

Poultry Research : Breed and Feed Trials

Funder: Sheepdrove Organic Farm (SOF)
Collaborators: EFRC, Sheepdrove Organic Farm & Bristol University.
Start Date & Duration: On going

Background

The Soil Associations organic certification of table birds currently allows the use of up to 20 percent non-organic component in the feed ration. In August 2005 this derogation will be removed, and ration will be required to be 100 per organic. As some ingredients used within the 20 per cent non-organic component of the current ration are not available from an organic source, there is a worry that this change will therefore impact on the nutritional quality of the ration. This impact on nutritional quality, particularly the protein levels, of the ration may therefore result in poor animal health and welfare, as well as impacting upon performance, yield and quality of the final product, and hence the finances of the system.

In addition it has been questioned whether the genetic base of the birds used in organic systems are the most appropriate birds to used in organic table bird systems as they tend to be slower growing versions of conventional birds. The ISA 257 bird, currently used in the Sheepdrove system, is one such example. However, when looking for an alternative breeds there are a number of constraints, working within the market requirements for weight and conformation, as well as the limited availability of alternative breeds in the numbers required by Sheepdrove.

Aims and Objectives

To compare the impact of feed composition (100 percent organic ration with the currently used 80 percent organic ration), when addressing the nutritional needs, production traits and behaviour of Sheepdrove birds within the confines of the Sheepdrove system and the market requirements.

To ascertain if there are differences between the performance of difference breeds of table bird in the Sheepdrove system.

To ascertain if there is an interaction between feed and breed, when considering production traits and behaviour of the birds.

Progress

This project is ongoing, and one trial (with replication) has been completed which suggests that organic table bird production is possible with a 100 per cent organic ration. The experiment is being repeated with a further 100 per cent rations, different protein sources are also to be trialled.

Expected Benefits

The benefits derived from this research will include scientific evidence of an effect, if any, a move to a 100 per cent organic ration will have on the health welfare and performance of table birds in an organic silvo-poultry system. It will provide crucial, but currently absent evidence to inform the decision of lifting the derogation.

In addition, it will help to provide information on the breeds better suited to the organic table bird production that the currently used, slower growing, but essentially conventional breeds of bird.