

Poultry Faring Well?

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Some things work in reverse. An idea to [improve outcomes](#), like poultry welfare, can lead to just the opposite. One of the issues I have noticed is the push for better poultry welfare by large shops, or more accurately, the [perception](#) of better poultry welfare. Better welfare is a noble aim and one we should all aim for, but when there are blunt rules, the unfortunate and real possibilities are that such rules can badly affect poultry welfare. Added into this are activist groups whose goals are more to do with ending animal ownership, than animal welfare and we have issues.

Consider this: A large shop insists, based on its own version of poultry welfare, without consulting industry, that its suppliers must now supply more perch space for chooks. OK that sounds fine and reasonable. The prices they offer their supplier does not increase to cover the extra costs. Cost free improvements (for the large shop), "guilt" allayed, and a possible advertising moment explaining on how the large shop (not the supplier) is improving poultry welfare! Or has it?

The large shop has not compensated the farmer for the extra costs involved, what can the farmer do?

1. Reduce flock size: Probable Result; slowly go out of business!
2. Drop out and supply someone else, not easy at all! See number 1 results
3. Provide decent perches and wear the cost, possibly see number 1 results
4. Find alternatives, basically low cost compliance to this new rule.

One could suspect number 4 will be chosen, and why not! Adhere to this new rule, keep your flock size, and keep your customer. But what's the cheap alternative? Salaries make DIY expensive and purpose made perches cost money!

Number 4 lets the chickens perch on the nipple lines, which is opposite to the normal practice. Without much effort, or money spent, we have the perch space!

What about [welfare](#)?

- The Chooks now have more space to perch, rule followed...but those chooks on the [nipple line](#) have a narrow round, mostly metal pipe to perch and sleep on. Bumble Foot anybody? Disrupted sleep anybody?
- An increased chance that poo goes into the splash cups, where chickens occasionally drink dribbles and drops from [chicken drinker nipples](#), not great!

One fact is true, [welfare costs](#)!

If the large shop doesn't pay, if the farmer doesn't pay, and the consumer doesn't pay, then the chicken pays!

The same equations relate to backyard poultry keepers and the fancy. Faced with rules, and hopefully, a will to do the right thing, there are decisions to make and some compromise as well. Your time manually feeding chickens versus some automation; Automation allows some ease but may stop you observing your flock as much, perhaps! Making a great Chook pen versus buying one that will just do the job, if you're lucky?

Keeping poultry, and [good stockmanship](#) costs time and money, either upfront or over the long run. Doing things well can actually save both time and money in the long run and have better welfare outcomes, but blunt rules made up to satisfy an activist group, the media hounds or perceived guilt are unlikely to save money, or time or have good welfare outcomes for poultry.

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