

NewsLetter



Free range poultry rule change

Last week, Defra revealed the results of a recent 8-week public consultation on their proposal to allow poultry meat from birds that are confined inside during Bird-flu mandatory housing measures, to be allowed to be described as “Free range”.

The proposal was initially greeted by concerns raised by consumers that such labelling could be misleading as the birds would be kept in standards better described as “barn poultry” rather than free range.

However, there were only 14 responses to the formal consultation with the majority in favour of the proposal. Currently, when mandatory housing measures are introduced to protect poultry from the spread of disease, after 12 weeks, free-range poultry has to be labelled as indoor reared.

The Poultry Meat Marketing Standards Regulation in England will be amended so that this time limit is removed, enabling free-range poultry meat to be marketed as such for the duration of any mandatory housing measure. Similar legislative changes will be introduced in Scotland.

These measures are being introduced to protect poultry farmers.

What are bird-flu housing measures?

Currently, all of England is in an avian influenza prevention zone (AIPZ) with mandatory biosecurity measures applying to all bird keepers whether they have pet birds, commercial flocks or just a few birds in a backyard flock and are essential to protecting flocks from avian influenza.

AIPZ Statutory housing measures or “flockdowns” are introduced following a risk assessment exercise whenever a positive bird flu case is identified and require birds to be kept inside with enhanced biosecurity.

As of 7 April 2025 the avian influenza prevention zone (AIPZ) housing measures have been extended to cover County Durham, Cumbria, Northumberland and Tyneside in addition to Cheshire, City of Kingston Upon Hull, the East Riding of Yorkshire, Herefordshire, Lancashire, Lincolnshire, Merseyside, Norfolk, Suffolk, Shropshire, Worcestershire, York and North Yorkshire.

These AIPZ housing measures have no time limit and as the current bird flu status of England and Scotland is considered “very high” may remain in force for some time.

Further Information

- [Defra: Poultry Meat Marketing Regulations to be amended to support industry through bird flu outbreaks](#)
- [Bird flu \(avian influenza\): latest situation in England](#)