

## New Salmonella Regulations for Turkey Producers

From 2010 EU regulations 2160/2003, 584/2008, 213/2009 will be introduced to monitor and control salmonella in turkeys. This may have an impact on your turkey enterprise.

Salmonella is the genus name for nearly 3000 types of bacteria, each type being identifiable by its specific protein coating. Other than that they are closely related. Many of these strains cause no problem while some, in certain conditions can lead to food poisoning. These bacteria are all around us and even inside us but may cause food poisoning symptoms if ingested in a large enough quantity. It is estimated that there are around 200,000 cases of salmonella food poisoning each year in the UK, of which 50,000 are reported and some 2000 will be hospitalised. Normally this is connected with some other condition affecting the immune system's ability to deal with the salmonella. To put this into perspective, 9,000 people die in NHS hospitals every year from MRSA and C.difficile. We know that poultry meat properly cooked, (core temp reaches 75oc) kills salmonella bacteria.

The culprits causing concern

The EU is concerned with two types of salmonella, Salmonella Enteritidis and Salmonella Typhimurium. Both of these types are fortunately very low level in the UK and are already below the EUs target of less than 1% by the year 2012. However the incidence of all strains is around the EU average at 30%. At present it is S Enteritidis and S typhimurium that the EU are directing control at and the aim in the UK will be to maintain the present incidence at the low level.

What this means for you as a turkey producer

The new regulations mean that breeding flocks of turkeys over 250 birds will have to take boot samples once a year and fattening flocks of over 500 turkeys will have to take boot samples at least 3 weeks before slaughter. There is no sampling requirement for flocks less than this and flocks of up to 10,000 will be exempt if they are for local and direct sale (including mail order). On top of this 10% of flocks, including flocks of 10,000 sold direct, (but not the flocks of less than 250 breeding or 500 fattening), will be randomly, selected for sampling by a competent authority. All costs associated with sampling will be borne by the producer.

How do you comply if your turkey flock is large enough to meet the criteria?

Boot sampling for a fattening flock entails putting on plastic over boots followed by the sampling boots and then walking at least 100 paces on one side of the house and then with new sampling boots, 100 paces on the other side. This has to be done at least 3 weeks before slaughter. For breeding flocks the exact sampling measures have not at this point been decided. Up to date information regarding this can be found at the Veterinary Laboratories Agency Tel 01932 357361. The control and elimination of salmonella is only totally possible in the high security environment of the intensive turkey producers and involves intensive cleaning and disinfecting, strict bio security, the elimination of rodents and wild bird activity and obtaining salmonella free replacement birds.

On the smaller free-range turkey units such measures are not possible. However, such producers are usually seasonal and therefore there are long periods with no turkeys on the farm. It appears that this alone will reduce the incidence of salmonella if houses are properly disinfected. It is also likely that such producers will have lower stocking rates so although it is not possible to remove contact with wild birds and insects, problems are less likely to spread quickly. It has also been noted that free-range birds, possibly because they have more challenges throughout their life, are better able to deal with them. Unfortunately the salmonella does not need to be causing the bird a problem for it to register positive.

More regulations for poultry producers coming

From the end of 2010 other new regulations may require testing of poultry meat in the slaughterhouse and the withdrawal of the meat from sale if it tests positive to any of the salmonella strains. This would suggest that a third of all turkey meat would be regarded as unsafe. At present the interpretations of these regulations has not been finalized.

October 2009

About the author Stephen Merritt is a partner in The Welsh Poultry Centre and an accredited advisor and board member of The Institute of Organic Training and Advice and has spent over 30 years working in sustainable agriculture in developing countries, England and Wales. In the last 8 years Steve has specialised in free range and organic poultry production and now offers on farm advice and training to this sector.

[www.welshpoultrycentre.co.uk](http://www.welshpoultrycentre.co.uk)