

Announcement: Funding from Open Philanthropy and Hendrix Genetics to support HenTrack

Dr. Michael Toscano, Group Leader of the Center for Proper Housing of Poultry and Rabbits (ZTHZ) ([link](#)), will be leading a project focusing on improving the breeding of laying hens using innovative tracking and data analysis strategies developed by his group. With support from the Open Philanthropy and Hendrix Genetics totaling 415'000 CHF, Dr Toscano is eager to apply his group's knowledge and expertise for advancing laying hen welfare in Switzerland and globally.

The project, referred to as HenTrack, will utilize the large-scale commercial facilities at The Aviforum ([link](#)) in Zollikofen, Switzerland to conduct detailed, continuous observations of individual hens over the entire laying period. The ZTHZ has previously shown highly consistent behavioural patterns of individual hens that nonetheless are very different between hens (see [here](#)). Most critically, the patterns appear to be linked to basic biological processes (e.g., the epigenome, see [here](#)) and associate with conditions relevant to animal welfare (e.g. bone injury, see [here](#)).

Data generated by HenTrack will include information on how animals acclimate to standard commercial stressors such as dietary changes and vaccinations, as well as variation in use of their environment, including access to outdoor areas. Information collected at the Aviforum, using large groups, each consisting of 225 laying hens within a commercial aviary housing system, will be combined with traditional breeding evaluations conducted by Hendrix Genetics in small family groups and more focused observations. The effort will yield laying hens that perform well in all housing conditions, including barn and cage-free like those typical of Swiss egg producers. The current focus will be on the Dekalb White Breed, a breed that is quickly gaining market share across the globe, especially in markets that are moving away from cage housing. The research team hopes that this effort will expand to other breeds and future breeding efforts.

Jeroen Visscher, Director of R&D for Hendrix Genetics Layers, believes: 'The HenTrack effort will make a remarkable difference in how we breed our animals in the near future, leading to improved animal welfare, healthier birds, and increased sustainability'.

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