Split House Feeding to Aid in Stress Reduction at Thinning

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Intro to Thinning & Good Practice

Thinning in broiler production refers to a partial depopulation to a barn of birds. The number or percentage of birds removed will vary and depends on the requirements of the processor at the time. This partial depopulation allows the processor to fulfil markets for lighter and heavier birds, from the one barn.

When a barn is due to be thinned, the feed will be removed for food safety reasons. Generally, this will mean that 100% of the birds will have feed removed while they may not be leaving the barn.
This Good Practice avoids this additional stress on the birds, as this barn has the ability to feed 50% of the birds to the rear of the barn which will not be thinned. Alternatively, the removal of feed can be staggered to avoid over starving birds.



Background to the Good Practice

- This broiler barn has been set up to allow split feeding of the birds, i.e. there is five feed lines, divided in two. This allows the front of the barn to be turned off from feeding, while the back continues to receive feed. There is a metal dividing gate at the point of the split feeders, this means the birds are kept in the correct section on the barn. The barriers are put in place upon arrival of day-old chicks.
- This equipment set up has allowed the birds at the back to continue to receive feed for a longer period where the full site is being cleared.
- The equipment can be utilised in a full depopulation or for a partial depopulation. (See examples)
- To fully utilise the equipment for partial depopulation, communication with the processor is crucial to ensure 50% of the birds will be removed.



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Benefits

- While no accurate figures have been researched or recorded by the producer in relation to the GP; the producer does believe that the birds at the back of the barn with split feeding do not lose as much weight before processing, versus if they had feed removed at the same time as the front if the house was to be fully depopulated.
- This is similar for partial depopulation, while there is no research on the impact where birds at the back are continued to be fed, while the front birds are removed. The producer does believe that this removal of stress of feed removal, and no weight loss during starving, has huge financial and animal welfare benefits.



Example of Partial Depopulation

- This site contains two barns. Barn 1 contains 36,000 birds and is set up with standard feed lines. Barn 2 contains 58,000 and has the split feed lines.
- For the split feeding to be used to the best of its ability, it is important that only 50% of the birds to the front of the house will be removed. This will mean that the front of the house will have feed removed, while the birds which remain on site will not have feed removed.

Example of Full Site Depopulation:

- This site contains two barns. Barn 1 contains 36,000 birds and is set up with standard feed lines. Barn 2 contains 58,000 and has the split feed lines.
- The catching team can commence with the front section of barn 2. The back of barn 2 can still be fed for 2 – 3 hours.
- Once the birds in the front of barn 2 are caught, the catching team can move to Barn 1. The feed can then be removed from the back of barn 2.
- Once Barn 1 is complete, the catching team can return to Barn 2 to finish the depopulation of the site.

Additional Information:

- There is extra set-up costs for this system as there is additional feed hoppers and motors required. It will also require a split feed bin to allow for individual augers.
- The water lines are also split to allow water to be given to the back, while removed from the front. This is important whether the house be partially depopulated or fully depopulated.
- There is risk associated with this set-up if the timing is mis-managed. That is, if feed is not removed in time before the second half of the barn is cleared; birds may still have feed in the crop.
- This system was installed to allow for fast feed access to all birds due to the larger size of the house. However, the split feeder lines has shown other proven positive outcomes with reduced stress and weight loss.

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