

## RSPCA work eggs

When it comes to Quality Assurance welfare schemes for eggs there is only one show in town – RSPCA Assured. We have the Lion Code, which offers assurances related to food safety and RSPCA Assured covers animal welfare and production systems. It is not surprising then that the main retailers across the UK are looking for eggs that carry both the Lion Code Stamp and the RSPCA Assured logo.

Scottish producers have been investing heavily in high welfare units meeting the RSPCA Assured standards and converting to Free Range production systems in line with retailer and RSPCA demand, generally improving the welfare of birds in Scotland. Unfortunately, there is one standard within the RSPCA Assured standards that many Scottish producers are powerless to comply with, and that is a maximum 8-hour journey to slaughter for end of lay hens.

The standard has been in place for years, but largely ignored by assessors where all other welfare met the grade. A more recent standard change to require the use of RSPCA Assured approved plants, forced journey times into the spotlight pushing RSPCA Assured to look at compliance. Perversely it was the RSPCA requirement for the use of gas stunning by plants processing spent hens that forced the closure of the one plant in Scotland that was taking spent hens, meaning all Scottish birds must now travel to either Bradford or Norfolk for processing, a journey of over 8 hours for producers north of the central belt.

NFUS has been in conversation with RSPCA Assured and has pushed them to apply for an official derogation from the 8-hour rule for plants unable to meet this requirement because of geographic location. The derogation, if granted, will allow NFUS to work with RSPCA and RSPCA Assured to come up with a permanent solution to allow all Scottish producers to remain assured under the scheme.

The preferred option from RSPCA is for industry to work with Government to develop a plant in Scotland to process end of lay birds. NFUS is in talks with Scottish Government and SAOS to look at the feasibility and availability of grants etc for the development of a Scottish plant, but previous considerations of plant development suggest limited long-term viability and a long lead time before any plant could be up and running.

NFUS is engaging with scientists and existing plants to gather evidence against the 8-hour journey limit as a factor in the welfare of birds during transport, and consider what alternatives could be written into the standards to provide equal, if not better, protections for the welfare of birds during transport. It is hoped that with suitable evidence RSPCA could be convinced to go with the science and by working with industry come up with a better standard that allows all producers to comply with improved bird welfare during transport, regardless of their location.