



## ANIMAL WELL-BEING

# Poultry

**Author: Marisa Erasmus**  
Assistant Professor,  
Department of  
Animal Sciences,  
Purdue University

The well-being of animals matters mostly to animals, of course. But this issue is also of vital importance to many consumers — and the poultry industry as well. This publication, part of a series, seeks to provide basic information for non-experts.

### **If you are concerned about an animal's well-being**

- Call a local animal control officer
- For livestock and poultry concerns, contact the Indiana State Board of Animal Health (BOAH)  
<http://www.in.gov/boah/>

### **What is Animal Well-Being?**

Animal well-being, or animal welfare, is the ability of an animal to cope with its environment and living conditions. It's more than simply being healthy. Animal well-being includes:

- An animal's feelings or emotions, such as contentment
- An animal's ability to perform natural behavior, such as grooming or preening, stretching and turning around fully.
- An animal's health and biological functioning, such as not having injuries or disease

## Did you know ...

The poultry category is bigger than you might realize. It includes chickens, of course — and ducks, turkeys, geese, quail and guinea fowl. Poultry can see in color and ultraviolet (UV) light, and can also recognize and distinguish between individuals of the same species.

## Signs of poor well-being

Poultry that are sick or in pain may display some of the following behaviors or signs:

- Prolonged crouched posture and closed eyes
- Inactivity
- Fewer social interactions than typical
- Feeding and drinking less than typical
- Dustbathing less than typical
- Increased huddling, shivering, sleeping or resting
- Dull, dirty feathers
- Open-mouth breathing or panting
- Difficulty walking
- Discharge from the eyes or nares

## Causes of Poor Well-Being

Poultry are not in control of their environment. They are dependent on actions taken — or not taken — by their caretakers. Here are some ways that humans can negatively affect poultry:

- **Neglect:** failing to care for the animal. Not providing adequate food or water. Restraining the animal in a way that causes pain or endangers health. Ignoring illness, injury or disease, and not providing veterinary care.
- **Cruelty or abuse:** Causing physical harm, mental harm, pain or suffering, such as prolonged periods of thirst, hunger, or restraint or immobility.
- **Abandonment:** Deserting an animal or leaving an animal without making provisions for the animal's long-term care.
- **Crowding:** Not providing sufficient room, especially room to stretch and turn around fully.

## What poultry do, need, like, etc.

- Poultry are social animals. Provide opportunities for them to interact with others of the same species.
- Fresh, clean, unfrozen water should be available.
- High-quality feed is preferred. Keep feed away from, and inaccessible to, rodents, direct sunlight and wild birds.
- Housing should feature adequate ventilation and protection from bad weather. Birds that produce eggs need nesting areas. Perches (roosts) enable anti-predator behavior and help boost leg health and leg strength. Poultry like to dustbathe, so provide wood shavings or similar materials.
- Check animals daily for diseases, parasites, and injuries.

## Behaviors of concern

- **Aggression:** Poultry will form a pecking order, and aggression is part of the equation. So when introducing new birds, for 4 weeks use a fence to separate them from the flock (quarantine). Then it should be safe to place the all in the same area, but continue to monitor the birds.
- **Severe feather pecking:** Birds will sometimes peck at and remove feathers from other birds. Bald spots, pain and even cannibalism can result. Housing conditions, environmental stresses, diet, flock size and group dynamics can be causes. Isolate victimized bird(s) from the flock until they recover. However, the victimized bird(s) may be targeted again when reintroduced, so they should be isolated somewhere where they still have visual and auditory contact with the rest of the flock. In some cases, the bird that is doing the pecking can be identified, and it may be best for the health of the rest of the flock to remove this bird.