

WORLD OSTRICH ASSOCIATION WELFARE CODES



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WOA Welfare Codes for Ostrich

Introduction

1. This code is designed as a basis for different authorities and companies to build their own Welfare Code for Ostrich. All members of the World Ostrich Association are encouraged to follow these welfare codes as minimum standards of operation.
2. The recommendations are relevant for Ostrich and designed to ensure the maintenance of ostrich to the highest standards of welfare under all production systems.
3. The number and type of ostrich kept and the stocking rate and/or housing density will depend on the suitability of the environment, the capacity of the farm, the competence of the stockman and the time available to carry out his/her duties. Good Stockmanship is of paramount importance in all systems of ostrich production.
4. The relevant animal welfare legislation applies to owners as well as to any person looking after ostrich on their behalf, wherever the ostrich are located. A written contract can be of value in ensuring that all parties are clear about their responsibilities in respect of welfare. However, the obligations imposed by law will still apply.

Stockmanship

5. The most significant single influence on the welfare of any flock is the stockman, who should develop and carry out an effective routine for continuing care.
6. All stockmen should be aware of the welfare needs of the stock under their care and be capable of safeguarding them under all foreseeable conditions before being given the responsibility for the flock. This requires the acquisition of specific stockmanship skills, acquired through a combination of practical experience and training. Wherever possible, the training should be of a type that leads to formal recognition of competence.
7. Stockmen should be trained in hooding, handling and restraint. Generally, it requires a minimum of 2 people to handle and move an adult ostrich safely.
8. Stockmen should know the signs of good health in ostrich of all ages. These include general alertness, free movement, active feeding and absence of lameness, visible wounds, abscesses or injuries.
9. Stockmen should also know the signs that indicate ill health in ostrich. These include:
 - a. listlessness
 - b. abnormal posture and behaviour
 - c. sitting apart from the flock
 - d. lameness
 - e. scouring or hard faeces
 - f. poor feather condition, including parasites
 - g. loss of body condition
 - h. excessive feather loss

WOA Welfare Codes for Ostrich

- i. not coming to eat
 - j. rapid and irregular breathing
 - k. sore eyes
 - l. anything out of the ordinary
10. The capabilities of the stockman in charge of ostrich are a significant factor in determining the size of a flock. The unit should only be set up if the stockmen have the skills necessary to safeguard the welfare of every animal in their charge and the infrastructure to support them.
11. It is important for an owner to ensure that enough time is available within the stockman's normal work routine for proper inspection of the flock and for any necessary remedial action to be taken.
12. Ostrich require handling as calmly as possible. Hooding is recommended when required, to relieve them from stress during handling and treatment. All floor surfaces must be non-slip and avoid any sharp protruding objects.

Food and Water

13. Ostrich must be fed a wholesome diet which:
- a. is appropriate to their species
 - b. is appropriate to their age and production group
 - c. is fed in sufficient quantity to maintain good health
 - d. satisfies their nutritional needs
14. All birds of all ages, from day old, must have feed available every day. Feeding intervals are dependent on age, with a minimum feeding of twice a day.
15. Avoid sudden changes in the type and quantity of feed.
16. Clean water must be available at all times, with care taken to avoid overheating in summer and well above freezing in winter.
17. Stale and Contaminated feed should be removed from troughs before fresh feed is added. Feed must always be palatable and of good quality.
18. Cross contamination with certain substances used in Pig, Cattle and Poultry rations are toxic to ostrich, so great care is required to avoid any cross contamination.
19. Avoid feeds formulated for other specie, including poultry, in case they contain any substances toxic to ostrich.
20. Feed troughs must allow space for every bird in the pen to feed at any one time. Minimum requirement for adult birds is ½ meter per bird. This applies to birds that are fed on an ad-lib basis or on a rationed feed level.

WOA Welfare Codes for Ostrich

Health

General

21. Ostrich kept in husbandry systems in which their welfare depends on frequent Human attention shall be thoroughly inspected at least once a day to check that they are in a state of well-being.
22. Ostrich kept in systems other than husbandry systems in which their welfare depends on frequent human attention shall be inspected at intervals sufficient to avoid any suffering.
23. Ostrich that appear to be ill or injured
 - a. Shall be cared for appropriately without delay; and
 - b. Where they do not respond to such care, veterinary advice shall be obtained as soon as possible.
24. Records shall be maintained for
 - a. Any medicinal treatment given to animals, and
 - b. The number of mortalities found on each inspection of animals carried out in accordance with items 21 and 22.
25. The records referred to in item 24 shall be retained for a period of at least three years or as specified in by legislation within the country.
26. Ostrich stockmen should be experienced or trained and be competent across the range of health and welfare skills. These skills should include vaccination, prevention and treatment of internal and external parasites.
27. A written health and welfare programme for all animals should be prepared for each flock. This should cover the annual production cycle and developed with appropriate veterinary and technical advice, and reviewed and updated annually. The programme should include sufficient records to assess the basic output of the flock and should address, as a minimum, vaccination policy and timing and control of external and internal parasites.
28. Particular attention should be paid to any stock introduced, including breeder hens, males, eggs or chicks since diseases can easily be spread.
29. Records must be maintained of any medicinal treatment given and the number of mortalities found in each inspection. Where equivalent information is required, kept for other purposes, such as for medicine records or identification legislation, these shall suffice.

Inspection

30. The health and welfare of animals depend upon regular supervision. Stockmen should carry out inspections of the flock daily and pay particular attention to signs of injury, distress or illness, so that these conditions can be recognised and dealt with promptly.

WOA Welfare Codes for Ostrich

Casualties

31. Any Ostrich which appear to be ill or injured:
 - a. Shall be cared for appropriately without delay; and
 - b. Where they do not respond to care, veterinary advice shall be obtained as soon as possible.
32. Where necessary, sick or injured animals shall be isolated in suitable accommodation with dry comfortable bedding as appropriate.
33. Injured, ailing or distressed ostrich should be identified and treated without delay. Where the stockman is able to identify the cause of ill health, he or she should take immediate remedial action. When in doubt, veterinary advice should be obtained as soon as possible.
34. It is necessary to make provision for the segregation and care of sick or injured animals, with care taken to avoid undue stress as a result of segregation from companions. If possible the segregation area should be positioned in sight of other birds.
35. If an unfit ostrich does not respond to treatment, it should be culled or humanely killed on-farm. It is an offence to cause, or to allow, unnecessary pain or unnecessary distress by leaving any animal to suffer.
36. In an emergency, it may be necessary to kill an animal immediately to prevent suffering. In such cases, the animal should be destroyed in a humane manner and, where possible, by a person experienced and/or trained both in the techniques and the equipment used for killing ostrich.
37. If animals are killed or slaughtered on-farm, other than in an emergency, the operation may only be carried out using a permitted method and in accordance with current welfare at slaughter legislation.
38. An unfit ostrich may be transported only if it is being taken for veterinary treatment/diagnosis or is going to the nearest available place of slaughter and then only provided it is transported in a way which is not going to cause it further suffering.
39. No person shall transport any ostrich in a way, which causes or is likely to cause injury or unnecessary suffering to that animal.
40. No person shall transport any animal unless:
 - a. It is fit for the intended journey; and
 - b. Suitable provision has been made for its care during the journey and on arrival at the place of destination.
 - c. For these purposes an ostrich shall not be considered fit for its intended journey if it is ill, injured, infirm or fatigued, unless it is only slightly ill, injured, infirm or fatigued and the intended journey is not likely to cause it unnecessary suffering.

WOA Welfare Codes for Ostrich

- d. Notwithstanding the above, any ostrich may be transported to the nearest available place for veterinary treatment or diagnosis, or to the nearest available place of slaughter, if the animal is not likely to be subject to unnecessary suffering by reason of its unfitness. However, an animal so transported may not be dragged or pushed by any means, or lifted by a mechanical device, unless this is done in the presence and under the supervision of a veterinary surgeon who is arranging for it to be transported with all practicable speed to a place for veterinary treatment.

Dosing and vaccination equipment

41. Care should be taken to ensure that all equipment used in dosing, vaccination and treatment is maintained to a satisfactory standard. Equipment used for any injections should be frequently cleansed and sterilised to avoid infections. Ideally, disposable needles should be used. Dosing gun nozzles should be of a size suitable for the age of the ostrich. Hazardous objects such as needles should be disposed of safely in accordance with current legislation.
42. Where necessary, the stockman should receive training in the use and maintenance of equipment used for dosing, vaccination and treatment.

Record Keeping

43. A record shall be maintained of –
 - a. Any medicinal treatment given to animals; and
 - b. The number of mortalities found on each inspection of animals carried out in accordance with any of the following provisions.
44. The record referred to in paragraph 7 shall be retained for a period of at least three years from the date on which the medicinal treatment was given, or the date of the inspection, as the case may be, and shall be made available to an authorised person when carrying out an inspection or when otherwise requested by such person.
45. Records should be kept of the name and address of the supplier of the veterinary medicinal product.
46. Farmers should only buy and use authorised animal medicines. They must keep full records of all the medicine purchased, including where purchased from. Also, farmers must keep records for at least three years of:
 - the date you treated the animals;
 - how much medicine you used; and
 - which animal or group of animals you treated.

Farmers can find more information in the Code of Practice on responsible use of animal medicines on the farm.

47. In terms of individual animal management, farmers may find it useful, as part of the health and welfare plan, to note specific cases of lameness and sickness and where appropriate, the relevant treatment given.

WOA Welfare Codes for Ostrich

Management

48. Animals not kept in buildings shall, where necessary and possible, be given protection from adverse weather conditions, predators and risks to their health and shall, at all times, have access to a well drained lying area.
49. Ostrich are maintained "free range", with access to shelter, as appropriate and outdoor runs.
50. Ostrich may only be held indoors for a period greater than 24 hours when weather conditions are such that it would be unsafe to allow them out – e.g. extreme ice or flooding.
51. Stocking density must ensure that under normal climatic conditions extreme muddy conditions do not affect their wing feathers.
52. All fields and buildings should be kept clear of debris such as wire or plastic, which could be harmful to ostrich and all livestock.
53. At all times ostriches require access to shelter from rain, wind or sun.

Marking

54. A skilled stockman using properly maintained instruments should carry out permanent marking of ostrich. Neck or wing tags and microchips are suitable for use in ostrich.

Handling

55. All ostrich farmers should have easily operated and efficient handling pens, to facilitate routine management and treatment, on a size and scale to suit the flock numbers. Pens and floors should be maintained in good repair and should not have any sharp edges or projections, which might injure the birds. Such handling should be kept to the minimum required to maintain optimum health.
56. When transporting ostrich ensure there are well designed collecting, loading and unloading facilities available on the farm.

Fencing & hedges

57. Fences and hedges should be well maintained so as to avoid injury to ostrich and prevent entanglement.
58. Electric fences have not yet been tested with ostrich and until this research is carried out, they are not permitted.
59. Any fence must be highly visible.
60. Hedges are suitable for ostrich, provided they are well maintained and gaps are filled.
61. Barbed wire should never be used near ostrich.

WOA Welfare Codes for Ostrich

62. Fence height should be appropriate to the size of the birds being contained.
63. Any wire used should be installed to ensure the birds do not get their necks or feet caught in the wire.

Feather Plucking

64. The plucking of feathers takes place after slaughter and not permitted while birds are alive.
65. If the removal of feathers from a live animal is required for welfare reasons, care should be taken to cut the feather above the bloodline.

Breeding Techniques

66. Subject to item 68 natural or artificial breeding or breeding procedures that cause, or are likely to cause, suffering or injury to any of the animals concerned shall not be practised.
67. Item 67 shall not preclude the use of natural or artificial breeding procedures that are likely to cause minimal or momentary suffering or injury or that might necessitate interventions which would not cause lasting injury.
68. No animals shall be kept for farming purposes unless it can reasonably be expected, based on their genotype or phenotype that they can be kept without detrimental effect on their health or welfare.
69. Ostrich use natural mating with breeding carried out in a free-range environment of single breeding groups or colonies.
70. Single breeding groups contain one male and one or more hens. Colonies contain more than one breeding group in the same pen.
71. Artificial Insemination is not currently in use with Ostrich production.

Hatching

72. Automatic handling systems at hatch are not currently in use with Ostrich production.
73. Any chicks deformed, sick, injured or failed to hatch successfully must be removed immediately and destroyed humanely.

WOA Welfare Codes for Ostrich

Chick Handling

74. No automatic systems are currently incorporated for the handling of ostrich chicks at hatch.
75. Chicks must be handled with care during the transition process from hatching trays, to identification, sexing and despatch to rearing units.
76. Day old ostrich chicks are not beak trimmed.
77. Day old chicks must have access to feed and water as soon as possible
78. The design of transport boxes must ensure that there is adequate ventilation and air circulation to maintain an optimal temperature within the boxes during transportation.
79. The design of the transport boxes must optimise airflow when they are stacked.
80. Holding facilities must maintain thermal comfort and ensure protection of chicks from any draughts.
81. The level of lighting must be at a level that ensures chick comfort and activity levels suitable for the situation.
82. Chicks must be delivered to the rearing unit within 24 hours of the time of removal from the hatchers.
83. Transport boxes and transport vehicle must be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected after carrying each consignment of chicks.
84. The cleanliness of the transport vehicle must be checked, and signed accordingly, by an appointed supervisor before any new chicks are loaded onto the vehicle.
85. The number of chicks placed in each box must ensure that chicks have sufficient room to avoid overcrowding and to maintain a thermally comfortable environment.
86. The height of the crates must enable the chicks to maintain a normal posture and prevent chicks from escaping.
87. When placed in the transport vehicle, transport boxes must be properly secured to prevent movement and disturbance to the chicks during transportation.
88. The timing of transport must be planned to minimise waiting time for chicks on arrival at the destination.
89. Every effort must be made to ensure journeys are completed without unnecessary delays.
90. Contingency plans must be in place in case there are delays, in order to protect the chicks' welfare.

WOA Welfare Codes for Ostrich

91. All drivers must have a means of communication and an emergency procedure manual that contains all necessary emergency contact numbers.
92. Drivers must be familiar with appropriate procedures that need to be taken.
93. Any deaths and injuries occurring during transportation must be recorded.
94. Any chicks requiring euthanasia must be treated humanely.
95. Only a trained and competent person must carry out the killing of chicks.
96. Chicks must have access to food and water immediately on arrival at rearing unit.

Environment/Housing

97. When ostrich are kept in buildings, they shall be kept on, or have access at all times to, a lying area that either has well-maintained dry bedding or is well drained.
98. The freedom of movement of animals, having regard to their species and in accordance with established experience and scientific knowledge, shall not be restricted in such a way as to cause them unnecessary suffering or injury.
99. Ostrich can cope with a wide variety of climatic conditions if provided with suitable infrastructure.
100. Ostrich are maintained free range with suitable shelter and access to outside pens.

Breeder Accommodation

101. Breeding Ostrich are encouraged to nest inside, thus a dry sand or earth flooring is encouraged to enable the natural digging of nest. Straw can be used for adult ostrich as bedding material but is generally unnecessary
102. The pen must be free draining with good air circulation and good natural light.
103. Minimum recommended shelter for a single breeding group is 6 meters x 5.5 meters.
104. Recommended door height for breeder pen is no higher than 1.8 meters with a width of 1.2 to 1.5 meters. (This is a safety measure designed to slow the birds down when entering the building)
105. Sharing of shelters by more than one breeder group (colony) is discouraged, but when required allow a minimum of 50 sq meters per group.
106. Minimum total recommended area for a breeding pair or trio is 600 sq meters when maintained as individual breeding groups.
107. Minimum total recommended area for more than one breeding group in the same pen should be a minimum of 2,500 sq meters per breeding group.

WOA Welfare Codes for Ostrich

Chick Accommodation

108. During the first weeks baby chicks, especially while the yolk sac is still unabsorbed, must be kept warm and dry and not lie directly on the cold floor of the accommodation unit. Heated flooring or bedding in conjunction with overhead heating must be used to keep chicks warm and dry. Plastic or rubber matting that enables free movement of urine away from direct contact with the chicks may be used and to discourage the baby chicks from eating bedding material that may be detrimental to their health.
109. Any suitable bedding that ensures the birds are warm and dry may be used throughout their lives.
110. The feed area should be kept free of bedding.
111. Chicks should be encouraged to have access to outdoor pens when the weather is suitable. Except when cleaning, chicks should have access to all areas of their pen 24 hours a day – the practice of shutting them out from their night quarters during the day is discouraged.
112. Buildings should be light with good ventilation and free from drafts.
113. Internal surfaces of housing and pens should be made of materials that can be cleansed and disinfected or easily replaced when necessary.
114. The design, construction and maintenance of all floors must minimise risk of discomfort, stress or injury to ostrich. Regular maintenance is essential.
115. Floors should be well drained and provided with dry bedding as appropriate to the age of the birds.
116. Water bowls and troughs should be constructed and sited so as to avoid fouling and to minimise the risk of water freezing in cold weather.
117. Water bowls and troughs should be checked at least once daily, and more frequently in extreme conditions, to ensure that they are kept thoroughly clean and in working order.

Transport

Casualty Animals

118. A sick or injured animal must not be transported unless it is being taken for veterinary treatment or it is being taken to the nearest available place for humane slaughter, and then only if the said animal is suitable for loading, travelling and unloading. This standard to be read in conjunction with the DEFRA document "Guidance on the Transport of Casualty Farm Animals."

Handling/loading/unloading

119. Animal handlers and transport drivers must:
 - understand the likely stress factors ostrich may be subject to

WOA Welfare Codes for Ostrich

- appreciate how ostrich react to other ostrich
- appreciate how ostrich react to man
- appreciate how ostrich react to strange noises, sights, sounds and smells
- understand the requirements of transporting a large animal with only 2 legs

120. Sticks must not be used for hitting ostrich
121. Electric goads must not be used
122. Sticks and benign handling aids may be used as extensions of the arms
123. Races and gates must be designed so that animals can move through them unhindered
124. When operating gates and catches, every effort must be made to reduce excessive noise which may cause distress to the animals.
125. If a problem is identified, noise reduction mechanisms must be fitted as necessary.
126. Ostrich must not be moved or loaded unless the way forward is clear for the lead animal and there is adequate space available for them to move forward
127. Loading facilities must minimise the incline or ramp.
128. Loading ramps and tail boards must be appropriately designed and covered with litter to prevent animals from falling off or slipping.
129. An ostrich transport vehicle must be suitable for the age and size of birds transported and have sufficient headroom for the age of bird transported
130. The vehicle must have adequate ventilation and non-slip floor and appropriate bedding
131. Ostrich must be handled gently at all time at loading. Hooding is permitted during loading
132. Ensure sufficient headroom at all times during loading and transportation.

Transport

133. The timing of transport for any purpose must be planned between haulier and producer(s) and slaughterhouse, if applicable, to minimise travelling time for the ostrich
134. Ostrich must be unloaded immediately at the slaughterhouse
135. Ostrich being moved to slaughter must not be transported for more than 8 hours (from loading of first animal to unloading of the last)
136. Ostrich transported for breeding purposes may require transport over longer distances. It is not advisable to offload ostrich during transit. Floor space must be

WOA Welfare Codes for Ostrich

sufficient to allow each bird to rest and sleep without being trampled. Adequate stationary time and provision of food and water should be made available in the transport vehicle.

137. Ostrich must have access to water up to the point of transport
138. Ostrich must have access to food up a minimum of 4 hours prior to loading
139. The floors of all vehicles must be covered with sufficient bedding in order to provide comfort and reduce the likelihood of injury
140. When transporting ostrich it is important to remember they are a large animal with only 2 legs. This requires a number of special considerations to ensure their safety during transport to minimise the risk of falling:
 - Care when driving around corners, on roundabouts and when breaking
 - Limiting the space with 5 – 10 birds per compartment
 - Ensuring any bird falling is lifted immediately to avoid risk of damage or death from other birds.
123. In hot weather a system to cool the birds should be provided to prevent heat stress. Birds can be sprayed with cool water when loading, if weather is exceptionally hot.