

By [Mark Clements](#) on March 14, 2017

Welfare, slow growth focus at pre-VIV Asia forum

Welfare assurance schemes, Dutch slow growth experience highlighted at pre-event forum

Higher [poultry welfare](#) and the growing interest in slower-growing breeds were among topics examined at the Hubbard Forum, held in Bangkok, Thailand, prior to VIV Asia 2017.

Joe Bailey, agriculture manager with U.K. welfare assurance scheme RSPCA Assured, highlighted the business benefits of being part of an assurance scheme, and noted that, for the scheme's members, adherence allows their efforts to take advantage of the growing demand for ethical food, adding that retailers can grow sales and achieve customer loyalty.

RSPCA Assured runs a “dynamic and dedicated marketing to raise awareness,” she said, continuing that every opportunity is taken to communicate with consumers, governments and scientists to promote the brand, at home and overseas. Where social media is concerned, she said, there has been “a massive uplift in engagement” since RSPCA Assured's first foray into the medium.

RSPCA Assured was originally launched as Freedom Foods in 1994 but has since undergone a rebrand.

Bailey explained that it is important for consumers to recognize and trust any assurance scheme, and the wide recognition of the RSPCA's name in the U.K. was seen as advantageous in the label rebrand in 2015. Since the revision, one-third of U.K. shoppers are thought to have become familiar with the new name.

She continued that this interest is not simply coming from consumers. The RSPCA's assurance scheme is not a country-of-origin scheme, and the RSPCA is increasingly working with organizations overseas keen to either adopt the same scheme or introduce similar assurance programs.

The scheme now has 4,000 members in the U.K. and approximately 1,000 products and covers, for example, 90 percent of the U.K.'s non-cage egg production.



Joe Bailey of RSPCA Assured noted how the scheme is increasingly being used as a basis for similar schemes outside of the U.K. | Mark Clements

Dutch experience with slow growth

Paul van Boekholt, business director with Hubbard and Novogen, looked at how the Dutch broiler market has changed over recent years, particularly the move to retailers stocking slower-growing birds.

Hubbard had started working with welfare organizations in 2000, and between 2000 and 2006, Dutch producers came up with a new, more welfare-friendly method of production that offered birds access to a covered range.

Discussions with Dutch supermarkets, however, also resulted in the development of the “Chicken of Tomorrow,” also more welfare friendly but less expensive to produce.

Working together, the various Dutch supermarkets announced in 2013 that all of their poultry meat would be from higher-welfare birds by 2020. In fact, this has happened ahead of schedule and now 90 percent of the poultry available in Dutch supermarkets is from birds raised to higher welfare standards, and higher-welfare birds now account for one-third of Dutch production.

He continued that there is now also more choice in the Dutch market, the market has broadened away from a focus on breast meat, and deboned thigh meat is growing in popularity with Dutch consumers. While these higher-welfare birds may be more expensive to produce than standard birds, use of more of the birds is advantageous, and producers can focus on added value rather than simply cost. Additionally, he noted, many of the problems associated with meat quality have largely disappeared.

White striping, woody breast

The theme of meat quality was taken up by Claude Toudic, technical manager with Hubbard. He pointed to press reports associating issues such as woody breast and white striping with higher body weight and faster-growing birds. These conditions are not only problematic in terms of consumer acceptance but can also affect the functional capabilities of meat.

Among solutions offered to these conditions, Touric said, are to use birds with lower breast meat yields and to ensure that birds are raised in optimal conditions.

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