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THE INSIDE CHIRP

POULTRY NEWS VOL 43

THE IMPORTANCE OF GOOD STOCKMANSHIP

AVIAGEN MANAGEMENT ESSENTIALS

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INTRODUCTION

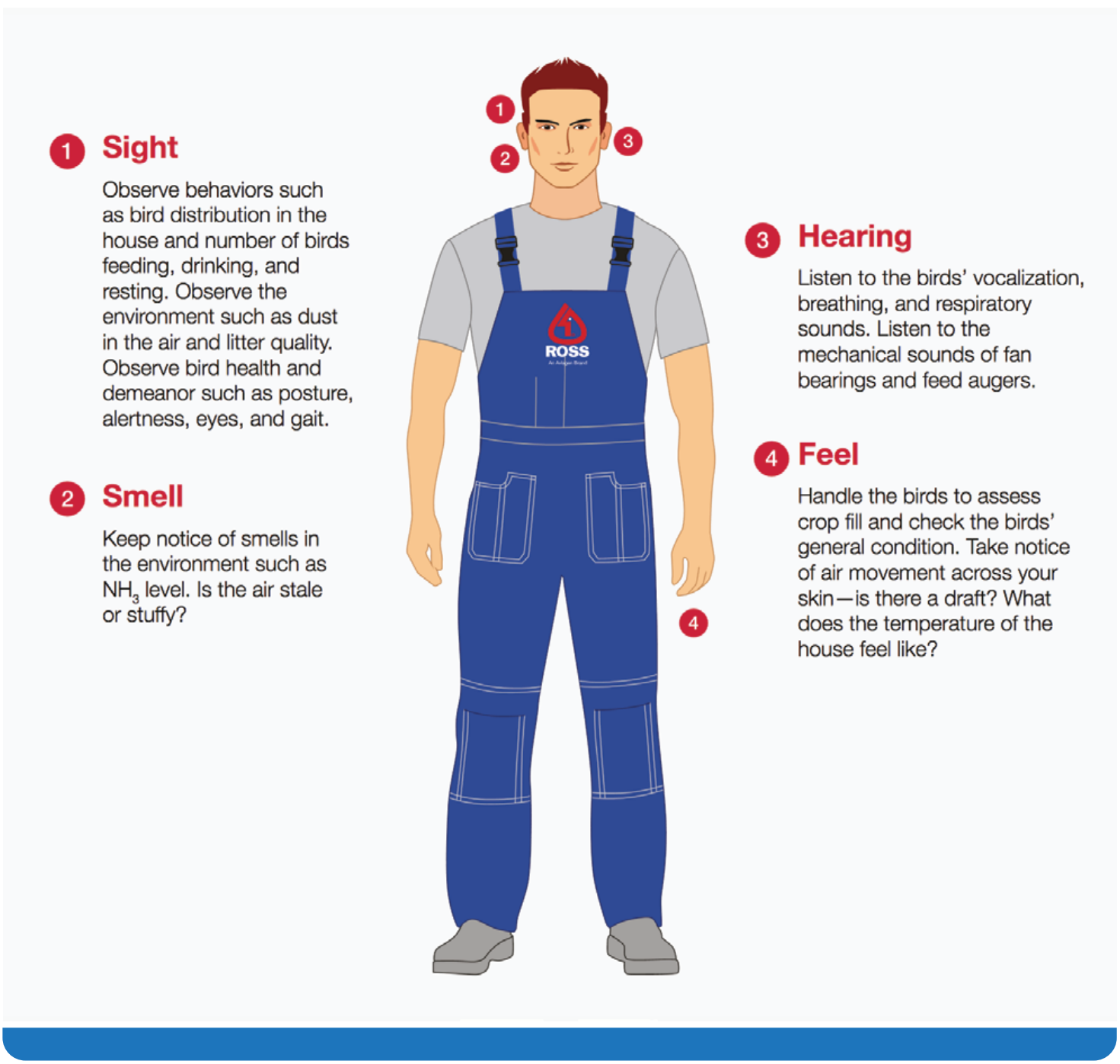
The importance of stockmanship for parent stock welfare, performance, and profitability must not be underestimated. A good stockman will be able to identify and respond to problems quickly.

The stockman must apply and interpret the best-practice recommendations given in this handbook and use them in combination with their own professional competence, practical knowledge, skills, and ability to meet the birds' needs.

The stockman must be constantly in tune with and aware of all the birds in the flock, their environment, and the data related to both. To do this, the birds' behavioral characteristics and the conditions within the poultry house must be closely observed.

This monitoring is commonly referred to as “stock sense” and is a continuous process that uses all the stockman’s senses **(Figure 1)**. A good stockman must also be empathetic and dedicated, have a good knowledge and skill base, pay attention to detail, and be patient.

Figure 1:
Stockmanship: using the senses to monitor the flock



PRACTICAL STOCKMANSHIP

The body-weight and egg production targets at a given age are usually the same across flocks, but each individual flock will have slightly different management requirements to achieve those targets. To understand the individual management requirements of a flock and be able to respond to each flock appropriately, the stockman must know and also sense what is normal for the flock.

The stockman has an important role to play in maintaining the welfare, health, and performance of a flock. If only farm records (growth, feed consumption, etc.) are monitored, important signals from the birds and their environment will be missed. Often, the first signs of a problem or inadequacy in the environment are subtle changes in bird behavior.

By understanding what is normal for a flock, any changes in behavior or the development of abnormal behavior for that flock can be quickly identified. Using all the senses, the stockman must build up an awareness of the environment and an understanding of the normal behavioral characteristics of the flock.

This information should be continuously analyzed, along with farm records, the stockman's experience and knowledge, and the current environmental conditions, to quickly identify and correct any changes or deficiencies in the birds' condition and/or environment.

The flock environment and behavior should be observed at various times of the day by the same person. This observation should be carried out whenever day-to-day management tasks in the house are completed. Additionally, it is crucial to conduct specific inspections solely focused on monitoring flock behaviour.

Before entering the house, the time and ambient climatic conditions should be noted. This will help determine how the fans, heaters, cool cells, and inlets should be operating when compared to the system's set points.

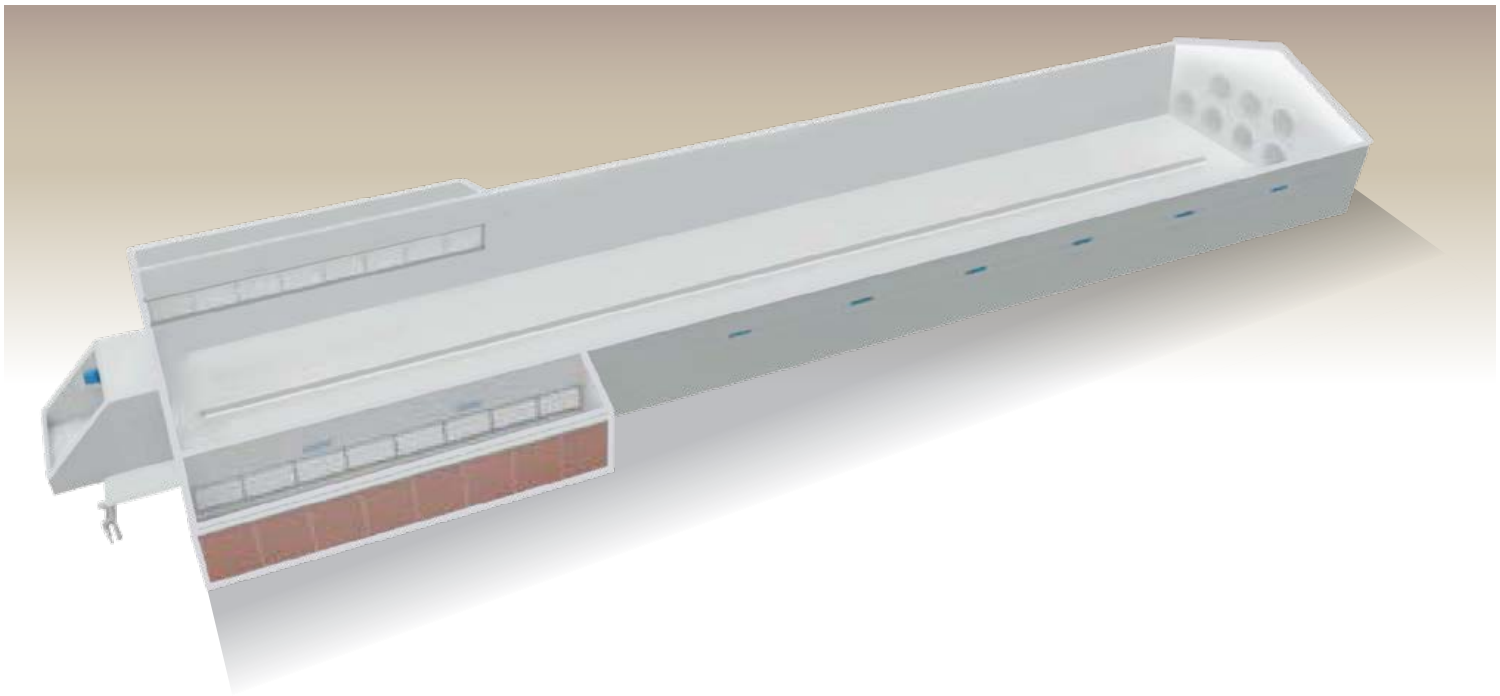
Upon entry to the house, gently knock on and gradually open the door and ask yourself the following question:

Does the door into the house open with a slight resistance, no resistance, or high resistance?

The answer to this question will indicate the air pressure within the house and reflect the ventilation settings (e.g., inlet openings and fan operation)

Slowly enter the house and stop until the birds become accustomed to your presence. During this time, continuously use all your senses to assess the flock condition: **LOOK, LISTEN, SMELL, AND FEEL (Figure 2)**.

Figure 2: Using the senses to assess flock condition



LISTEN TO:

THE BIRDS:

Are the birds snicking/sneezing? Are their vocalizations appropriate for their age? How do the birds sound compared to previous visits? Is it a vaccination response or is it related to a dusty, poor environment? Often, listening to the birds is best done in the evening when the noise level is reduced.

THE FEEDERS:

Are the mechanical augers or chains running constantly and smoothly? Has the feed bridged in the feed bin?

THE FANS:

Are the fan bearings noisy? Do fan belts sound loose? Routine maintenance can prevent environmental issues related to suboptimal air quality.

FEEL:

THE AIR:

How does the air feel on your face? Is it stuffy (humid), cold, or hot? Is there fast air speed or no air movement? These, either in combination or solely, can indicate specific environmental issues, such as insufficient minimum ventilation.

THE FEED PHYSICAL QUALITY:

Is the feed very dusty? Do the pellets break down very easily in the hand and in the feeder?

THE LITTER CONDITION:

Pick up and feel the condition of the litter. If the litter stays together after compressing (does not spring apart), it indicates excessive moisture, which may suggest ventilation inadequacies. If the litter is dry, it will remain friable and fall apart after compressing.

LOOK AT:

BIRD DISTRIBUTION:

Are specific areas of the house being avoided, suggesting an environmental issue (drafty, cold, hot, or unevenly lit)?

BIRD RESPIRATION:

Are the birds panting? Is the panting specific to one area of the house, suggesting an air flow or temperature issue?

BIRD BEHAVIOUR:

Drinking, feeding, mating and resting normally, ensure behaviours are appropriate for the time of day..

BIRD HEALTH:

Do the birds look healthy upon visual observation? Are there signs of injury or damage to feather cover?

FANS:

Are the inlets correctly positioned? Are the heaters running? Do the set points need adjustment?

COOLING PADS:

Depending on the set points, is the pad area wet, dry, or a combination? Is the water pump functioning and the water being distributed evenly on the pads?

LITTER CONDITION:

Are areas capping due to leaking drinkers or excess water from cool cells? Is cold air entering the house and falling to the floor?

FEEDERS AND DRINKERS:

Are they the correct height? Is there feed in the feeders? Are the drinkers leaking? What is the feed quality like? Is there feed spillage?

LIGHTING:

Are there any dark spots in the house? Are the lights at the correct intensity? Is the timer correct and working? Has the quality of light-proofing been checked?

SMELL:

THE FEED:

What does the feed smell like? Does it smell fresh or musty?

THE ENVIRONMENT:

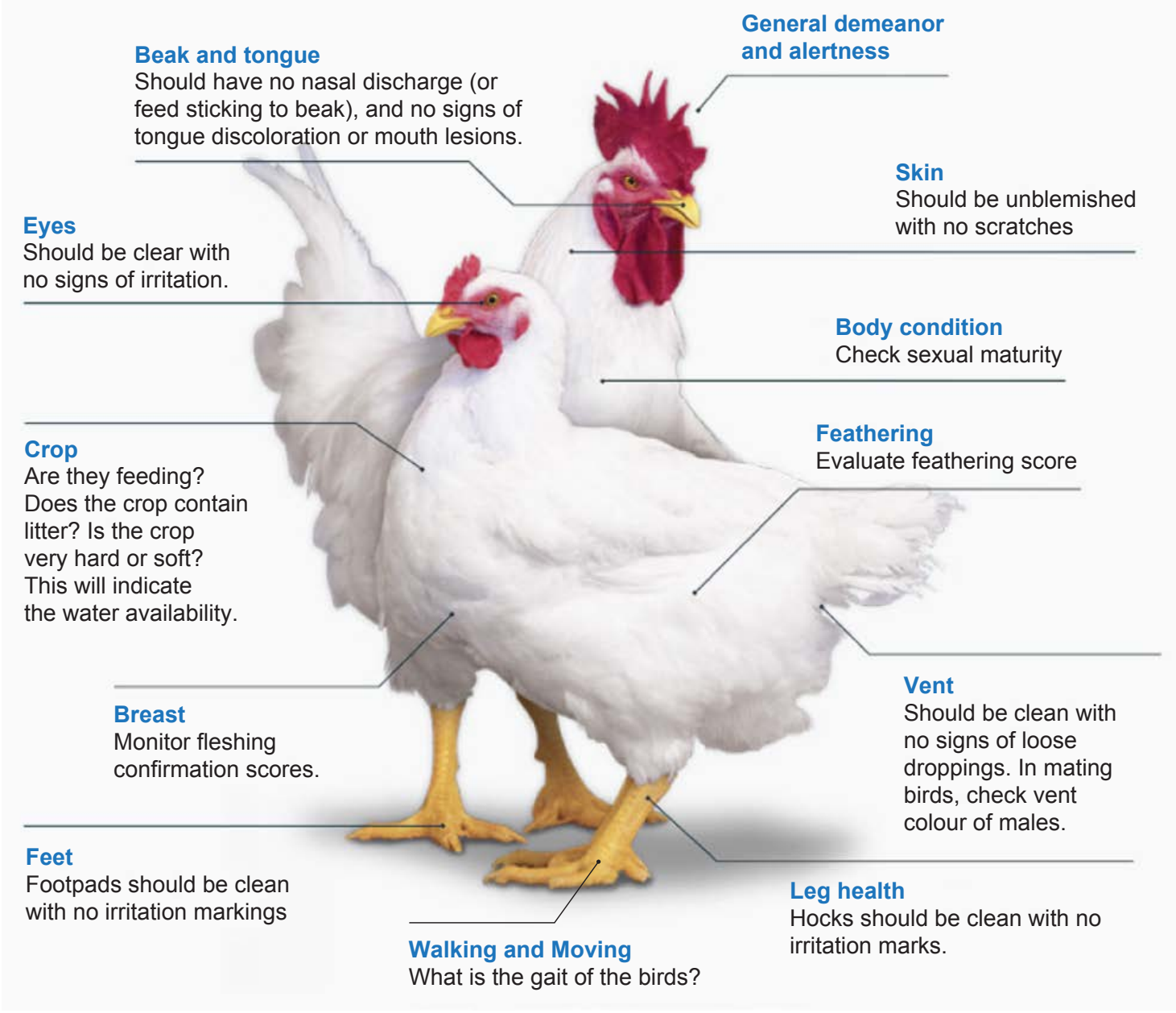
What does the environment smell like? Can you smell NH3? (Ammonia)

NEXT STEP

After the initial entry into the house and observation of the flock and the environment, slowly walk the entire house, assessing the points in **Figure 2**. Walking the entire house is important to ensure that there is minimal variation in the environment and bird behavior throughout the house. When walking through the house, get down to bird level and pick up any birds that do not move away. Are they sick or injured? How many birds are affected? Assess the way the flock moves in front of and behind you. Do the birds move back to fill the space created by walking through the flock?

Periodically stop to handle and assess individual birds for the following:

Figure 3: Bird Assessment



These observations will help build a picture for each individual flock/house.

REMEMBER, NO TWO FLOCKS OR HOUSES ARE THE SAME!

Compare this stock sense information with actual farm records. Are the birds on target weight for age? If there are any irregularities, they must be investigated and an action plan should be developed to address any issues that occur.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN STOCKMANSHIP AND BIRD WELFARE

Stock sense, combined with the stockman's knowledge, experience, and skills in husbandry, will produce a well-rounded stockman who will also have personal qualities such as patience, dedication, and empathy when working with the birds. The implementation of the "Three Essentials of Stockmanship" **(Figure 4)** will not only bring the birds as close as possible to the ideal state of "The Five Freedoms of Animal Welfare," it will strongly influence efficiency and profitability.

Figure 4: Three Essentials of Stockmanship.
(Source: adapted from Animal Welfare Committee [AWC] definition of the "ideal state to strive for")

1 KNOWLEDGE OF ANIMAL HUSBANDRY

Sound knowledge of the biology and husbandry of farm animals, including how their needs may be best provided for in all circumstances.

2 SKILLS IN ANIMAL HUSBANDRY

Demonstratable skills inobservation, handling, care and treatment of animals, as well as problem detection and resolution.

3 PERSONAL QUALITIES

Affinity and empathy with animals, dedication and patience.

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