

What Broiler Growers Can Expect During PAACO Audits

Broiler production welfare audits are an essential part of poultry operations. These welfare audits are to ensure the safe and humane treatment of animals, and in turn make sure the grower and consumer are benefiting from a good product.

Auditors will audit a company from start to finish (chick to processing). These audits usually take approximately 2 days and can be done by first- or third-party auditors. First-party auditors are either internal company auditors who work for the grower company being audited (such as Sanderson Farms or Tyson Foods), or auditors who are paid by consumer companies (such as KFC or McDonald's). Third-party auditors work for outside companies that have no affiliation with the grower company or the consumer company.

All auditors will use the same format when conducting an audit. However, some consumer companies require specific additions to these audit instruments. In order to assure the humane treatment of broilers and to promote broiler product quality, the National Chicken Council (NCC) recommends animal welfare guidelines and provides an audit checklist for broiler production.

An auditor will only look at the portions of an operation that deal with the live bird. Therefore, these audits will begin in the hatchery. The auditor's check will be extremely detailed and include the machinery to make sure nothing is harming the chicks or inhibiting their normal health or growth. Eventually they will focus on auditing the farms where chickens are housed. These auditors will always be accompanied by company personnel and should never be allowed to enter a farm alone.

As a grower, it is important to remember that these auditors are only visiting farms to ensure the safety of the animal for the grower's benefit. They do not want to stop production but are there to ensure the highest quality product possible. As long as the farm is properly managed, the audit will run smoothly.

Farms are usually selected at random, which means any poultry farm may be audited at any time. However, there is nothing to fear about an auditor entering your farm, and every auditor should be aware of biosecurity measures. Auditors make sure flocks have a healthy report and take all necessary precautions if multiple flocks are seen within their audit visit.

During a farm assessment, the auditor should check everything, including litter conditions, ammonia levels, stocking rates, overall bird health, and even rodent control. Auditors will usually enter a house and visually observe the birds to check for normal behaviors. Sometimes the auditor will gait score the birds by penning them and then watching them exit the pens. Gait scores are not always used, but the U.S. gait scoring technique is recommended to check for lameness.

Auditors also may observe the catch process at your farm to make sure it is being done correctly. The auditor will gather additional information by looking at your farm records.

Remember that PAACO auditing is a positive tool for consumers and companies. You should not fear an audit. These audits are required and necessary only to ensure the humane treatment of your animals.

Figure 1 shows an example of an auditing checklist from the NCC. This auditing tool demonstrates what happens during the grower portion of the audit process and what will be observed while an auditor is present on a grower's farm.

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Figure 1. Example NCC auditing checklist.

1.1 Designated Management, Training, and Emergency Plan:	Area: Growout
The growout department has a person in charge of promoting adherence to the guidelines.	5
The growout department has a documented training program for all employees involved in handling live animals. Employees are trained before handling live animals.	5
Employees involved in handling live animals are trained at least annually.	5
The growout department has a written plan for disaster response and recovery, including, but not limited to, structural damage, electrical outages, and (if appropriate) water and feed outages. The facility has an alarm system or regular monitoring system in use to alert the grower to failure of critical systems (heat, electricity).	5
1.2 Nutrition and Feeding:	Area: Growout
Feed formulations are approved by a professional poultry nutritionist.	5
Feed and water availability is monitored. Feed intake is monitored with every change of feed type. Water availability is monitored daily.	5
Feed mill meets good manufacturing practices for feed production and is a Food and Drug Administration-licensed feed mill if medicated feeds are produced.	5
1.3 Comfort and Shelter:	Area: Growout
House and equipment are adequate to protect the birds from normally expected levels of heat, cold, and precipitation; premises are maintained in a clean and orderly fashion; vermin are controlled; and biosecurity measures are in place.	10
The facility (i.e., growout house) has a written protocol for minimum ventilation requirements, including temperature and dust control, heating program, and static pressure (when applicable).	10
Ammonia in the atmosphere does not exceed 25 parts per million.	25
Moisture in litter does not exceed 35 percent (loosely compacted when squeezed in the hand).	25
Litter, ventilation, drinking systems, and feed formulation are managed to maintain appropriate paw integrity. In two separate flocks in a given day, check a random sample of 100 birds (200 paws) from each flock. Using the Poultry Paw Scoring System recommended by the AAAP Welfare Committee, score paws as either 0 or 1. Paws scoring 0 are at least 90% of the 400 paw total. (Paw scores are taken at the processing plant to avoid undue live animal stress.)	25
1.4 Healthcare and Monitoring:	Area: Growout
Qualified veterinary care is available.	5
Each company has a written health plan developed in consultation with a veterinarian. This healthcare plan includes at a minimum: vaccinations; daily checks on bird condition; mortality/morbidity monitoring; and guidelines regarding when, how, and under what circumstances a producer should report a disease situation.	5
The company has a routine bird health monitoring program that includes an active surveillance of eye and leg health.	10
1.5 Ability to Display Most Normal Behaviors:	Area: Growout
Stocking density in growout house does not exceed limits set in guidelines.	25
Birds that exhibit stunted growth and obvious gait defects that limit an individual bird's ability to move about or access feed and water for normal growth and development are humanely euthanized.	25
Birds are provided with a minimum of 4 hours of darkness in every 24-hour period. During the period of darkness, the illumination at bird level does not exceed 50 percent of the light level in the remaining hours.	25
1.6 On-Farm Best Practices:	Area: Growout
Producers have current contact information for local emergency services, and each company provides each producer with a "telephone tree" of emergency contacts at the company.	10
Flocks are inspected at least twice a day.	10
Producer uses only methods of euthanasia listed in the guidelines.	10
Subtotal, Growout	255

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