

Poultryhealth BYTES

Number: 221

Nutritional diseases

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Introduction

In this introduction we will consider nutritional diseases in general and then, in subsequent Poultryhealth BYTES, we will look at specific nutritional diseases of poultry.

A disease is a condition that adversely affects the bird's well being and productivity and there must always be a cause and consequences. In the case of nutritional diseases, the cause is due to an excess or deficiency of a particular nutrient, such as a vitamin or mineral.

Predisposing factors

When we come across certain nutritional diseases we also need to consider if there are any predisposing factors that could reduce nutrient availability.

For example, a disease such as coccidiosis, which damages the gut lining thereby reducing the area that is available for nutrient absorption, can convert a marginal diet into an apparently deficient one and cause the nutritional disease to appear.

There can also be a factor in the feed that makes some of the nutrient unavailable to the bird. A good example of this is phytate making a proportion of the phosphorus in the diet unavailable to the bird.

Sometimes a management factor can come into play and this is often something that is preventing some of the flock getting adequate feed. This can relate to feeder management, bottom end birds being left behind or a disease, such as coccidiosis, depressing the bird's appetite.

Diagnosis

Diagnosis of a nutritional disease requires demonstration of a post mortem picture typical of the disease and, if that particular disease is due to a shortage or an excess, demonstrating that deficiency or excess by analysis of the feed. Some nutritional diseases take time to manifest so the culprit feed is not the feed that the birds are eating today but the one they were consuming a few days ago. For this reason it is prudent to sample each delivery of feed at the farm and retain a sample.

Diagnosis of nutritional diseases is often a team effort involving the nutritionist and the veterinarian.

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