

Feeding whole grain wheat grains to broilers

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Intro to Good Practice

Feed for broiler chickens is typically delivered ready-made to the broiler farmers. However, in the Netherlands, Belgium and Germany, a large number of broiler farmers also mix whole wheat grains alongside more concentrated feed. The wheat is locally produced, marking a significant step towards sustainable agriculture. An additional benefit is the positive effect on gut health.



Figure 1. Pellets and whole grains mixed in the feeder

Background & challenges

In the Netherlands as well as in the EU, there is increasing emphasis on sustainability, with some practices being longstanding. Many broiler farmers in the Netherlands, as well as in Belgium and Germany, have their own arable farming operations or have neighbors who have this. Previously, the harvested wheat went to the feed mill, where it was processed and mixed into broiler feed. However, it was long ago realized that this process could be approached differently.

Nowadays, the harvested wheat is stored by the broiler farmer and, from around two weeks of age, gradually mixed into the core feed. This reduces the number of transport movements and lowers the CO₂ footprint. Additionally, feeding whole grains has a beneficial effect on feed digestion and gut health, potentially leading to a reduction in antibiotic usage.



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Costs

- Feed costs decrease significantly due to savings on transport, reduced trade, and less processing of raw materials.
- The investments are manageable, involving an additional silo and an expanded computer program for feed management in the barn.
- Additionally, there is a need for even more structural monitoring of the technology's operation and the health of the chickens.



Benefits

- Fewer transport movements
- Lower carbon footprint
- Improved gut health
- Reduced feed costs
- Localized manure disposal
- Potential reduction in antibiotic usage through improved gut health



Figure 2. Pellets and whole grains mixed

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