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Did the EU Miss an Opportunity for Red Mite Control in Poultry?

31 May 2016

EU - The EU made and implemented the decision to remove the use of the battery cage system for keeping layers of table eggs, for the purpose of poultry wellbeing, write A Pavlicevic and I Pavlovic.

However, the change in the way of keeping poultry and, consequently the equipment for keeping poultry, has a complex influence on poultry production.

One aspect of these changes is the influence of altered conditions on the existence, hazard and control of the most important external parasite - red chicken mite (*Dermanyssus gallinae*).

A question arises - whether it would have been possible to use the changes in the way of rearing and keeping poultry in the EU in a more productive way for red mite control.

At the moment of their implementation, the cage system changes certainly brought a short-term alleviation of *D. gallinae* influence on poultry production.

This occurred during the years when cages and equipment were changed. The alleviation resulted from removing highly infested cages, washing, and especially from housing reconstructions and house vacancies (which lasted much longer than usual).

We think that *D. gallinae* control measures implemented during the vacancy were less important because they were not rigorously organised and did not follow a scientific basis, but were ad hoc interventions from producers, largely influenced by commercial distributors of red mite control products.

During the changeover, *D. gallinae* infestations were minimised, and in rare cases, possibly completely exterminated. This provided an altered, improved situation for the young flocks.

However, this situation was very short-lived. Continued infestation and re-infestation of the poultry houses with red mite was not prevented, and many believe the new housing conditions favoured the colonisation of the parasite.

These comprehensive changes of the cage system in the EU created a unique opportunity for the most up-to-date products and methods of control to make an excellent effect by full optimisation of application. The role of control measures would be minimised, and conditions would be maximised.

However, poultry producers failed to prepare in advance by acquiring timely and quality information about the influence of the cage change on the *D. gallinae* problem.

IPM (integrated pest management) could have been applied in scientific institutions, so that it would be based on the principles of rational pharmacotherapy, choice of the most efficient methods and products at the most affordable price.

Furthermore, it was important to create the conditions for adequate application of *D. gallinae* control plans, with supervision and coordination. In the final balance it could have been better for the health status of poultry in the EU and created a long term economic saving for every producer.

Not only did such measures not happen, but adverse effects on poultry production were also spread to neighbouring third countries by mass purchasing of infested old cages and equipment. Those countries did not readily tackle the situation either, but they also let everything take its natural course.

Accurate information, its distribution and circulation are the basis of our approach. Although it seems that one very good opportunity was missed, significant advancement, and even the solution for *D. gallinae* control in the world still awaits.

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