



# SKOV International

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## Litter Quality

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Litter management and inspection of the litter quality in poultry houses with deep litter is an issue of great importance. The birds live their entire life on the litter and it is very important to ensure an optimal environment in order to obtain the best production results.

A moist litter is synonymous with a house environment increasing the risk of infections among the birds resulting in decreasing productivity. Moist litter increases the risk of breast and hog burns plus burned feet and is thus of great importance to the animal welfare of the flock.

The litter should always be dry and loose. Many factors, both biological and technical ones, affect the litter and one should focus on all elements in order to assure the quality. The litter is affected by the climate in the livestock house, the behaviour of the birds and especially the daily attendance carried out by the manager. It is a great challenge to ensure optimum litter quality in a poultry house. In this and the next article of SKOV International, Poultry, some guidelines are put forward. They will contribute to ensuring the litter quality in the livestock house.

### Temperature

A good litter is established during the interval between two batches, before stocking of birds. The fact is that it is very important to heat the floor sufficiently before the floor is littered as condensation may otherwise be formed under the litter when the housing temperature rises. The livestock house should be heated to 25°C before the bedding material is spread on the floor.

During the first hours after stocking, the day-old chickens often stay where they were unloaded, but when they start distributing in the house, it is important that they are always evenly distributed and remain evenly distributed throughout the batch. This will contribute to ensuring a good litter quality as the birds emit heat to the litter. Freezing birds will huddle together in small groups whereas birds sensing a convenient temperature will distribute throughout the entire livestock house. An optimum temperature prompts a more active and feed seeking behaviour.

Apart from ensuring the birds the temperature required for obtaining the best productivity, the heat supply to the livestock house is essential for an optimum ventilation. If the heat supply is insufficient, it is not possible to remove excess humidity through ventilation. If focusing on the litter quality, too high air humidity inside the livestock house is undesirable.



Table showing the recommendations of SKOV as regards air humidity

Day no.	1	8	14	21	28	42
Air humidity, %	50	50	60	65	70	85

### Water

Air humidity in the livestock house is derived from emission from the birds - from droppings - and from the water system. Therefore, always focus on not having any water waste anywhere in the livestock house. In case of leaking water system, the leakage should be plugged immediately. The water intake of the birds should be observed and compared to the feed intake. There should be a balance between feed and water intake. Otherwise, wet droppings will have a negative influence on the litter quality. At the same time, the air humidity will be high again and has to be removed from the livestock house through ventilation. Besides, wet droppings can be an indication of bad feed quality or the birds being at the start of an outbreak of a disease which makes monitoring of the water uptake an important focus point for the manager.

To be continued in the next issue of SKOV International, Poultry