The ABC’s of Poultry Handling and Transport

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A LONG TIME AGO IN A GALAXY FAR, FAR AWAY....... ALSO KNOW AS THE COVERED WAGON DAYS.....

Well, that’s how it feels sometimes. I don’t consider myself an expert, but...........I have been around awhile.

30 years in this business. Mostly live operations.
THE URBAN LEGEND OF WATER LINE HEIGHT, THE NEW CHICKEN FARMER, AND COMMUNICATION.

What the heck does that have to do with transport and handling?
For Animal Welfare, the interaction between people and animals is where the rubber meets the road.

Do people truly understand what to do and how to do it?
PEOPLE

Execution is key to success. (For anything in life, can we influence people to take action and do the right things.)

As we get into the technical details and SOP’s, don’t forget the human aspect. (training and yearly signoffs check the boxes, but does your team really know what to do?)

Don’t expect common sense.

Make doing the right thing the path of least resistance.
BEGINNING THOUGHTS

Animal welfare Concerns and Production concerns are aligned. Doing what’s right for the bird’s welfare, in most cases, also optimizes performance.

Bird handling is one instance when we should think in terms of individual birds and not necessarily as an overall flock dynamic.
BEGINNING THOUGHTS

Size Scale: 3” chick vs. 6 ft. man

Needs and requirements change during the process.

Most of our discussion today is from a broiler perspective.
BEGINNING THOUGHTS

The basics that should go without saying:

Don’t throw birds.

Don’t hit birds.

Don’t kick birds.

Never, Ever Acceptable.
HATCHERY

Chicks

Should be handled by their whole body. Preferably “Scooped” in a cupped hand. This prevents injury to the wings and legs.

Chicks shouldn’t be dropped from a distance greater than 12”. This is NCC standard. Think of the size scale. Though bone structure maybe resilient, internal damage from the shock force is possible.
HATCHERY

Temperatures and Ventilation

We have to be aware of the chicks condition relative to temperatures.

As we stack chick boxes there is a lot of heat generated that must be removed with ventilation.

Chick room and chick holding areas must be set, monitored, and adjusted based on the chicks comfort and not our comfort.
HATCHERY

Euthanasia

When necessary should be done using an AVMA approved method. Rapid maceration or air displacement with CO2.
HATCHERY

Chicks should never be thrown.

Chicks should never be kicked with your foot.

Chicks should never be hit with an object of any kind.

Any equipment that may cause injury should be repaired immediately.
PLACEMENT

The Transport Truck

Most companies utilize enclosed transport trucks that are temperature controlled.

Preventative Maintenance is critical. Assure that alarm systems are functional and calibrated.

Important that drivers understand the equipment and have training for how to react to challenges.

Chick trucks should have an emergency plan for accidents or other issues.
PLACEMENT

The House
Start at the back of the house and work towards the entrance.

Tip birds out of the chick boxes at a height less than 12 inches.

Don’t place chicks on top of other chicks

Size Scale (again). Uneven bedding can look like giant mountains when your only 3” tall.

Shuffle step as you walk houses.
GROWING

Handling

Broilers should be handled by both legs.

Breeders should be handled by both wings or both legs.

Turkeys should be handled by both legs, or both wings at the shoulder, or by a combination of a single leg and a single wing at the same time. (two points of contact)
GROWING

Cull Birds and Mortality

Deceased birds should be handled respectfully.

Birds that are not thriving and suffering should be euthanized. Broiler euthanasia at this age is typically by cervical dislocation.
EUTHANASIA

HOW TO PROPERLY EUTHANIZE BIRDS BY RAPID CERVICAL DISLOCATION
To euthanize the bird, dislocate the neck without breaking the skin. If properly performed, this is a humane method that prevents spilling blood.

1. Hold the bird by both legs at the hock joint.

2. Grasp the head, placing the index finger or thumb at the occipital crest just above the neck at the junction of the atlas and caudal vertebra and the other fingers under the lower mandible.

3. With one quick motion, stretch the neck and tilt the head backward. Dislocate the vertebrae between the atlas and caudal vertebra, simultaneously severing the spinal cord and tearing the jugular vein and carotid artery.
CATCHING

Modules

Damaged Modules can cause injuries. Look for broken doors, sharp edges, and loose wires.

Be mindful of bird density within the module. Take into consideration weather conditions. Birds should not be loaded so that they are layered on top of each other.
CATCHING

Processing age birds can overheat quickly, therefore there is a need to keep the birds cool and comfortable throughout catch process.

Heat can be counteracted different ways, such as:

- Wetting the birds.
- Foggers
- Fan trailers

When planning processing schedules, many things have to be considered, such as:

- Time from farm to plant
- Temperature and humidity conditions
- Biosecurity/ Disease in area
CATCHING

Be sure that all dead birds are removed immediately prior to the scheduled catching time.

Feed and Water lines must be raised before catching begins.

Water lines should not be raised more than 1 hour prior to catching.

Exhaust fans at the back of the house should be running before catching begins.

Any bird unfit for transport should not be loaded but euthanized in a timely manner.

After the module is loaded the birds should be evenly distributed.
CATCHING

Birds should never be thrown into a module.

Birds should never be kicked.

Birds should never be swung back and forth.

All module doors should be closed before the module is moved.

Birds must not be caught by the wings or neck.

Birds should be moved away from the area where empty modules will be set.
TRANSPORT TO PLANT

Time of Catch and outside conditions can cause welfare issues while the trailer is still on the farm, especially in the summer.

Emergency procedures should be in place in case of an accident or breakdown.

Once birds are being hauled, the best practice is to not stop unless absolutely necessary to keep air moving over the birds.
TRANSPORT TO PLANT

Birds Lost Along The Road

Very bad:

Animal Welfare
Profits
Public Perception

This should be a high priority.
HOLDING

Holding Sheds at the plant are instrumental in the welfare of the poultry we process every day.

Birds must be protected from outside environment throughout the process from placement to processing.

Holding sheds are important in reducing mortality at the plant before processing by protecting the birds from the outside environment as much as possible.
HOLDING

NCC guidelines recommend that the time from catching to slaughter not exceed 12 hours.

Do First in- First out with trailers and be aware of times. May need to slow the catching process.

Not only an Animal Welfare issue, but also a production shrink issue.
UNLOADING

Sliding chickens out of a module onto other birds or causing unnecessary pileups must be avoided.

Subdued lighting keeps birds calm and easier to handle.

Look for pinch points and areas that can cause injury.

Be mindful that all birds are removed from modules and not returned to trailers.
HANGING

Grasp and hang birds by both legs.

Don’t allow loose birds on the floor. Not only a welfare concern but also a safety hazard to employees.

Subdued lighting keeps birds calm and easier to handle.

Never place live birds into a DOA bin.
QUESTIONS?