

ON MY FARM Robert Lanning, Devonshire Poultry

This month *Robert Lanning* considers the importance of maintaining equipment and that the poultry industry has a way to go before true public acceptance



I am sat writing this on a hot August day, listening to the background noise of fans rumbling in the office and a slight nervousness after a generator failed on test this morning from overheating. The machine is less than three years old and is fully maintained.

It certainly highlights the importance of our weekly two-hour test run. We all felt greatly relieved when an engineer's van pulled in to the yard and his toolbox came out.

I await to find out the cause but

I am pleased it has been dealt with quickly.

We are very relieved our two new broiler houses at Chaffcombe Farm are now finished. They were filled on 23 July and the birds are going through successfully.

Thankfully, at 31 days these new units are outperforming our two older sheds by about 61g/day, which reassures me new, quality buildings and equipment are the way forward.

Another notable difference is that, in the summer heat, the new build-

ings peak at 2C lower on hot days than the older sheds, which were built sometime in the 1980s.

I need to work out if this is a fan capacity shortage, a shed age issue or simply due to newer, better building materials and techniques.

On a totally different matter, I do feel the image of British poultry farming, with Open Farm Sunday and positive television programmes, is the best it has ever been.

That said, from recent experience it would appear we still have a long

way to go. I was left feeling saddened when my two youngest children got off their rural school bus emotionally upset by verbal bullying from older children that their dad was cruel to chickens and they smelled bad. This was soon resolved with a few chocolate fingers and reassurance.

But it did make me stop and think, as it was the second incident in just a few weeks of people having preconceived ideas of what we do. Earlier this year my wife Jacqui approached a well-known local farming charity that works with children, offering to raise money for them by climbing the three largest peaks in Scotland, England and Wales in three days.

Her offer was turned down because of the perception of what we do. I feel what we are doing as a farming base is getting through, but there is still a lot of work needed to remove the preconceived image of what we do and how we do it.

Devonshire Poultry comprises six farms in Devon, Dorset and Somerset, growing 3.5 million chickens a year for a leading integrator

Soapbox Derek Kelly**Confusion for small-scale farmers must be clarified**

Expensive stunning equipment is out of reach for smallholders

The changes in slaughter regulations for poultry have caused a great deal of confusion among small producers of Christmas turkeys and geese as well as poultry fanciers.

Traditionally they have used neck dislocation, which provides a rapid, humane kill. The issue of whether they should be subject to the same legislation as much larger, commercial-scale producers has been debated for more than 20 years.

Let us remember who these small producers are. In our Farm-Gate Hatcheries business, supplying about half the poults reared for the traditional Christmas market, we have only 80 customers who produce fewer than 50 turkeys.

Typically they sell to family and friends in their local village, as they have done, in some cases, for several generations. However, there must be a thousand or more fanciers and goose producers slaughtering very small numbers.

The new EU regulation "1099"

that came into force last December requires stunning for all birds before neck dislocation and imposes a 5kg liveweight limit for this type of slaughter.

This legislation poses a serious threat to small producers. Can they justify the investment in a stunner likely to cost more than £600? My own contention is there should be a threshold above which producers should have to use a stunner – and I believe 200 turkeys is a sensible level.

The other issue is the ban on neck dislocation for birds over 5 kg. We have continued to champion the plight of small producers, yet fully appreciate that to justify derogation for them, we would need scientific evidence.

In 2011 we were in contact with Dr Vicky Sandilands, of Defra in Edinburgh, who had been asked to trial on-farm slaughter of poultry. Three of the methods of culling that were assessed had been rejected by our company 20 years ago as inhumane,

and the fourth was too expensive.

We offered our processing facilities near Glasgow and a flock of over-5kg turkeys on condition the trial would include a method we had developed. This involves suspending a turkey from a hook and putting a loop around the bird's neck, and then using a sharp step down with the foot to dislocate the neck at the first vertebrae and interrupt the flow of blood to the brain.

At Christmas 2013 a team from Defra gathered the data and assured us slaughter had been satisfactory. Their report stated "ECG recordings showed varying times to loss of consciousness, but MCD [manual cervical dislocation] was fastest [3.6s] by a considerable margin."

When the results were published last November, Stephen Lister, of Crowshall veterinary practice, reviewed the data and said although it was inconclusive, our method seemed to tick all the welfare boxes and was worth further assessment.

We have discussed this with Sue Whitehead, head of animal welfare at Defra, and last month with Stephen Lister and the NFU. Could there be a derogation for those "under-200" turkey producers this Christmas, pending further assessment? The answer was: "Sorry, but the EU regulation gives no leeway for national interpretation."

The NFU is now asked to initiate the tedious procedure of reviewing the regulation. In the meantime it is preparing an information sheet for the membership.

Small producers do need clarification on these issues and we hope scientific assessment and common sense will prevail. But of course, all this might even be very short term with so much uncertainty following the Brexit vote and about what will actually happen over the coming years.

Derek Kelly is the founder and chairman of Kelly Turkeys