ACP, together with Assured Food Standards (AFS), has been successful in persuading both the Food Standards Agency (FSA) and the Local Authorities Coordinators of Regulatory Services (LACORS) that enforcement inspections should be targeted at non-assured farmers.

“This is excellent news for assured farmers,” said Sir Colin Spedding, ACP Chairman. “At last the credibility of the farm assurance system and the work farmers put in to meeting the schemes requirements have been recognised by regulators. This is a major benefit to ACP members who are fed up with lots of inspectors visiting the farm to check up on them.”

With input from ACP and AFS, the FSA evaluated the farm assurance scheme standards and concluded that they met the requirements of the new General Food Hygiene Regulations. At a series of recent training courses Local Authorities have been told to follow an inspection regime targeting 25% of non-assured farms on an annual basis and reducing this to only 2% for assured farms (unless there is additional evidence which they need to act on).

At the moment these arrangements only relate to the General Food Hygiene Regulations and are covered by a Memorandum of Understanding between AFS and LACORS, which also outlines the process for Local Authorities to feedback information on the use of the Red Tractor logo on food to AFS.

AFS and ACP recognise that this is just the tip of the iceberg and will continue to lobby organisations responsible for enforcement such as DEFRA, FSA, Veterinary Medicine Directorate, Environment Agency and Local Authorities to try to get more of them to adopt this type of approach for other legal requirements.

Chairman’s letter

Public confidence in our standards is essential for the success of the Red Tractor and it depends on two main factors. The first is simply knowing what they are and how they are inspected: in other words, what the Red Tractor means.

AFS is continually trying to raise public awareness but it is easy to see how difficult it is to inform the public about our very detailed standards and the fact that they apply to all kinds of broiler production. There is no possibility of putting all this on a label!

But the second factor is the damaging effect of criticism in the media, especially by animal welfare organisations.

Recently, we have been talking to the RSPCA and CIWF, to ensure that they understand what we are trying to do and what we have already achieved. The fact is that when ACP raises its standards, virtually the whole industry advances, not just the small percentage covered by other schemes.

No other scheme can achieve this. I have assured both organisations that if they believe that we should change out standards, they are welcome to write to me or to the Chairman of the TAC, providing us with scientific evidence on which to base change, and we will seriously consider it, normally at a TAC meeting.

Sometimes, the pressure is based on public opinion, but this is easily swayed, especially by pictures of what may look like overcrowding at the end of the growing period.

Now the public are perfectly entitled to their view but finding how to change standards to improve welfare requires considerable knowledge and experience, of the kind we have on the TAC.

So we have to have firm evidence before we make changes but we should be open to new findings whatever the source.

In the end, APC and the animal welfare organisations should be on the same side, endeavouring to improve bird welfare as rapidly as industry can absorb it.

We have been having very constructive meetings with their representatives in order to try and ensure that, as far as possible we work together, rather than in opposition.
Avian influenza

Following the discovery of a swan infected with Avian Influenza (AI) last year, the AFS Poultry Sector Board (PSB) and Technical Advisory Committee developed a policy to be effective in the event of any further occurrence of AI. This policy requires an immediate switch from physical to paper audits and is detailed below for information.

Any outbreak of AI in a commercial poultry flock should lead to an automatic cessation of assessments for 30 days during which time representatives of the PSB should liaise with Defra to assess the situation and then make a further recommendation to the Board. Producers who had been scheduled to receive an audit during the cessation period would be required to undertake the self assessment and telephone audit. In the event that the outbreak is low pathogenic AI businesses which do not consider themselves at risk can carry out a risk assessment in conjunction with a veterinary adviser and if the risk is assessed as low then they may allow physical audits to proceed.

Any outbreak of AI in wild birds should lead to a cessation of assessments within a region to permit producers to assess risk and if the producer did not wish to allow a physical assessment then he would be required to undertake a self assessment and telephone audit. In addition, any producer within the region who had been scheduled to receive an audit during the cessation period would be required to undertake the self assessment and telephone audit. This policy was implemented following the announcement of the recent AI outbreak in East Anglia. Following the lifting of restrictions by DEFRA physical audits recommenced at the beginning of March.

AFS/NFU try to alleviate the burden of IPPC

At the request of the Minister, the Director General of the NFU has conducted a review of Environment Agency (EA) arrangements for implementation of these new regulations and AFS poultry and pig sectors have been involved in joint industry/EA meetings as part of the review. This involved some intensive activity during December.

As producers are aware, at the primary level these regulations impact upon pig and poultry units above a certain threshold size. The industry perspective is that the costs (EA is obliged to recover enforcement costs from producers) are disproportionately high and might be significantly damaging to the two sectors. There is evidence of producers scaling down poultry and pig operations so that they fall below the threshold.

One suggestion is that any farm inspection work might be done more cost effectively on behalf of EA by the assurance scheme inspectors hence AFS sectors’ involvement with the discussions. However the exercise has identified that a very high proportion of the EA charges cover their office and support costs rather than front line farm inspection. Industry has challenged these costs and also the treasury principle of full cost recovery from producers. The implication for AFS is that the opportunity to make savings at the level of farm inspection is limited.

Furthermore EA wants to cover the first tranche of inspections during 2007/08. But there is a firm proposal that farm assurance inspectors might pick up the routine annual report after April 2008 to provide a modest cost saving. Dialogue is continuing with EA to develop this opportunity.

Negotiations fail

The British Poultry Council reports that they are very disappointed by reports from the EU Commission and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, that the negotiations on an EU chicken welfare directive have failed.

The BPC Chief Executive, Mr Peter Bradnock said: “The failure to reach agreement on the directive is disappointing, particularly after successfully achieving a consensus amongst UK stakeholder groups and DEFRA. The British chicken sector supported the directive which would have pulled together all the existing UK legislation and official codes into a single document, with rules applying across the whole EU”.

This would have been the first piece of welfare legislation not only to focus on inputs, housing etc, but also on welfare outputs. Welfare parameters were to be monitored and scored at the factory and reported back to every farm.

Commenting further Mr. Bradnock said: “This directive would have ensured a level playing field for chicken welfare across the EU and it is regrettable that some countries, including many new member states, opposed the Finnish compromise in order to continue to export low welfare product into Western European markets. In doing this they protected their own ability to export to the UK and other markets at an advantage”.

Charles Bourns wins top industry award

ACP would like to send congratulations to Charles Bourns who was presented with the BPT/BOCM PAULS Man of the Year Award last November.

Mr Bourns was described as a ‘driving force, working to forge a strong identity for British chicken with retailers and consumers, based on the Assured Chicken Production standards under the Red Tractor logo’. He was commended for his enthusiasm and tireless perseverance in promoting British Chicken.

The award was started in 1953 and carries the joint names of the old British Poultry Federation (the forerunner of the BPC) and the major feed manufacturer BOCM PAULS Ltd. It was presented to Mr Bourns by Ted Wright (Chairman, BPC) at the Egg and Poultry Industry Conference.

Charles Bourns is the Chairman of the NFU Poultry Board and Chairman of British Chicken Marketing, the joint BPC/NFU body set up to promote British chicken as well as being a member of the ACP Board.
**Olympic champion support for British chicken**

**British Chicken Marketing’s (BCM) 2007 campaign has sprinted into action with the signing of former Olympic champion athlete, Sally Gunnell, to front its £1m ‘buy British’ campaign.**

The 400m world record holder, who is now an ambassador for health and well-being, is the daughter of a poultry farmer and a keen supporter of local produce.

“I’ve got three young sons and try to feed my family a healthy, balanced diet – which includes chicken at least three times a week, as it is low in fat, nutritious and we all love it,” says Sally.

“And whenever I buy chicken, I always look for the Red Tractor and Union Jack on pack, so I know it is produced to high standards and can be traced back to the British farm it came from.”

Chicken is the nation’s favourite meat and accounts for over 40 per cent of the meat we consume in the UK. And while research has revealed that an increasing number of Britons prefer to eat home-reared birds, we import more and more chicken every year.

Since 1990, the amount we import has quadrupled, and in 2005 we imported over £900 million worth (487,283,734 kg) of chicken.

“Many people assume that all fresh chicken on sale must be British, and others are confused by labelling or simply forget to check. That’s why it’s important to check the label, or ask your butcher, to be sure you are buying British,” says Sally.

BCM’s 2007 campaign will include press advertising for the first time in its four-year history, with three separate bursts planned for March, May and November. Creative executions will involve lifestyle imagery, plus Sally endorsing the ‘buy British’ messaging.

**Red Tractor week**

Following the success of Red Tractor Day this year’s event will take place over a week from 9-15 July.

Activities will include a press launch with the Red Tractor ambassador, a survey on what people are eating, stories for consumer and trade press including stunts for regional press and more including in-store promotion. Keep watching www.redtractor.org.uk for more information on what is planned.

**AFS joins RUMA**

AFS (in the form of its livestock assurance schemes, Assured Chicken Production, Assured British Pigs, ABM and Assured Dairy Farms) has recently joined RUMA - Responsible Use of Medicines in Agriculture Alliance. RUMA was established to promote the highest standards of food safety, animal health and animal welfare in the British livestock farming and is a unique initiative involving organisations representing every stage of the food chain, facilitating transparency and traceability in the process.

**Guidelines**

The Alliance has produced guidelines on antimicrobials for all the major food producing species – poultry, pigs, dairy and beef cattle, fish and sheep. These are in two forms. The “short” form is for all people to read including the media, general public, farmers and stockmen. The “long” ones are for advisers including veterinary practitioners, some farmers and farm managers.

At the end of last year, a new batch of guidelines was produced. This time they were for Vaccines and Vaccination. At present both “short” and “long” guidelines are available for poultry, fish, pigs, sheep as well as a general guideline on food animal production. Free copies are available to download from the the RUMA website: www.ruma.org.uk.

**Review of the poultry catching industry**

Defra and FSA have jointly commissioned a review of the Poultry Catching Industry and are sponsoring an initiative to encourage good practices for catching teams. This will be done through training which will concentrate on improving biosecurity and aspects of worker health protection.

There is a clear view that good biosecurity during catching should be seen as a shared responsibility and that catchers should be part of a larger industry initiative. There is enthusiasm for the concept of a training initiative for the catching industry but the need for a carefully planned approach to training has been emphasised so that there are clear and concise messages and that the policies proposed are specific and practical.

The review notes that company-specific (in-house) training sessions are favoured and recommends that a pilot study of four in house training sessions should be arranged, planned and delivered covering different sectors of the industry. It is also recommended that consideration should also be given to the provision of key messages in written format based on existing Defra and FSA literature.

For further information see the full report as published on the Defra website at http://www.defra.gov.uk/animalh/diseases/pdf/catchersreview.pdf
Red Tractor sponsorship rolls on

Ever since the launch of Assured Food Standards, Massey Ferguson has been playing a pivotal role in helping to promote the image and the values of the Red Tractor brand. Sponsorship activities have included events, awards, competitions and publications – with a real red tractor, supplied by Massey Ferguson, never far from the scene.

Massey Ferguson are committed to continuing their support into 2007, with red tractors already scheduled to make appearances at county shows, road-shows and photo-opportunity events throughout the year. Massey Ferguson’s own UK product advertising in 2007 is giving prominence to the red tractor logo, with ads in Farmers Weekly and Farmers Guardian now appearing.

David Sleath, Sales Director and Country Manager, UK and Ireland commented: “We are proud of our association with Assured Food Standards. We recognise too that the Massey Ferguson brand benefits strongly by being linked to the values of a positive and successful force for the good of British farming.”

Revisions to standards – 2007/8

The following amendments to the Assured Chicken Production Standards will be introduced with effect from 1st April 2007

Breeder Replacement, Breeder Layer, Broiler Chickens, Free Range, Poussin

Standard 1.6 – Upgraded to a ▲ and revised to include reference to the new Waste Management Regulations 2006

Breeder Replacement, Breeder Layer, Broiler Chickens, Free Range, Poussin

Standard 1.9 ▲ NEW STANDARD – requiring sites to make and record a decision as to whether they consider their business is required to gain an Integrated Pollution Prevention and Control (IPPC) permit.

Breeder Replacement, Breeder Layer, Broiler Chickens, Free Range, Poussin

Standard 1.10 ▲ NEW STANDARD – requiring sites that need an IPPC permit to have made an application by the appropriate deadline

Breeder Replacement, Breeder Layer, Broiler Chickens, Poussin

Standard 5.3.1 ▲ Addition of Guidance Note detailing acceptable competences for electricians.

Note: for Free Range this is Standard 5.6.1

Breeder Replacement, Breeder Layer

Standard 5.19 ▲ Revised to include the requirement that immediately poultry houses are depopulated, doors should be closed and the house walked to ensure all carcasses or part carcasses are removed. Note for Broiler Chickens & Poussin this is Standard 5.20, and for Free Range Standard 5.24

Relevant publications – correction

Reference Code for Farm Fires: Protecting Farm Animal Welfare is PB9326.

Massey Ferguson sponsors this newsletter as part of its continuing support of British agriculture and commitment to the Red Tractor Scheme.

For any queries relating to Assured Chicken Production standards contact:
Assured Chicken Production Secretariat
Unit 4b, Highway Farm, Horsley Road
Downside, Cobham
Surrey KT11 3JZ
Tel. 01932 589 800
Fax 01932 589 800
Email: liz@aekerrigan.demon.co.uk
Website: www.assuredcrops.co.uk

For all other Red Tractor Scheme queries contact:
Assured Food Standards (AFS)
4th Floor, Kings Building
16 Smith Square
London SW1P 3JJ
Tel 020 7630 3320
Fax 020 7630 3321
Email: enquiries@redtractor.org.uk
Website: www.redtractor.org.uk

WATO 2006 – what does it mean?

The new EU Regulations (EC 01/05) regarding the Welfare of Animals in Transport came into force on 5th January 2007. The UK refers to these regulations as the Welfare of Animals (Transport) Order 2006. These regulations have an impact on all farmers and hauliers transporting livestock as part of an ‘economic activity’ including all transport of a commercial nature and taking livestock to shows.

Poultry Specific Regulations: – The new regulations state that vehicles should be inspected and approved for journeys over 8 hours, however, this applies to transport of animals in flat bed lorries and does not apply to animals transported in their own containers (crates).

Defra in conjunction with the other competent authorities are in the process of producing a species specific booklet which will be available shortly and will be published on the Defra website.

For further information on policy or to request a copy of the leaflet please call the Defra Animal Welfare Division Tel: 020 7904 6576 Email: awtransport@defra.gsi.gov.uk.

For general information call the State Veterinary Service Helpline Tel: 0845 603 8395.

Red Tractor sponsorship rolls on