The effects of alternative systems on disease and health of poultry

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Poultry health management is a pivotal component of successful poultry production. Disease and its effects on poultry health can damage productive performance and have an adverse effect on bird welfare and food safety. A whole host of factors can affect disease incidence and its impact on poultry health. These include the prevalence and interaction of many pathogens, availability and use of vaccines and medicines, standards of husbandry and management, and levels of stockmanship. One area with potential to have the most dramatic influence is the birds’ environment and how the birds respond to it. This impact has been well known throughout the development of the global poultry industry as it adapted to varying climates and market requirements. This involved considerable advances in technology and husbandry techniques. The first major changes tended to intensify poultry production. As such systems became the norm, they have often been described as ‘conventional’. Key drivers in poultry production have changed in recent years including a re-evaluation of the welfare impact of such production systems for both egg laying and meat birds. Part of this has been some move away from conventional systems and a re-introduction of more traditional systems or the development of novel alternative systems. The list of diseases that can affect poultry is the same regardless of the system of production. However, the clinical effects of those disease challenges and impacts on health, performance and welfare can be specific to a particular system. In order to ensure health and welfare is maintained, the interaction of the bird with the environment and the effect this can have on poultry health and the birds’ response to disease challenges must be understood.