Poultry Signals:
Interactive Poultry Farming based on Focus on Chickens

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Focus on chickens

Poultry keeping is all about your chickens, job satisfaction and a decent profit.

Comfortable housing and looking after them properly is what you want and what they need

Bird focussed poultry farming is about to house and care for chickens in the best possible way

Understanding chickens better is a key to improve results, both in money as in satisfaction
Important questions

Am I getting the best out of everything?

How do I know when the chickens disagree?
Take a step back/have a break

Many people are so involved in their farm that they no longer notice irregularities because they are so used to seeing them.

Open your mind to new things

Be critical and don’t be afraid to change
Train to look and see

Look with awareness.

Take a step back

Think about the signals your birds are showing

It takes skill to notice signals before the consequences reveal themselves
Seeing more

Seeing more by looking more closely

If you look only at technical information
(laying percentage, growth or feed and water consumption)

You run the risk of missing important signals and being overtaken by events

Do pick up the signals from the chickens themselves
Looking more closely

Start observing the whole flock
How are they spread out in the floor space?
Are they avoiding certain places?
Try to spot differences between birds
Are they uniform?

Put a chair in the house and sit on it for a few minutes to observe birds
Take your time
Invite others to limit farm blindness
Share your opinion
Open your mind for new things

Pick up the signals

and

Act accordingly
Using the signals

1. What am I seeing, hearing, smelling or feeling? What is the signal?

2. Why is this happening? What is the explanation?

3. What should I do? Can I leave it or should I take action?
UNO (‘you know’)  

Sometimes you encounter things you don’t immediately understand

UNO = Unclassified Notable Observations

I will give an example
What do you observe?
Yes it is true:

A catllebeast consuming a rabbit
What does it mean?
What did you observe?

Again:

Two vegetarian animals grazing at the heathland consuming rabbit corpses
What does it mean?

Two vegetarian animals grazing at the heathland consumed rabbit corpses as a response to phosphorus deficiency

Source: PhD study from Wallis de Vries, NL
Listen to your chickens
Not only this way
“Chicken language”

Understanding “chicken language“ is a key factor in improving poultry management

Chickens can’t talk so how do you communicate?
Learning chicken language

Step 1: Learn how to observe your chickens
(what do I notice?)

Step 2: Learn to understand your observation
(What does it mean?)

Step 3: Learn to translate your observation
(what should I do?)
Signals from the flock
What does it mean?
What will be the problem?

• After one week?
  Wet litter

• After two weeks?
  Foot pad lesions

• Could it be prevented?
  Yes
  How?
What do you do?
What will be the problem?
Spreading after placing
Spreading out well within 24 hrs
But if not?

• Suppose your chickens prefer laying towards the wall?

• Why they do so?
Look - Think - Act
Looking and measuring
Sampling, but how?
Not well dressed
Something missing
What would you do?
Lack of Salt
Walking males
It isn’t just learning chicken talk

Keep in mind that everything in life is mutual and interactive.

So it is also teaching.

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Or should I say: training?

I prefer to use the concept of “Interactive Management”
Signals from the droppings
Shit or info?
What kind of manure is this?
Good or bad?
What does it mean?
Good or Bad?
What are you looking at?
Grade A!
Signal from the dropping pit

Chickens don’t like draft or cold places.

Have a look at the distribution of the manure in the dropping pit.

The distribution shows whether the birds are avoiding certain places.

An uneven distribution is a signal that something is wrong with the ventilation/air inlets.
Check the floor
Use your hands
Conclusion?
Signal from the bird
Which chicken do you prefer?
What do you think?
What does it mean?
What is the signal?
Not a happy one
Your opinion about this hen?
Frame of reference
What about this one?
Inspect individual hens
Feel and think
Molting phase

Check the molting phase during rearing

Why?????
Molting fase is an important signal
What do you note?
Ready for egg production?
Signal from the egg

The egg, including shell damage provides of a lot of information about

- the rearing period
- the hen’s genetic make-up
- light program
- disease
- quality of the nests
- egg collection system and its use
- etcetera
Identify and classify
Two different signals
Signal of ???
Again two different signals
Why laid on the floor ??
Signal from the egg

Membraneous eggs laid about 4 hours after oviposition and due to that always lost in the dropping pit

Extra calcified egg are laid about 28 hours after oviposition and due to that laid on the floor/slats

In picking floor eggs check whether it is a normal smooth shell egg or a rough extra calcified egg

Be aware
Normal floor egg can be hatched, but are a risk of contamination
Extra calcified eggs will never hatch
At the end: Take home message

“Listen” to your chickens

- Learn to observe
- Learn to understand
- Learn to translate your observation
At the end: Take home message

Last but not least:

Enjoy working with chickens
Or didn’t you?