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## HOW MUCH FLOOR SPACE NEEDS A BROILER CHICKEN?

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### SUMMARY

Stocking density is one of the most disputed criteria in broiler production. But little is known about the real floor space covered by a sitting or standing broiler. This paper gives realistic figures on the floor space covered by broilers in various body positions, age and weight in the course of fattening. The measurements were carried out by the KobalPan colour contrast planimetric method (KobalPan). 1550 broiler chickens (genotype Ross 308) were weighed and photographed digitally in a photo box. The birds were between 10 and 40 days old. The results showed a linear correlation between floor space covered by the broilers and bodyweight ( $R^2 = 0.99$ ). The mean floor space for standing broilers with a weight of 100g was 74 cm<sup>2</sup>, with 1000g 203 cm<sup>2</sup>, with 2000g 320 cm<sup>2</sup> and with 2500g 372 cm<sup>2</sup>. The covered floor area in sitting

position was approx. 25 cm<sup>2</sup> larger. When broilers are raised for a stocking density of 42 kg/m<sup>2</sup> and a target bodyweight of 1.5 kg according to the EU Directive 2007/43/EG less than 1/3 of a square metre are not covered by broilers. The described method seems to provide reliable data for the calculation of animal density in broiler production. The figures show that the free space allowed for the birds in last days of the fattening period for behavioural activities like dust bathing or wing flapping is very limited. The results give cause for concern whether the behavioural needs of broiler chicken can be met under these conditions and for reconsidering the currently allowed high bird density at the end of fattening in the EU Directive.

### INTRODUCTION

Stocking density is one of the most disputed criteria in broiler production. The EU Directive 2007/43/EG (EU-CD) [1] allows stocking densities up to 42 kg/m<sup>2</sup> when certain keeping and management conditions are met. However little is known about the real floor space covered by a sitting or standing broiler in the course of fattening. This

paper describes a method how to measure the floor space covered by the body of a broiler during fattening and compares the covered area with the free space at different stocking densities (SD) and bodyweights of the birds.

### ANIMALS, MATERIALS AND METHODS

1550 broiler chickens (genotype Ross 308) were weighed, placed individually in a special photo box with a black floor (1.0m x 1.0m 0.40m) and photographed digitally in order to measure the floor space which was covered by the body of standing and sitting broilers. The white-feathered broilers gave a strong contrast to the dark floor of the box that was designed, lightened and fixed to provide high contrast pictures which were stored in a PC (Picture 1 and 2). The method is called KobalPan colour contrast planimetry [1] and uses a digital camera (OLYMPUS, E-410, 17.5-45mm Objective, 10.0 Mega pixel, Co. Olympus Optical Co. GmbH, D-Hamburg), mounted on a metal frame with a stationary fixed distance above the floor of the box (1.50m). All images were taken from top view (Picture 3). For better visualisation the program colours the recorded pixels blue (Picture 4). This helps to

recognise defaulted photos which can be eliminated before analysis. The birds were between 10 and 40 days old. They were randomly selected from commercial herds weighted and placed in the box.

As reference area the defined surface of a sheet of paper (DIN A5 = 310.00cm<sup>2</sup> or DIN A4 = 612.90cm<sup>2</sup>) was used. This sheet of paper was photographed (once for every series of measurements) with the same adjustments as the birds in the box and stored in the PC (Picture 5). The program colours the recorded pixels blue (Picture 6). The digital images of the broilers and the reference values were analysed by the KobalPan software which calculates the surface of the sitting and standing broilers according to the rule of proportion.

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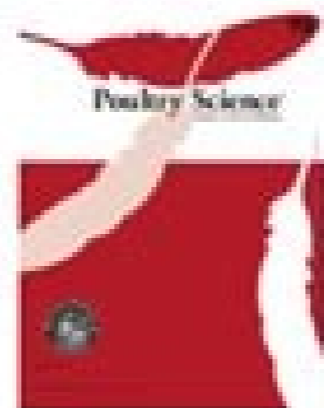
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