

# Organic Knowledge Update

Poultry and eggs

February 2011

## Organic poultry and egg production in the Netherlands

There are over 1 million organic laying hens in the Netherlands. Organic eggs are in high demand on the domestic market. Dutch organic poultry meat has a small but growing market share. To facilitate organic poultry farmers, Wageningen UR and Louis Bolk Institute carry out a variety of research aimed specifically at organic poultry meat and egg production. Hot topics are the protein content of poultry feed, organic rearing and animal health.



### Dutch organic poultry and egg sector

No exact numbers of organic farms, hens and egg production in the Netherlands are available. Estimations from early 2009 indicate there are more than one million laying hens on about 164 organic egg farms and 16 organic poultry meat farms in the Netherlands.

The market share of organic eggs was up from 6.6% to 7.6% in 2009. The total gross sales of organic eggs rose 20% compared to 2008. About 78% of all organic eggs sold domestically went through supermarkets. A continuing rise in the use of organic eggs in catering services (now 7,0%) was also noted. Demand for organic eggs is high, production can hardly keep up with both the domestic and German markets.

## → Aspirations

By 2013 the Dutch organic poultry sector aims to be at the forefront of sustainable agricultural production. All organic poultry will have outdoor access, be healthy and have a full coat of feathers. Sales of organic eggs have doubled compared to 2009, at least 50% of all former laying hens will be sold as organic poultry meat and the organic poultry meat sector has doubled its production. Organic poultry farms will be economically sustainable and use feed and rations that have been produced regionally. The quality and usability of chicken manure has improved and dust problems have been reduced.



The sale of organic poultry meat rose by 5.1% in 2009. This was a sharp drop in growth, as 2008 saw a spectacular rise in growth (34%). Supermarkets have taken organic (poultry) meat into their standard assortments and distribution has professionalised at record speed. Despite these developments, the total Dutch market share for organic meats was still only 2.4% in 2009. Organic poultry meat is relatively difficult to sell because of the large price difference with traditionally produced poultry meat.

## Current affairs

One of the most interesting developments in current research is optimal feeding strategies for both organic laying hens and broilers, especially the young animals. Quality protein ingredients are rare, especially on the regional market. These ingredients are very important, especially for growing animals.

Another hot topic are national regulations for the rearing of organic laying hens. Dutch organic laying hen farmers are obliged to buy organically reared young hens. The demand for these young hens



is large, which results in waiting times for new flocks. The Dutch sector would like to see regulation for organic rearing implemented on a European level.

Health issues will continue to remain important. It is proving difficult to produce a

robust young hen in the current situation. This is mainly due to the many vaccinations that are necessary in a country full of poultry, such as the Netherlands. Additional difficulties arise from the obligation to use 95% organic ingredients in feed.



## Research projects

- **Energy and protein requirements for organic laying hens** Quantifying the optimal energy to protein ratio in diets of organic laying hens is important as organic housing is different from conventional housing. These different circumstances lead to different feed requirements.  
*Contact: Marinus van Krimpen MSc, Marinus.vanKrimpen@wur.nl*
- **Low Input breeds, protein and moulting (EU project)** Study on the interaction between breed, feeding regimes, moulting and prolonged use of hens on welfare, health, performance and egg quality in organic and low-input laying hen systems.  
*Contact: Dr Ferry Leenstra, Ferry.Leenstra@wur.nl*
- **Organic feed for rearing hens and broilers** Because of a difference in cultivation methods and plant breeds, organic feed differs greatly from conventional feed. This study looks at the chemical compounds, digestibility and nutritional value of organic feeds for rearing hens and broilers.  
*Contact: Dr Teun Veldkamp, Teun.Veldkamp@wur.nl*
- **Reducing the mortality rate of organic laying hens** This project aims to improve the knowledge levels of organic poultry farmers regarding identification, prevention and treatment options for a number of poultry diseases.  
*Contact: Thea van Niekerk MSc, Thea.vanNiekerk@wur.nl*
- **Improving growth of rearing hens** This study will result in an overview of practical measures to stimulate growth in organic rearing hens. Practical usability and costs will be taken into account.  
*Contact: Jan-Paul Wagenaar MSc, j.wagenaar@louisbolk.nl*
- **Prevention of predation by raptors** Hens in outdoor runs containing trees seem to run a higher risk of getting killed by birds of prey. Measures to prevent predation are investigated.  
*Contact: Monique Bestman MSc, m.bestman@louisbolk.nl*
- **Natural health** Organic poultry farmers need information on natural products that improve and maintain animal health. This project provides guidelines for the use of natural products at the farm level.  
*Contact: Maria Groot, Maria.Groot@wur.nl*



Offering packaged roughage results in natural behaviour such as searching and pecking for food



## Literature

- Rodenburg, T.B., J. van Harn, M.M. van Krimpen, M.A.W. Ruis, I. Vermeij and H.A.M. Spolder. (2008). 'Comparison of three different diets for organic broilers: effects on performance and body condition', *British Poultry Science*, 49: 1, 74-80.
- Bestman, M., P. Koene and J. Wagenaar. (2009). Influence of farm level factors in organic reared hens and their predictability for feather pecking in the laying period. *Applied Animal Behaviour Science* 121: 120-125.
- A.T.M. van Knegsel and M.M. van Krimpen. (2008). Energy and protein requirements of organic housed poultry. English summary in Dutch report. Animal Sciences Group, Wageningen UR.



Bioconnect aims to further develop and strengthen the Dutch organic sector by initiating and implementing research projects. Within Bioconnect organic entrepreneurs (from farmers to shop-keepers) work together with research institutes, colleges and universities and consultancy organisations. This leads to demand-driven research that is unique to the Netherlands.

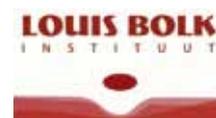


The Ministry of Economic Affairs, Agriculture and Innovation sponsors these research projects.



Ministry of Economic Affairs,  
Agriculture and Innovation

Wageningen UR (University & Research centre) and the Louis Bolk Institute together carry out these research projects. About 140 projects dedicated to organic agriculture are currently under way.



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