



2024

# Animal Welfare Report

# Poultry



# Animal Welfare Report

# Poultry

## 2024

### CONTENTS PAGE

Welcome	4
2023 welfare outcome metrics	6
Welfare research	18
Future outlook	20





# WELCOME



**Fábio Brancher**

Agriculture Director  
Pilgrim's Europe

**The latest edition of our Animal Welfare Report for poultry is the first to be published under our new Pilgrim's Europe structure which brings together our Moy Park, Pilgrim's UK and Pilgrim's Food Masters businesses.**

Together Pilgrim's Europe represents the UK's largest provider of higher welfare pork, the number one UK and leading European organic and free-range poultry producer and the UK's top prepared foods business.

This is an incredibly exciting time for our team as we continue to share knowledge, insight and efficiencies, offering unrivalled capabilities, products, service and innovation to our partners and customers.

Our business is deeply rooted in our agricultural heritage and farming

practices that can be traced back over 80 years. From the beginning, caring for the livestock that we produce has been at the heart of all that we do. As a result of our passion for our birds and our farming heritage, we continue to develop our poultry welfare strategy, ensuring the health and welfare of the birds in our care.

This fourth edition of our poultry Animal Welfare Report continues to track, measure and report our welfare outcome metrics, bringing clarity and transparency to our supply chain.

Our approach to animal welfare is grounded in measurement and continually improving, relying upon strong governance.

Strategic direction is driven through our long-established Antibiotic Stewardship Forum and our Animal Welfare Forum, while training and knowledge sharing is delivered through our Agriculture



Academy. Our Welfare and AI Hub continue to cement welfare as a condition throughout our business. This year's report demonstrates a range of improvements across key welfare outcome measures, while also highlighting areas for improvement. Through deep-rooted, long-established relationships with our customers, as a collective we have brought a monumental step change to the market. More of our birds than ever are grown at lower stocking densities, providing each bird more space to play and thrive. We are particularly proud of our move, along with key customers, to increase the proportion of our chicken production grown to 30kg/ m<sup>2</sup>. This is a clear demonstration of our commitment to 'higher-welfare' chicken.

Our team and farming partners are dedicated to producing locally grown food, farmed in a sustainable manner, while caring for our birds. As

an organisation our goal is to provide chicken, farmed with care for our retailers and consumers, ensuring that our practices of today are the foundations for a sustainable future. We are therefore committed to safe and sustainable farming practices.

At Pilgrim's Europe, we want to harness our scale and influence to help the food industry be a part of the climate solution, seeking even more sustainable ways to continue meeting our societies nutritional needs. We recognise the challenges posed by climate change and are determined to address them boldly, with a strong emphasis on welfare. We have found time and time again in all challenges that we have faced that collaboration is key to our success. It is obvious to us that we are stronger together and we are deeply grateful to our team members, farming suppliers, industry bodies, and academic partners for joining us on this journey.

# 2023 WELFARE OUTCOME METRICS



## 2023 welfare outcome metrics

In 2023 we continued to provide all our birds with the enrichment to support and encourage fundamental natural behaviours.

Enrichment allows all our birds to express normal behaviours - one of the 5 freedoms of animal welfare - and encourages positive behaviours such as playing, foraging and perching.

Natural light is key for birds, providing our birds with access to the full light spectrum and a natural variation of light across the floor of the house.

Perches support our birds' inherent desire to perch, and straw bales and pecking objects encourage foraging and food-running behaviours. We never have and never will grow any of our birds in cages. Because of the clear benefits of enrichment for improving the welfare of chickens, we continue to provide enrichment to 100% of our birds.

Year	Access to natural light	Access to perches	Access to pecking objects	Barn reared / cage free
2020	100%	100%	100%	100%
2021	100%	100%	100%	100%
2022	100%	100%	100%	100%
2023	100%	100%	100%	100%

## Responsible use of antibiotics

Pilgrim’s Europe continues to work tirelessly across the supply chain to ensure that we lead the industry in a best-in-class approach to the use of antibiotics across poultry farming. At its core, our principle is to only use antibiotics to safeguard animal welfare, never administering antibiotics as a routine preventative medication. We continue to invest in our hygiene and husbandry practices to produce healthy, robust birds.

Over the last 10 years, we are proud to have led the way in this area, massively reducing our antibiotic use, moving to a place where we have achieved less than 4mg/kg since 2016.

In 2023 we saw a slight rise compared to 2022 in our usage, moving to 3.6mg/kg and an increase in the number of flocks treated. Although 2023 represents a rise in usage, 3.6mg/kg remains an industry leading low position while we continue to focus on the highest standards of husbandry and management to grow healthy birds. As we move forward, we will continue to be led by our Antibiotic Stewardship Forum, a multi-stakeholder steering group, made up of vets, industry experts and academics to drive continuous improvement and direct investment.

Year	Mg/kg
2014	17.2
2015	10.5
2016	3.6
2017	3.4
2018	2.4
2019	3.3
2020	2.8
2021	2.5
2022	2.4
2023	3.6



Pilgrim’s Europe poultry farmers do not use any antibiotic classes identified by the World Health Organisation (WHO (Sixth Revision 2018)) as the ‘Highest priority critically important antimicrobials’.

These classes include:

- Quinolones
- Cephalosporins (3th, 4th and 5th generation)
- Macrolides and ketolides
- Glycopeptides
- Polymyxins (Colistin)

Year	% Flocks not treated	% Flocks treated pre day 7	% Flocks treated post day 7
2020	89.8	6.9	3.3
2021	93.7	2.1	4.2
2022	92.5	3.7	3.8
2023	85.7	8.7	5.7



## Stocking density

Ensuring adequate space is a core principle of our operations. We maintain a maximum planned stocking density of 38kg/m<sup>2</sup>, which is well below the EU's limit of 42kg/m<sup>2</sup>. This essential standard is frequently audited by Red Tractor and our customers to guarantee strict adherence.

In 2023 we saw a significant shift in the stocking densities that we grow our birds to, with 47% of all our production

now achieving 30kg/m<sup>2</sup> or less and we have seen a 19% reduction in the number of chickens we grow to 34kg/m<sup>2</sup> and above.

The shift underlines our drive to produce 'higher welfare' chicken, and, in collaboration with our customers, brings an enhanced level of animal welfare to, most importantly our birds, as well as shoppers and consumers.

Year	% of flocks		
	30kg or less	30-34kg	34 and above
2021	28%	14%	58%
2022	30%	19%	51%
2023	47%	21%	32%





## Hock Mark and Pododermatitis indicators

Hock Mark and Pododermatitis are iceberg indicators of welfare, meaning they provide insight into a broad number of factors affecting bird health and welfare.

Both conditions can describe litter condition throughout the rearing period, which in itself describes gut health, drinker management and the environmental conditions throughout the life of the bird.

Over the last number of years we have seen a sharp decrease in the occurrence of both indicators. In 2023, however, we have seen our Pododermatitis move to 29% compared to 24% in 2022 and our Hockmark move from 9% to 12%.

These percentage shifts are representative of increased challenges in 2023 in maintaining high quality litter, which include weather - the unusually wet year, and the gut health of our birds. To tackle these challenges, we have undertaken extensive bedding and diet related trials to assess if there was a macro solution to the problem. At farm level, we applied a strong focus on ventilation set-up and management, including providing additional training alongside diagnosing specific issues on farms. These learnings stand us in good stead as we continue to drive down these metrics in the coming years.

Year	Pododermatitis %	Hockmark %
2019	43	14
2020	36	11
2021	26	9
2022	24	9
2023	29	12

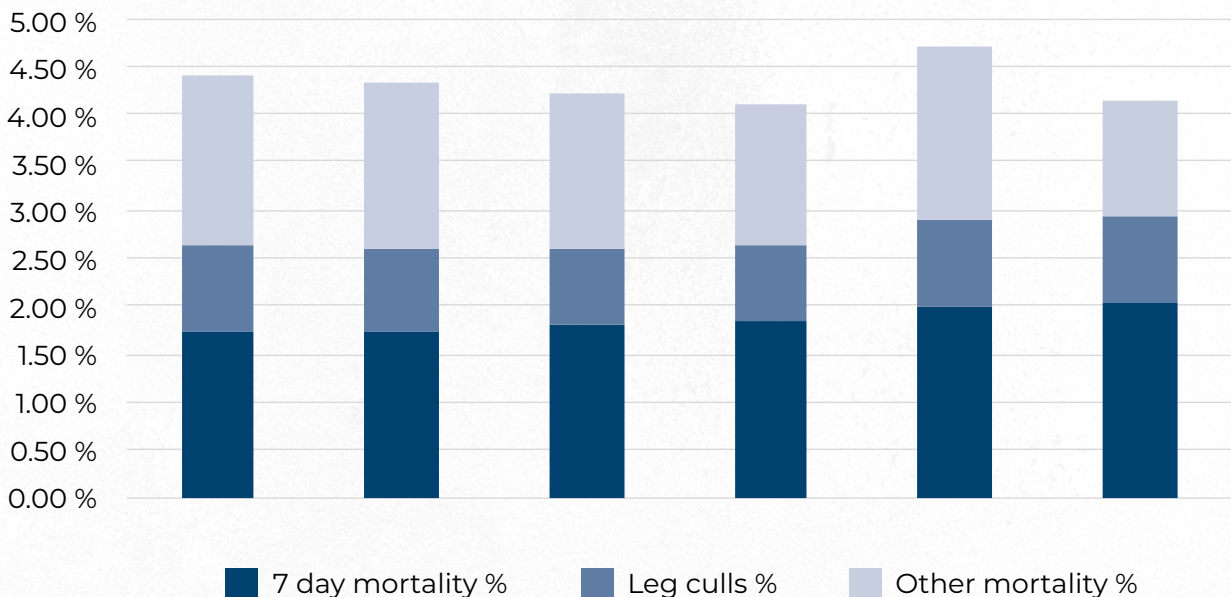
# Mortality

Mortality refers to animals that have died during the growing cycle or that have been humanely culled for reasons such as injury or disease. Mortality records, including cause, are updated daily on all farms by the stock keeper. Three key mortality figures are tracked as '7-day mortality', 'leg culls' and overall 'total mortality'.

Mortality data is recorded and used as an indicator of many aspects of flock health, and indeed of the hygiene and husbandry further up the supply chain. 7-day mortality for example provides an indication of parent flock status, incubation and brooding. Leg culls are reflective of leg health and walking ability and there is a strict Pilgrim's Europe policy, in line with industry best practice, for stock keepers to humanely remove birds with gait issues (Bristol Gait Score 3 or above) to ensure good welfare is maintained. The overall mortality metric is the culmination of all the factors affecting mortality

throughout the flock, indicating health status.

In 2023 there was an overall reduction in mortality from 2022, dropping to 4%, which represents a 12% reduction from 2022 to 2023. Our improvement in 2023 is born out of our dedication towards continuous improvement. Running comprehensive vaccination trials in 2023 has helped our teams better tailor our health programme, better protecting our birds from common diseases. Additionally, a strong focus on hygiene and brooding in the early phases of the crop has set our chicks up to be healthier, more robust birds later in life. Education and training are essential components of our strategy, empowering our team members with the knowledge and tools to address health challenges effectively. All Pilgrim's Europe team members working on farms and all our farming partners have been appropriately trained on methods of humane culling.



## Transport times

Pilgrim's Europe prioritises minimising long-distance transportation of our birds, with most of our farms conveniently located within a 30-mile radius of our fresh primary sites.

In 2023, our efforts resulted in an average journey time of just 2 hours and 3 minutes, maintaining the same journey time from 2022.

Additionally, we have maintained that more than 45% of our chickens are caught and delivered to factory within 2 hours, a standard we consider best-in-class and a goal we strive for wherever the farm geography allows. Over 98% of our birds, spanning both our own brand and customer brand categories across all geographical locations, are delivered within 4 hours of catch.



We adhere to all legislative requirements and industry standards governing the transportation of our live birds, ensuring their welfare throughout the journey.

Average transport time
2:03

Year	% of chickens		
	Less than 2hr	Between 2hr - 4hr	Greater than 4hr
2021	47.00	52.50	0.50
2022	47.39	51.49	1.12
2023	45.37	52.71	1.93







## Production systems

In this section we highlight the proportion of our birds grown to each industry standard. As a reminder, Pilgrim's Europe has never and will never rear broiler chickens in cages.

Our dedication to delivering improved poultry welfare continues through close collaboration with our customers to ensure we align with their specific requirements and sourcing standards.

In 2023, we significantly increased the number of birds we grow under the higher welfare umbrella, increasing by 40% to over half of our production.

As we look forward, 2024 will mark a momentous year for Pilgrim's Europe as we step into rearing indoor slower growing chickens to meet the Better Chicken Commitment standards. This significant step which underlines our commitment to improving poultry welfare. Pilgrim's Europe has become the largest producer of Better Chicken Commitment Chicken in the UK, a move we are delighted and proud to play a role in.

Year	% of birds grown to better chicken commitment (bcc), free range or organic standards	% of birds grown to indoor higher welfare standards	% of birds grown to red tractor indoor standards
2021	3%	13%	84%
2022	3%	14%	83%
2023	3%	14%	83%
2024	3%	54%	43%

# WELFARE RESEARCH



## Welfare research

---

At Pilgrim's Europe, we have a proud history of improving animal welfare through science and our collaborations with academia. Over the years we have developed and implemented natural lighting, play bales and platform perches. All of these innovations have raised the bar for the whole industry and are included in Red Tractor Assurance Standards.

Although we have a proud history, we are not done yet as we continue to collaborate and invest in welfare research. In 2023 we collaborated with academic partners to publish a peer reviewed paper, detailed below, investigating the movement patterns of broilers. The study aimed to understand the movement patterns of broiler chickens in a commercial setting to gain insights into their behaviour and welfare. By tracking individual chickens, we sought to explore if movement patterns indicated welfare, understand bird behaviour at a greater granularity, assessing the range of individual behaviours.

Furthermore, we continue to invest in our Doctoral Programme, whereby students are selected from both inside and outside of Pilgrim's Europe to carry out research. Currently, we are supporting one of our team members to investigate new management strategies for broiler chicks to improve health, welfare and performance. Currently their studies have investigated different hatching systems, including in-house hatching and providing access to feed and water for the broiler chick in the hatchery and assessing the impact on bird welfare. Looking forward, this study will be peer reviewed and published, providing the evidence to shape both our own and the wider industry's thinking on the best hatching system to support welfare.

Pilgrim's Europe continued support for and engagement with forward thinking farm animal welfare research demonstrates our commitment to relentlessly pursuing better ways to produce our chicken, pushing the industry forward.

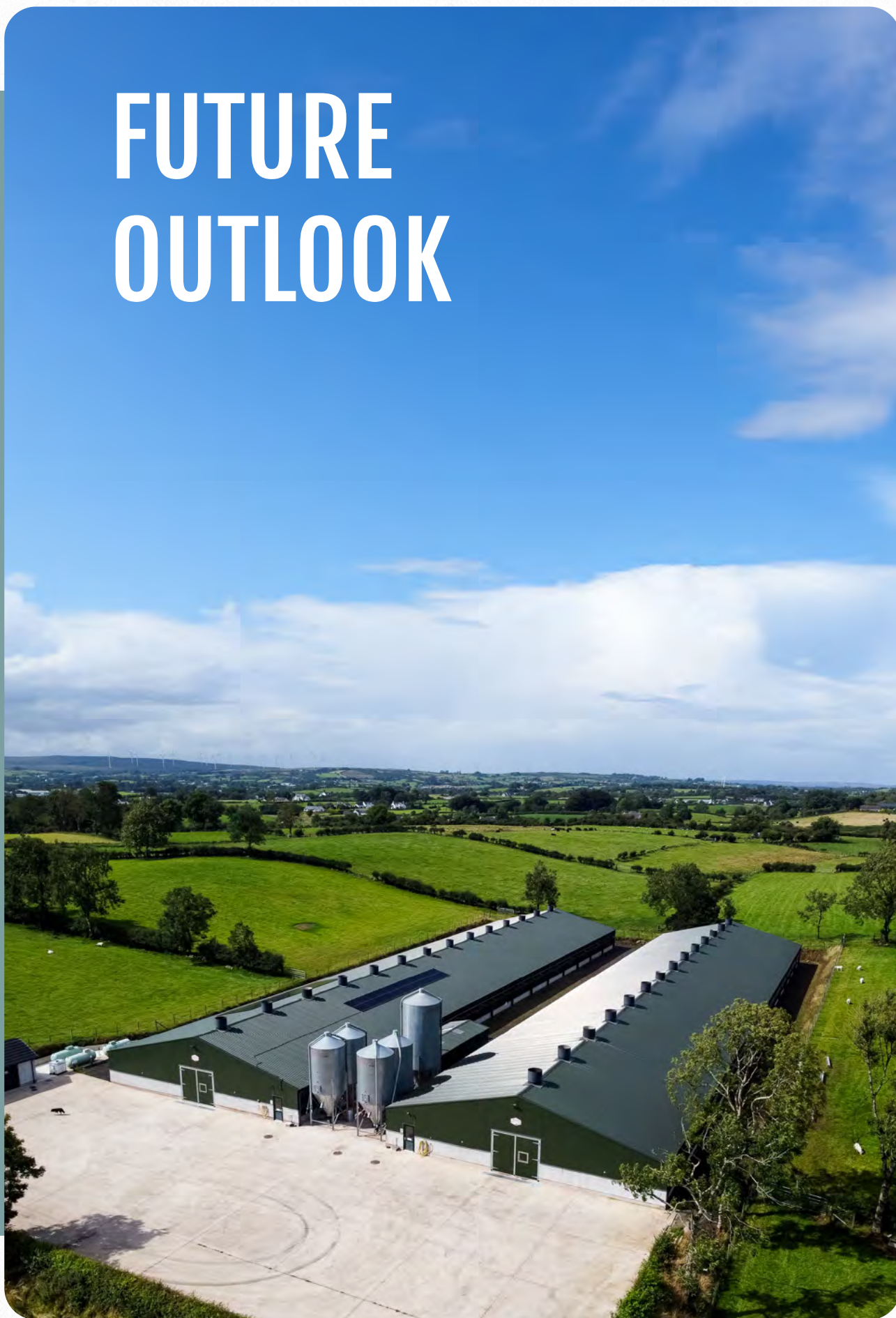
### Peer reviewed article

Baxter, M., O'Connell, N.E. Large variation in the movement of individual broiler chickens tracked in a commercial house using ultra-wideband backpacks. *Sci Rep* 13, 7634 (2023).

<https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-023-34149-0>

Large variation in the movement of individual broiler chickens tracked in a commercial house using ultra-wideband backpacks | *Scientific Reports* (nature.com)

# FUTURE OUTLOOK



## Future outlook

---

Reflecting on the past year and the valuable insights shared in this report, it is evident that our commitment to animal welfare remains at the core of all that we do within Pilgrim's Europe. Our journey towards enhancing transparency, sustainability, and innovation is an ongoing pursuit of excellence, however our dedication to these principles is profound.

We are proud to report significant improvements in several key performance indicators (KPIs), highlighting our tireless efforts to elevate the welfare of our birds. Though our principles of continuous improvements we have achieved significant progress in reducing our mortality levels. By working closely with our customers, in 2023 we have been able to deliver a seismic shift in how we produce the majority of our birds, growing them to a lower stocking density, giving each bird more space.

By aligning our commitments to both innovation and animal welfare we have invested significantly in industry leading research programmes and in the individuals who will continue to deliver advancement to the industry for years to come.

Looking ahead, we are excited by the prospect of producing Better Chicken Commitment birds within our supply chain, in partnership with our key customers. While we have had significant experience with these birds through the breed development phase, we are excited to experience them in a commercial setting and the improvement in welfare outcomes they will bring.

Our future remains focused on creating better, more sustainable food for all while upholding the highest standards of care for our birds animal. Together, we can set a new standard for excellence in animal welfare.



Animal Welfare Report  
**Poultry**  
2024



[PilgrimsEurope.com](https://PilgrimsEurope.com)

