

JOURNEY TO THE GOOD CHICKEN AWARD – SPA FOOD



COMPANY BACKGROUND

SPA Food is a Polish manufacturer of convenience products and finger food. They have demonstrated leadership in the field of animal welfare by committing to produce higher welfare chicken products.

SPA Food supplies retailers and food service companies. Most of their goods are exported across Europe. In each of their production plants, SPA produces products according to [BRC](#) and [IFS](#) Standards. They are also able to provide tailor made products to their customers.

THE JOURNEY TO IMPROVE BROILER WELFARE

In 2012, SPA Food embarked upon a journey to improve the welfare of chickens on all the farms they work with - moving from standard production to a higher welfare indoor system. The company decided to build their own, modern farms that comply with higher welfare criteria.

Whilst in the process of designing their broiler sheds, SPA Food engaged with Compassion because of our shared views on the future development of animal breeding and to better understand the changes they could make to improve the welfare of the chickens they farm.

Through this engagement, SPA Food expressed their understanding for key welfare issues that were identified by Compassion. These focussed on:

- Ensuring adequate space for physical wellbeing. SPA Food have committed to a maximum stocking density of 30kg/m² for their broiler chickens.
- Providing enrichment such as pecking objects, perches and natural light to support mental well-being and behavioural expression. SPA Food have also introduced objects for the birds to peck at and have designed perches that are fit for each stage of the bird's life to enable maximum use.
- Implementing a slower growth rate to avoid negative impacts on leg health. Birds are currently grown on average to a maximum of 50g per day. In addition to this SPA Food have introduced a leg health management plan with routine health checks as part of their overall welfare improvement programme

COMMERCIAL PROBLEM

SPA Food believe that higher welfare production is common sense. They recognise that there is a significant gap in the market for suppliers of higher welfare chicken – especially to the food service industry – and they believe that to offer like-minded, ethically-aware businesses with higher welfare products is an opportunity for correct poultry breeding.

While food service companies express an interest in sourcing higher welfare chicken, finding it at commercially viable prices and in the volumes and specifications they need has proven to be a challenge. They also often have less ‘purchasing power’ than major retailers or manufacturers when negotiating with suppliers due to their volumes being lower and specifications being more demanding. With little room to negotiate on sizes, weights and portions, they are somewhat restricted as to what they can source to ensure reliability of supply at the right price.

SPA Food considered all these factors when developing their products and they are able to supply significant volumes of chicken and offer their customers specific portions at competitive prices.

SPA Food was established in 1999 and by 2014, they had built a third processing plant which is one of the most modern sites in the world where state-of-the-art and environmentally-friendly technological solutions have been applied. Production capability of the plant reaches 10 thousand tons a year of heat treated products. Other sites are adapted to producing raw, largely hand made products. All facilities have got quality and ethical certificates required by their customers.

WORKING TOWARDS THEIR COMMITMENT IN FARM ANIMAL WELFARE

SPA Food recognised that good animal welfare results in good quality meat, satisfied customers and exceeds legislation requirements across Europe.

Their journey towards higher welfare production propelled after initial enquiries came in from a leading, global food service company that was looking to source select cuts of higher welfare chicken for their restaurants. After consultation with their co-operative of farmers, SPA Food made the decision to invest in their higher welfare chicken production system.

Recognising that investing in a higher welfare production system would be both financially and resource intensive, SPA Food consulted a number of animal welfare professionals, including Compassion in World Farming and The University of Bristol.

In order for their move to higher welfare production to be successful, SPA Food invested in staff training to better understand the welfare needs of broiler chickens and shared this knowledge across their team, including their farmers. This education programme led to the development of a new project which resulted in the construction of their new processing plant, and new product and business development opportunities, as they become more recognised as a supplier of higher welfare chicken.

RESEARCH AND IMPLEMENTATION

The journey to higher welfare production is an ongoing project for SPA Food. They are ambitious in their desire to further improve broiler welfare, above the criteria of the [Good Chicken Award](#). This includes looking at moving to a different breed of bird, over time, that has an intermediate growth rate.

It has not been an easy journey for SPA Food to move to higher welfare production and there have been a number of obstacles for them to overcome along the way.

Getting buy-in from farmers to fulfil a higher set of requirements was their first challenge. The farmers needed to see for themselves the difference in chicken behaviour and performance from standard to higher welfare production and recognise the benefits of providing a more natural environment for the birds.

The need for improved animal welfare is fairly new on the business agenda and awareness is relatively low, so SPA Food had another challenge to overcome in terms of getting financial support for investment. However, by using the knowledge gained from previous training and on-farm experience, they were able to put forward the business case for better welfare to the banks to overcome this obstacle.

RELATIONSHIP WITH COMPASSION

Compassion has supported SPA Food on their journey towards higher welfare production by providing on-farm support and animal welfare training. Compassion remains in close contact with the SPA Food team and visits Poland, and some of their farms, annually to provide ongoing support. This includes training in gait scoring and reducing the incidence of footpad dermatitis and hock burns, as part of their health management and monitoring audits.

Compassion has also provided SPA Food with technical advice on optimum shed sizes, the measurement of air speed input and ventilation and their effects on litter quality, as well as light levels and the design of the perches for the birds.

Compassion commends SPA Food for introducing higher welfare standards on their broiler farms which will inevitably open up new business opportunities with like-minded companies that are looking to source higher welfare chicken in the future, and we will continue to support them on their mission.

Compassion's Food Business team offers free, objective advice and consultancy from a team of staff who work across the whole of the food industry. To find out more about how we can help you improve your animal welfare standards, please contact one of the [Food Business team](#) or visit: www.compassioninfoodbusiness.com