



Beak Trimming Ban

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Beak trimming is used to improve welfare in laying hen flocks. Feather pecking, also called injurious pecking, is something that can occur in flocks, which affects the health of a flock and can also cause injury or death. One solution used by farmers is to blunt beaks by trimming them. This procedure is carried out on chicks within 10 days of hatching.

The procedure itself has welfare implications and in response Defra legislated to ban beak trimming by 1 January 2011. However, on advice from the Farm Animal Welfare Council it was decided in November 2010 to postpone a total ban until at least 2016. Further information on this, including the legislation, can be found in the Library Standard Note on [Battery Hens](#) (SNSC 1367).

The Government decided a total ban would not be introduced until it could be demonstrated under commercial conditions that laying hens could be managed without beak trimming, without a greater risk to their welfare than that caused by beak trimming. The decision on whether to implement the ban will be made following a review of evidence in 2015 of whether welfare of non-trimmed flocks can be maintained at current or improved levels. Defra is currently funding a study to inform this decision, which will be completed by 2015.

There is an ongoing campaign by the NFU and poultry farmers to have the proposed ban for 2016 postponed.

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Beak Trimming

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Research focuses on improving husbandry and welfare of flocks to remove the stresses that can lead to feather pecking. Further information on the kind of improvements suggested can be found on the [Fetharewel](#) website, which is led by the University of Bristol.

Despite this timetable the [National Farmers Union](#) and the [British Free Range Egg Producers](#) association are already calling for the ban to be delayed. The NFU is also urging members to lobby MPs and has [stated](#) the following:

Our concerns centred around managing untrimmed birds and avoiding a welfare issue. Hot blading at a later date was not the answer. Not enough is understood as to what causes or triggers an outbreak - low flying aircraft, feed interruption, poor feed quality, red mite outbreak, poor weather, change in ration, etc. We are also concerned that the decision will be politically motivated and not based on science and evidence. Further, the great concern and worry amongst farmers is that untrimmed birds cannot be managed flock in and flock out without their welfare being compromised.

This follows [reports](#) in April 2014 that there have been problems in some of the flocks in involved in the Defra study.

[Compassion in World Farming](#) is a member, along with the two organisations above, of the Beak Trimming Action Group, which has been tasked with establishing an action plan to work towards a future ban on beak trimming. It has been critical of their approach:

"I'm very disappointed at the actions of NFU and BEIC, who are both on Defra Beak Trimming Action Group and should be working constructively through this instead of again trying to get a possible ban postponed or dropped.

This is the second time the industry has done this - they effectively scuppered the ban due in 2011 by simply not preparing for it, thus effectively forcing the Government to drop it.

The ban was enacted in 2002 - just how long do they need?"

The Government's response to the campaign was set out in a written answer from June 2014:

Poultry

David T. C. Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the Government's policy is on beak trimming of chickens; and if he will make a statement.

George Eustice: The Mutilations (Permitted Procedures) (England) Regulations 2010 restricts the method used for the routine beak trimming of laying hens to infra-red technology only. The Government is also working with the Beak Trimming Action Group, which includes representatives from industry, welfare groups and scientists, to find ways to manage flocks of birds without the need to beak trim. DEFRA is currently funding a peer reviewed research study to assess the effectiveness of management strategies in reducing injurious pecking in non-beak trimmed laying hens. The results of this pilot study and all other available evidence will feed into a review in 2015.¹

An [earlier response](#) in March 2014 set out the Government's view of the NFU's campaign:

The National Farmers' Union (NFU) is represented on the Beak Trimming Action Group, which comprises representatives from industry, welfare groups, DEFRA, scientific and veterinary professions looking to develop an action plan and implement strategies to reduce injurious pecking in flocks of laying hens. The views of the NFU and others will feed into an evidence review in 2015 on whether to ban beak trimming of laying hens

¹ 10 Jun 2014 : [Column 116W](#)