



FEATHER SCORING

AVIAGEN MANAGEMENT ESSENTIALS



INTRODUCTION

Feathers are a fundamental body part for birds, with varying functions such as protection, insulation, sexual display and flight.

In broiler breeder hens, feathering is essential in order to achieve optimal production and a correct degree of welfare. Plumage, particularly in the dorsal area, is important for the female's willingness to mate. When coverage is insufficient, a drop in fertility can be observed, usually in the second half of the production cycle.

PROTOCOL FOR SCORING THE FEATHER COVER OF BROILER BREEDERS DURING THE LAYING PERIOD

GENERAL

Feather cover must be scored for the areas where the male comes into contact with the female during mating. These are the back, wings, tail and thigh area.

A FEATHER SCORE BETWEEN 0 AND 5 MUST BE GIVEN FOR EACH AREA OF THE BIRD;

• BACK • WINGS • TAIL • THIGH AREA:

- 0 = Fully feathered
- 1 = Rough
- 2 = Some broken feathers and small bald areas
- 3 = Heavily broken feathers and some bald areas
- 4 = Almost bald/large bald areas
- 5 = Bald (no feather cover)

DAMAGE TO THE THIGH AREA MUST ALSO BE SCORED ON AN ADDITIONAL SCALE OF 6 TO 8:

- 6 = Damaged (some small spot wounds)
- 7 = Minor wounding
- 8 = Serious wounding



METHOD

- Scoring should ideally be done by two people. (one person to score and the other person to record).
- It is possible to feather score with only one person, but the score must be recorded after each bird.
- Collect at least 20 birds per house or group.
- Catch the birds at random and for each bird feather score the back, wings, tail and thigh area.
- Note the scores down on the form given on page 7. Remember to fill in the farm name, age of birds, date and the name of the person doing the scoring.
- To assess the development of feather cover over time flocks should be scored every 10 weeks during lay (at 20, 30, 40, 50 and 60 weeks).
- From approximately 40 weeks of age some birds will show molting of feathers. Don't score these birds because they will give a distorted image of the average feather score of the flock.
- After all the birds have been scored transfer the data into a spreadsheet and calculate the average score per area and per house or group.

FEATHER COVER - BACK

The back is the area from the tail up to the neck, excluding the thigh area.

SCORE = 0
Fully feathered



SCORE = 1
Rough



SCORE = 2
Some broken feathers



SCORE = 3
Heavily broken feathers



SCORE = 4
Almost bald



SCORE = 5
Bald



FEATHER COVER - WING

The score for the wings is an average of both wings.

SCORE = 0
Fully feathered



SCORE = 1
Rough



SCORE = 2
Some broken feathers



SCORE = 3
Heavily broken feathers



SCORE = 4
Almost bald



SCORE = 5
Bald



FEATHER COVER - TAIL

The tail is the area from the tip of the tail to the base of the back.

SCORE = 0
Fully feathered



SCORE = 1
Rough



SCORE = 2
Some broken feathers



SCORE = 3
Heavily broken feathers



SCORE = 4
Almost bald



SCORE = 5
Bald



FEATHER COVER - THIGH AREA

The thigh area is the area between the hock, the back and the tail.

SCORE = 0
Fully feathered



SCORE = 1
Rough



SCORE = 2
Some broken feathers



SCORE = 3
Heavily broken feathers



SCORE = 4
Almost bald



SCORE = 5
Bald



PHYSICAL WOUNDS - THIGH AREA

SCORE = 6
Damaged



SCORE = 7
Minor wounding



SCORE = 8
Serious wounding



FORM: SCORING FEATHER COVER OF BROILER BREEDERS DURING LAY

Name:		House:	
Date:		Pen:	
Flock Age:		Scorer Name:	

Bird Number	Feather Cover				Wounds
	Back	Wings	Tail	Thigh Area	Thigh Area
1					
2					
3					
4					
5					
6					
7					
8					
9					
10					
11					
12					
13					
14					
15					
16					
17					
18					
19					
20					

FEATHER COVER

- | | |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 0 = Fully feathered | 3 = Heavily broken feathers |
| 1 = Rough | 4 = Almost bald |
| 2 = Some broken feathers | 5 = Bald |

WOUNDS

- | |
|----------------------|
| 6 = Damaged |
| 7 = Minor wounding |
| 8 = Serious wounding |



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