

EUWEP's Position on 'what to do with the male chicks'

Introduction

Within the European Union there is an ongoing discussion in several Member States, as well as in Brussel, regarding the culling of day-old male chicks in the egg sector. Some Member States have already prohibited the culling of male chicks whilst others have not yet even mentioned the topic. With this position paper EUWEP aims to give an overview of the discussion held in various countries, the status of the discussion and what we as EUWEP would view as the most desirable situation for the sector in the event that the EU will undertake action.

Legislation in different Member states

- Germany: the banning of one-day chicks became effective on the 1st of January 2022. The ban only applies to chicks hatched in Germany. Therefore, it is still possible to import one-day old chicks from outside Germany. In-ovo techniques are allowed to be used but by 1st of January 2024 the in-ovo technique can only be used before day 6.
- Austria: a ban on the culling of one-day chicks became effective on the 1st of January 2022. It is still possible to cull one-day chicks if they are intended to be used as e.g. animal feed for zoo's etc.
- In France: a ban on the culling of one-day chicks was enforced on the 1st of January 2023. The in-ovo technique can be used until day 15. Chicks whose sex have been wrongly determined using the in-ovo technique and chicks intended as animal feed can still be culled.
- In the Netherlands the current disadvantages outweigh the advantages when it comes to a ban on the culling of male chicks. It has therefore been decided to postpone the implementation of a ban but the sector has to come up with measures which will limit the number of male chicks culled. These measures/ the situation will be reassessed in 2026. If these measures are deemed ineffective then the ministry of agriculture will resort to legislative action.

Analyses of dilemma

Looking in the dilemma's surrounding the culling of male day old chicks from a practical, environmental and economical point of view.

Practically impossible

Germany has made it known that as of 01-01-2024 legislation will be put in place only allowing in-ovo techniques which can determine the sex of an egg before day 6. Currently, sexing can only be done around day 9. There has been little or slow success in determining the sex at an earlier date with exception of techniques of theoretical and/or experimental techniques developed in Israel where some form of genetic manipulation takes place. With less than one year to go and no proven techniques, legislation should not be enforced, nor should the development of a sexing technique be rushed.

Environmental unsustainability

Rearing of male chicks as opposed to culling them and being used as food for zoo's and as ingredients in pet feed brings with it many additional environmental costs:

- The feed conversion ratio of these male chicks is very low which means expensive animal feed is used inefficiently. This will result in a product with a much higher carbon footprint.
- These male chicks are not raised in countries in North-western Europe as the costs are too high and slaughtering houses are not able to slaughter the lighter weighing male chicks, hence day old male chicks are transported to countries like Poland. With the exception of organic egg producers in Austria and some organic egg farmers in Germany who do raise the male layer chicks.
- In countries where culled male chicks can no longer be put to use as animal feed, organisations dependent on male chicks as a source of feed e.g. zoos have to look into alternative sources i.e. production of mice to be used as animal feed. There is a shift in production of feed for these animals adversely affecting the environment.
- Is it acceptable in a time of food scarcity and economic instability to feed animals which digest the feed far more inefficiently than broilers do? Consumers will end up paying a higher price for eggs, greatly affecting the most disadvantaged consumers for whom eggs are an affordable, essential component of a healthy diet.

Economic unsustainability

First and foremost EUWEP is of the opinion that the culling of day-old male chicks should be left to the market forces of demand and supply.

- Currently many male chicks are transported and reared in Poland as it is not at all cost effective to rear and slaughter these chicks in Western European countries. In addition, it is important to mention that the carcasses are being sold, at extremely low prices, to African countries disrupting their local markets.
- A ban will have serious effects across EU countries but will hit remote areas, e.g. Ireland, even harder. The size and distance of remote areas/islands from mainland Europe will result in a disproportionate cost burden faced by egg farmers and packers in remote areas like Ireland

We will strongly oppose a decision to ban the culling of the male layer chicks, due to environmental, ethical and environmental reasons.

1. We strongly advise against the rearing of male chicks as they are very inefficient in meat production, it is not cost effective, the carbon footprint is very high and the animal feed used for these male chicks could be used more efficiently for other commercial viable productions. Additionally, there is no current market for the meat of these male chicks in the EU. Practice tells us that the meat of these reared hens is sold to African countries, at extremely low prices disturbing their local markets.
2. As the rearing of male chicks is very inefficient and there is no viable market for the meat of these birds somebody else has to pay, ultimately it will be the egg consumers within the EU who will have to bear the burden of these extra costs.

3. It should be taken into account that if these male-chicks are no longer available as feed for other animals (zoo's, birds of prey, reptiles etc.) other animals will be reared for this purpose!
4. When an in-ovo technique has been developed which can do sexing at day 0, that is before placing the eggs in an incubator, we will look positively at the issue. The male eggs can be used for human consumption purposes (egg products industry), limiting food spoilage.

If more detailed information is needed or additional reasons are needed, please feel free to contact the Secretary General of EUWEP, Clara Hagen at +31 6 31 959 880 or via email to clara.hagen@euwep.org