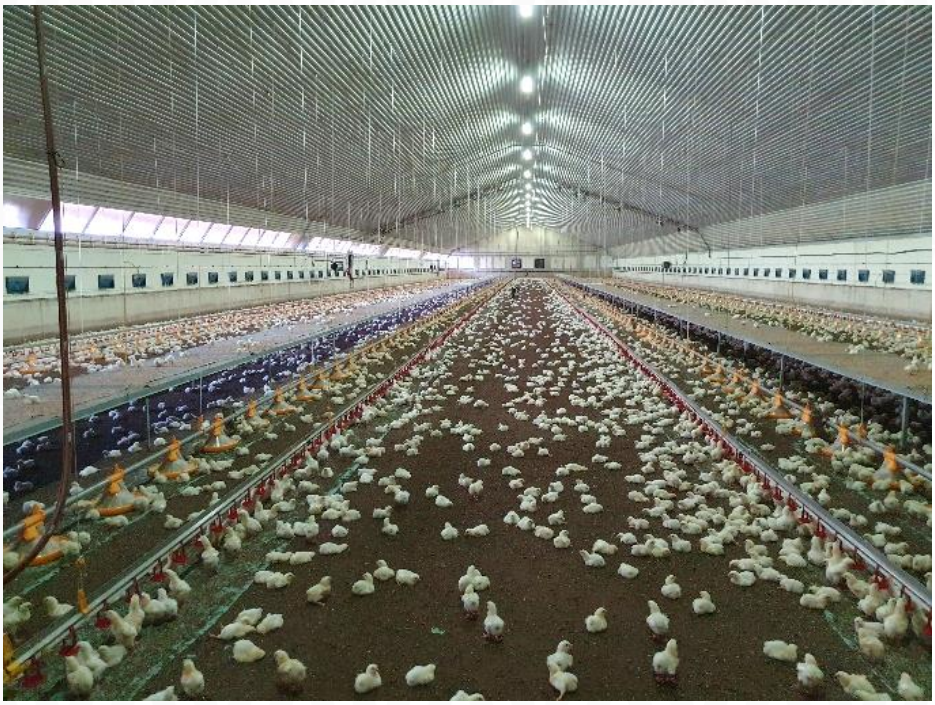
Elevated Platforms to Support the Walking Ability of Broilers



Country of GP owner: Germany
BroilerNet Challenge: Reducing lameness problems

Optimizing the animals' ability to move is essential to meet their basic needs. In recent years, for example, the occurrence of lameness has been reduced through genetic selection. However, problems with the ability to walk can still be found on farms. There are various approaches in practice that can be used to prevent these problems, e.g. elevated platforms. By using elevated levels, movement activity can be increased and the muscle-bone system gets trained and stabilized. Especially young chickens are active and therefore get more opportunities to discover their housing environment, which supports locomotion. A good balance of the muscle-bone system can have a positive effect on walking ability. Platforms can be offered by different materials (plastic or metal), surface texture (perforated or closed), and heights.
In Germany, non-perforated and littered elevated levels can also be counted as barn floor area up to 10% reduction of stocking density. Reducing stocking density leads to more space per animal, which increases freedom of movement in the litter area and supporting the exercise of comfort behavior, and improved foot pad health, as both the litter on the floor and the animals' feet get a chance to dry when the broilers are on the elevated platform.
Platforms can remain in the barn for approx. 5 years, after this period the structures need to be replaced. Additionally, platforms provide a darker area underneath the platform, which is also used as a resting area by the animals. Furthermore, compared to resting places in the litter area, the use of elevated resting places promotes natural behavior such as perching and allows for undisturbed resting. The provision of elevated platforms can thus improve animal health and welfare.

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