‘The Pecking Order 2020’ report will no doubt make for unwelcome reading for many of the companies concerned.
THE BIG PICTURE

Checking out the fast food welfare pecking order

Josh Loeb discusses a ratings system that looks at the welfare of chickens reared for global restaurant chains

SINCE World Animal Protection last compiled its yearly ranking of global restaurant chains’ chicken welfare measures, more than 60 billion of the birds have been farmed for their meat worldwide. Such is the enormity of the planet’s appetite for chicken.

‘The Pecking Order 2020’ report will no doubt make for unwelcome reading for many of the companies concerned. Most were rated either ‘poor’ or ‘very poor’ by the campaigning charity, which takes into account a range of criteria when drawing up its league table using a complex points-based scoring method.

Criteria include stocking densities, whether ‘meaningful enrichment’ is provided, birds’ growth rates and how transparent individual companies are about their welfare policies.

Of nine companies assessed, KFC came top this year with a ‘making progress’ rating. The company scored 44 out of a maximum of 90 points available. Its ranking is still two tiers below the top category of ‘leading’ – but nonetheless, World Animal Protection said that KFC’s performance was noteworthy because it had improved more than its eight competitors, having advanced up the table since last year.

Elsewhere, the picture was less encouraging. Starbucks and Subway, which came joint second, showed no improvement on their 2019 scores. Nando’s and McDonald’s were both ranked ‘poor,’ with the latter even dropping points for 2020, while Burger King showed the ‘sharpest decline’. It was bracketed in the ‘very poor’ category – the lowest available – alongside Pizza Hut, Domino’s Pizza plc and Domino’s Pizza inc. All the companies analysed were approached by Vet Record for comment, but only four responded.

Domino’s said it was committed to ensuring high welfare standards, including rearing chickens with natural daylight and enrichment, and pointed out that the company had no battery cages in its supply chain. McDonald’s said it had made ‘significant investments’ in animal welfare globally, had formed a global advisory council on chicken sustainability and had launched a $4 million fund with one of its partners to ‘drive the development of innovative on-farm welfare monitoring technology’.

A Subway spokesperson said: ‘All UK and Ireland chicken suppliers and their producers must, as a minimum, comply with EU animal welfare legislation, and globally we support the principles of the Farm Animal Welfare Council five freedoms.’

A spokesperson for KFC said: ‘We were proud to be one of the first restaurant brands to sign up to the Better Chicken Commitment, but we won’t stop there. This is just the beginning and we hope others take confidence from our commitment and join the growing movement to create real change to improve the lives of chickens.’

Since fast food companies tend to conform to different animal welfare standards in different parts of the world, and since World Animal Protection’s analysis looks globally, its rankings cannot be used to directly compare companies’ welfare performance in the UK.

The charity’s ‘Pecking Order’ categories are ‘leading’, ‘good’, ‘making progress’, ‘getting started’, ‘poor’ and ‘very poor’.

World Animal Protection said the nine companies were chosen as all are ‘big players’ with the power and responsibility to improve the lives of millions of chickens every year.