

## RSPCA Assured announces amendments to the new RSPCA laying hen standards

*In a bid to support its members, whilst continuing to improve hen welfare*

Monday 22 January 2024

**RSPCA Assured has today announced revisions to the RSPCA's new laying hen welfare standards following feedback from the industry. Key changes include removing the veranda requirement for free-range producers and adding a timeline extension for providing natural light.**

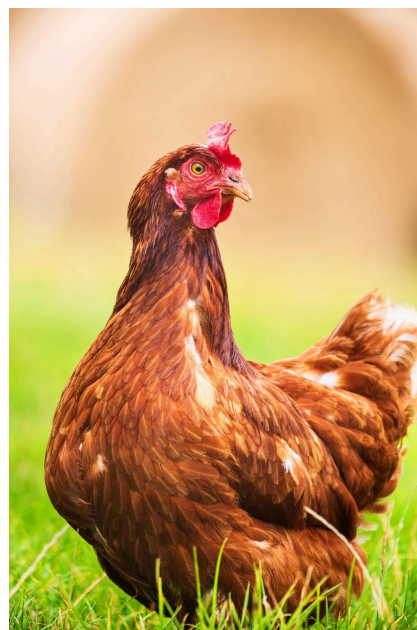
In November 2023, RSPCA Assured first notified its members of the RSPCA's new laying hen welfare standards. These originally included a number of veranda and natural daylight requirements for free-range and barn members.

The combination of providing both verandas and natural daylight will significantly improve bird welfare. For example, helping to reduce feather pecking and keel bone fractures - two of the most challenging welfare issues for hens in egg production. Natural daylight also provides an appropriate visual environment for free-range birds when range access is restricted e.g. during a housing order.

However, following feedback concerning these new standards, the RSPCA and RSPCA Assured met with industry representatives and members today and announced the following revisions to better support members with transitioning to verandas and natural daylight, whilst continuing to improve hen welfare:

### **Veranda requirements**

### **Free-range members**



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- No free-range members are required to install verandas.
- *The requirement for new free-range members or existing members carrying out a major refurbishment to install a veranda, originally announced in November, has been removed.*
- *The RSPCA and RSPCA Assured will jointly engage with industry to conduct an in-depth review of installing verandas on free-range systems.*

## Barn members

- Verandas must be installed on **all barn buildings** by no later than **1 January 2030**.
- *The requirement for newly approved buildings and refurbished buildings to install verandas from 1 May 2024 has been removed, this provides additional time for both existing and new barn members to install verandas.*

## Natural daylight requirement

### Free-range members

- Additional natural daylight within the main laying house, corresponding to at least 3% of the total floor area, must be provided in all free-range systems by no later than **1 January 2031**.
- Popholes can be counted towards the natural daylight allowance. Many free-range producers will already be providing approximately half of the natural daylight requirement through existing popholes.
- *Newly approved buildings and refurbished buildings are no longer required to install windows from May 2024.*

### Barn members

- Natural daylight within the main laying house, corresponding to at least 3% of the total floor area, must be provided in all barn systems by no later than **1 January 2031**.
- *Newly approved buildings and refurbished buildings are no longer required to install windows from May 2024.*

The timeline for natural daylight has been extended by one year which now gives RSPCA Assured laying hen members **seven years** to implement the new standards in their entirety and allows increased engagement with industry and members\*.

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Dr Kate Norman, senior scientific officer and poultry specialist at the RSPCA, said: “We recognise that these changes are challenging for producers, but they represent a very important step forward for hen welfare in the UK.

“Natural daylight provides a number of important welfare benefits for laying hens such as helping to reduce stress, feather pecking and keel bone fractures.”

## Supporting resources for members:

- View the revisions to the new laying hen standards [here](#).
- View further information for barn members on the benefits of verandas [here](#).
- View further information for barn and free-range members on the benefits of natural daylight [here](#).

New, potential or existing RSPCA Assured members who are in need of support or advice about meeting the new laying hen standards should [contact](#) RSPCA Assured membership services via the RSPCA Assured website.

-ends-

## Notes to editors:

- \*Extending the timeline for the introduction of natural daylight will enable the RSPCA and RSPCA Assured to work with industry and retailers to share evidence and case studies which reflect conditions in the different areas of the UK. Building a strong body of case studies will also allow us to demonstrate to industry how natural light can be installed effectively, practically managed and showcase the positive benefits for hen welfare.
- What is a veranda?
  - A veranda is an additional roofed structure attached to the outside of a poultry building, which has a fully littered floor. Alongside other key welfare improvements, verandas provide barn hens with access to natural daylight and an outdoor climate.
- Find out more about egg-laying hens [here](#).

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