



Oats - effective against feather pecking in chickens

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The text below is a translation of the original German article (figures have not been reproduced here):

Hafer - wirkungsvoll gegen Federpicken bei Hühnern

<https://www.saaten-union.de/index.cfm/article/9345&longversion&1.html#dtstart>

“10% oats and coarsely broken corn in the ration should significantly reduce feather pecking in laying hens. (This is the central message of an article in "Agrarzeitung", which we have reproduced here by courtesy.)*

Nationwide, preparations are underway on poultry farms to do away with beak shortening. The members of the Central Federation of the German Poultry Economy, Federation of German Egg Producers, and Federation of German Turkey Producers announced a voluntary termination of beak shortening practices starting in January 2017. However, for this change to proceed without complications, the right conditions needed to be created.

First practical experience is positive

Practitioner Dietrich Vriesen, who holds approx. 120,000 laying hens in Westmünsterland, is participating in a pilot project for maintaining whole beaks. He had already converted his own flocks in the summer of 2016, relying on a specific feeding regime that has already proven itself in practice. It leads to less feather pecking, the chickens are less aggressive, and their immune systems become more stable.

This fitness concept was developed by scientists from the North Rhine-Westphalia Chamber of Agriculture, and Prof. Friedhelm Jaeger from the Lower Saxony Chamber of Agriculture was also involved. The scientists found that feather pecking is the result of an unstable gastrointestinal tract and a lack of intestinal bacterial flora. This inflames the plumage of the animals, the keels of the feathers become damaged, and, as a result, the birds suffer from itching. They then strive for relief with mutual feather picking.

Previously, it was believed that feather pecking was primarily caused by poor barn climate and excessive stocking densities. Now it has been shown that it also occurs in optimal housing conditions - if not controlled using a proper feeding regime.

It depends on the mix

The components of the new feeding regime are crucial: At least 6% percent crude (rough) fiber



(RF) should be included, with a soft to hard RF ratio of 50/50. The hard RF component is oat hulls and the soft component is, for example, soybean hulls. Another decisive factor for a quiet flock that pecks less is the proportion of oats in the ration: Prof. Jaeger recommends a 10% share of oats and coarsely broken maize. Other ingredients may be used in common practice.

Higher feed intake, healthier animals

The feed is administered in eight feeding phases throughout the day. The balanced diet with the higher crude fiber content encourages a higher feed intake by the birds: this is around 125-130g/animal/day, about 10g higher than with conventional feeding. The scientists have also observed that intestinal activity improves and the birds' metabolism is stimulated. The quills remain intact, so the birds can no longer pull out the feathers so easily. In addition, the researchers believe that this diet has a positive effect on coecal fermentation and stimulates the immune system.

More expensive feed is profitable. Prof. Jaeger emphasizes that, although more fibre makes the feed more expensive, this is partially offset by saving energy and raw protein.

In addition, you have comfortable animals in the barn!"

*Agrarzeitung 5, August 2016, page 7
