



Pecking blocks

Pecking blocks contribute to hen welfare especially for laying hens with intact beaks. It is an environmental enrichment, giving birds the possibility to peck an object. Also some blocks provide minerals. By pecking at the stones, the beak is blunted in a natural way and thus can cause less damage to the skin of other birds.

Variation in pecking blocks

Various pecking blocks are on the market. Important aspects are:

- **Durability:** Farmers prefer pecking blocks with a high longevity because it saves labour to provide the laying hens pecking blocks.
- **Use by the hens:** to get any effect, the blocks should be used frequently by the hens.
- **Cost:** cost should be seen in relation to durability; durable blocks may be higher in price, as they don't have to be replaced that often.

To date it is unknown what pecking block has the highest longevity, is affordable but still intensively used by the laying hens.

Pickstein Geel

- Softer type, round shape
- Advised for pullets and beak trimmed hens

Pickstein Rood

- Harder type, round shape
- Advised for non-trimmed laying hens



Aerated concrete blocks

- Cheap, large rectangular blocks, can easily cut in smaller pieces
- Not made or meant for poultry, but for construction work

Piksteen Pro

- Smaller rectangular bricks
- Contain additional minerals

Test with pecking blocks

In an on-farm trial four pecking blocks were tested for their longevity and use by laying hens (see photo). All four pecking blocks were tested in two compartments of two farms with non-trimmed laying hens of 30-40 weeks of age.

The pecking blocks were taken out of their normal packaging and placed in grey wash tubs to avoid preference due to colour differences of the packaging.

Results

- Within one week Piksteen Pro was finished.
- Pickstein Geel showed a significantly higher weight reduction when compared with Pickstein Rood and the aerated concrete block
- Significantly less laying hens were counted around Pickstein Rood when compared to the aerated concrete block
- Significantly more laying hens were pecking at aerated concrete blocks when compared with Pickstein Rood
- There was no difference in the number of laying hens pecking at the wash tub

Conclusion

Aerated pecking blocks have a high longevity and are most intensively used by the laying hens. Moreover these pecking blocks are cheap.