Best Available Techniques are still being expected to massively reduce their ammonia emissions by up to 700%!!! The other challenge facing the industry is Climate Change Levy which requires producers to reduce energy usage and improve their efficiency in a "climate" of ever increasing costs with the target goals being regularly reduced.

CURRENT EGG MARKET

There has been considerable growth in the free-range sector following the Jamie Oliver programme, with market research showing double digit growth in January, February and March. For the past 12 months, however, the industry has seen significant feed price increases, with most producers paying an average of £80/tonne more than last year. This has left producers in desperate need of an egg price increase, which demand would suggest is more than feasible.

Organic sales were in decline but have down stemmed the decline year on year, whereas the barn market is reducing substantially by 20% year on year. It is interesting to see that the value line cage egg sales are increasing though premium cage are down.

Louisa Platt from the BEIC reports that, "there is a polarisation of the market and that the cost of eggs has increased by 47% year on year for a dozen free-range eggs." There is no doubt with such increases that the average household will feel the increase in the price of food.



OLD HENS

There has been some improvement in the last 12 months with the old hen market tightening and the demand for birds increasing. Producers no longer have to pay for the catching at 6 pence per bird, as in most cases the major processors are supplying this foc. Depending on flock size and geographical location, the producer may also receive between 4-6 pence per bird. Although this is still a long way from the profitability of old hens in the past, it is a reasonable contribution to the clean out costs.

ORGANIC EGG PRODUCTION

To some extent the dramatic changes seen in the pricing of conventional feeds has been mirrored in the organic market – sharp rises with prices much higher than a year ago!

One problem has been that not enough arable farmers in the UK are growing organic wheat which brings in an element of 'shortage' that lifts the prices. To make matters worse, from the organic poultry farmers' perspective, more UK wheat has been traded between farmers this year. Last year the UK was 50% self sufficient in the wheat used in compound feeds. This year the figure is considerably less than half of that – largely because organic dairy farmers have bought the wheat from other farmers, denying the wheat access to the market. Whilst poultry diets lifted from 85% to 90% on 1st of January, for some ruminant diets, the organic inclusion was less than 50%, but from 1st of January the inclusion level had to be 100%.

Soya prices have soared even higher on lack of availability, in particular organic soya expeller. Insufficient material was available for the EU, in particular from Chinese origins and the disrupted pipeline for soya has caused chaos in the organic markets.

All in all the last year has provided a challenging time for organic raw materials and with new crop prices starting at historically high levels it is difficult for the trade to have the confidence to cover at these prices.

The retail chain has not returned the level of high feed cost to the producer. Retailers need to at least pay for the current high feed and pullet prices, to give confidence that they will then pay for the very high new crop prices.

An organic pullet is currently costing a producer around £4.80 which is unsustainable on current egg prices. To thrive, organic farmers must be paid a fair price which reflects their changing/rising costs, otherwise.....



With thanks to Martin Humphrey.

POINTS OF INTEREST

AVIAN FLU *Continued from Page 1*
caused significant disruption to a vast number of producers in the surrounding area. Culling was carried out on the Infected Premises as well as 5 Dangerous Contact sites and infection was kept confined to two farms, one of which was free-range. By 19th December, all zones were lifted.

2008 has thankfully been a quieter year so far with H5N1 only been confirmed in a small number of mute swans in Dorset in early January, with all control restrictions being lifted by the end of March.

The message from Defra and the BEIC throughout all these incidents has been to improve your on-farm biosecurity and stay alert at all times, which is something we should do at all times, not just when we are reminded to.

ZOONOSIS LEGISLATION

As previously reported, from 1st January 2008 all producers were required by law to take environmental samples from all buildings housing their flocks. The new rules are part of the EU's Zoonosis legislation. At present samples are only being tested for Salmonella enteritidis and typhimurium, however, further sub-types could be included in the future.

Producers must take the first test between 22 and 26 weeks of age and thereafter at 15 week intervals. In addition to the four tests taken by the producer over the laying period, a "control body" will take one sample from the holding every 12 months.

Currently we are still in "peace time" so should a producer get a positive result, they are only required to put a plan in place to eradicate the infection, involving Defra. However, from as soon as January 2009, the new rules will ban the sale of eggs at retail level from units which test positive for Se or St.

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FACT



EGGS NEED TO REACH 144 TO 158 DEGREES FAHRENHEIT BEFORE THEY'LL TURN FROM A LIQUID TO A SOLID

SPARES

Potters offer an extensive range of spares to provide a complete system, including feed chain, corners, troughs and a full range of suspension equipment. If we have not got it, we will make it for you!

Call Henry on 01455 204945 or order direct through our on-line shop



ZOONOSIS LEGISLATION

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From this date if a producer's sample proves positive a repeat sample will be ordered. If this is also shown to be positive then restrictions on the sale of eggs from the affected flock will be put in place. The only outlet for the eggs will be processing after heat treatment - assuming processors will accept them - and with it a massive loss of revenue. At the same time Defra will sample any other flocks on the holding.

After much lobbying from the BEIC, Defra have now confirmed that the producer can then opt for one of the 3 confirmatory samples – enhanced environmentals, oviduct/caeca or eggs. This is great news for the industry as it keeps focus on what really matters as stated by Mark William, BEIC, "this legislation is

ultimately aimed at protecting public health and from that point of view it's contamination of the eggs, not the environment, that is the real issue,"

This does not detract, however, from the severe financial implications that will be associated with a positive environmental sample. Sampling 4000 eggs is likely to cost into the thousands and whilst awaiting the confirmatory samples, there will be the cost of the eggs being downgraded, which could be as much as £3000/wk for a 12,000 bird farm. Should the confirmation test prove to be positive, this potentially means the flock being slaughtered and then the loss of income and increasing costs really begin.....

POTTERS LAUNCH NEW PRODUCTS

The new plastic slat launched by Potters a few months back is proving to be very successful and is now widely acknowledged to be the strongest slat available. Unlike most plastic slats that are used, the new Potters slat feels totally solid, stable and safe to walk on.

Our plastic slat contains a number of unique design features which not only make it exceptionally strong; it is also very easy to remove and refit at clean out time. The undercarriage support system is also made to last, with all parts only made from either galvanised steel or plastic. The legs are cleverly designed to keep all the adjustment at the top and clear of the manure.

Our slat systems are available with either a vertical board on the front or a ramped slat. The ramped slat design has been the best seller over recent months and seems to work very well with the birds.

Also launched within the last few months has been our new feed trough. The new Superior AntiMite trough has been designed with no folded edges, resulting in a feed trough which is considerably less attractive to the dreaded Red Mite. The new design also makes the trough much easier to clean and it remains compatible with old style couplers. The new trough is also substantially stronger than the old type because it is now made from much thicker galvanised steel.

The Superior AntiMite trough is now available as spares or for use in complete new systems. We now use this trough as standard in all our new installations.



WELCOME TO NEW TEAM MEMBER

Potters are pleased to announce that on 1st April 2008 Andrew Williams joined the Equipment division. Andrew has replaced Phil Tandy who left us in March to spend more time developing his own business. Justin and Olivia would like to take this opportunity to thank Phil for all he did during his 5 years working at Potters and we wish him all the best in the future.

We are delighted to have filled the Sales position as quickly as we have, thus ensuring our nationwide coverage is not compromised. Andrew has had many years in selling and his most recent experience was as a Sales Representative for Newquip in the South of England. Andrew is already proving to be an asset to Potters and we all look forward to working with him for many years to come! Andrew will predominantly be covering the South of the UK with Justin Potter continuing to cover the rest. Contact details for both can be found below.



Andrew commissioning new installation

THAT'S ALL FOLKS...

Well, that's the end of the seventh issue. If you would like anything published in our next Potters Post, please give me a call on 01455 204944 or write to the address shown below.

Olivia Potter, Editor.

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