

Burn or collection – what's best bet?

Deadstock disposal has become a hot topic after it became illegal to bury or burn fallen stock in the open. But which is the best option? *Olivia Cooper* investigates

The two practical solutions to deadstock disposal are incineration or rendering, but both have pros and cons. Producers either face the cost of installing an incinerator on-farm or increase biosecurity risks by signing up to the National Fallen Stock Scheme (NFSCo), which collects and disposes of animals. Here's an overview of both options:

The National Fallen Stock Scheme
This not-for-profit, farmer-owned organisation enables producers to send livestock, which has either died of natural causes or been put down by a vet due to illness, to a renderer in the area. It collects 65-70% of all the nation's poultry mortalities.

Farmers register one or more



Deaths are an inevitable part of poultry farming.

collection points for fallen stock and are sent a list of collectors in their area who they then deal with directly. Stock should be removed within 48 hours of notification.

Annual rates are £28 + VAT and £20 for each extra pick-up point and individual pick-up costs agreed with the collector. The rates are 35% subsidised by the government, although this is to end by 2008.

Collection costs vary depending on the location and size of the enterprise. The greater the number of hens, the better value the scheme becomes. "Most of my friends who have small free-range flocks have

their own small incinerators," says NFSCo chairman Michael Seals. "But the scheme is a low-cost alternative for larger producers."

Average annual collection bills for a 75,000 broiler flock in north-east England would be £1070 + VAT.

Spent hens are not eligible for the subsidised scheme, although it may be possible to arrange collection at the unsubsidised rate. This is typically about £2.30/10kg depending on the location.

Incinerators

An on-farm incinerator allows the quick disposal of fallen stock and

Deadstock schemes

■ National Fallen Stock Scheme

Pros
No capital outlay
Pay for what you use
Straightforward billing

Cons
Need to store deadstock on farm
Visiting lorries threaten biosecurity
Less efficient for small producers

■ On-farm Incineration

Pros
Self-sufficient
No need to store deadstock
No biosecurity threat

Cons
Large capital outlay
Uncertain running costs
Need to prepare site in advance

reduces the biosecurity risks from visiting collection vehicles.

Prices from one supplier, Waste Spectrum Environmental, start from £3000 for a 50-70kg incinerator (50,000 birds) and £5000 for a 100-150kg machine (100,000 birds). Much larger incinerators tend not to be cost-effective.

Incinerators must be approved by the State Veterinary Service and a list of approved models is available from DEFRA. Farmers must also register an exemption from Waste Management Licensing requirements with the Environment Agency. And incinerators which burn more than 50kg/hour require permission from the local authority's Environmental Health Department.

The site must have a concrete hard-standing with a fuel source (diesel, gas or kerosene) and possibly an electricity supply. Running costs on gas can be as little as 2.8p/kg, although larger models will be more costly. Annual servicing costs typically range from £140 to £450.

MORE INFORMATION

- DEFRA www.defra.gov.uk or 08459 335577
- Environment Agency www.environment-agency.gov.uk or 08708 506506
- National Fallen Stock Scheme www.nfsc.co.uk or 08450 548888
- Waste Spectrum Environmental www.wastespectrum.com or 01905 362113

CASE STUDY: JASON THOMPSON

■ Jason Thompson keeps 18,000 free-range laying hens at Silverthorne Farm, Millborne Wick, Dorset, and has invested £3000 in a small incinerator.

"I was spending £25-£40 a week with the NFSCo scheme, and I really wasn't happy about having dead birds on the farm and lorries carrying deadstock coming on to the unit," he says. "I wanted to be self-sufficient and not reliant on anyone else."

The incinerator is easy to use and cheap to run, he claims. "We

have spent less than £200 on gas since March."

Between 30 and 40 birds are incinerated each week, which takes about two hours. The afterburner ensures that there is no smoke or smell and the remaining ash is spread on to the land.

But new buyers should ensure their incinerator does not have many consumable parts, says Mr Thompson. "We had an old incinerator on the farm before and the parts were burnt out and worn."



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