



PRESS RELEASE

## In Ovo hatches first 150,000 chicks without culling

**Leiden, 29 March 2021 – After 10 years of R&D, In Ovo, a spinoff from Leiden University, has hatched the first 150,000 chicks without chick culling. Its gender typing machine has been screening eggs at high speed, in a commercial hatchery, since December. These chickens are almost ready to lay, giving consumers the option to buy more sustainable and animal friendly eggs. The company is now ready to scale up its impact, together with strong partners in the industry.**

### **Mission**

Every year, 6.5 billion chicks are culled in the poultry industry. These are male and therefore don't lay eggs. Traditionally chicks are sorted by gender by hand and the males are culled right after hatching. This has been a problem since the 1950s. In Ovo has developed a high-throughput screening machine called Ella which can identify the gender of the egg before it hatches. This gives hatcheries the option to only hatch the females, which is better for animal welfare and sustainability. In Ovo is on a mission to make this technology available around the world, to end chick culling all together. In 2014, the company signed a letter of intent with the COBK (the organization representing the Dutch hatcheries), the Dutch government, Leiden University and the Dierenbescherming (a Dutch NGO for the protection of animals) to receive funding that supported the development of the technology. Successful hatching of the first flocks of chicks is a result of years of research and a crucial milestone in solving the problem.

### **Ella, where bio meets tech**

Finding a solution that screens early, both white and brown eggs, with high accuracy and at high throughput, was only possible by combining several technological breakthroughs. In Ovo identified a novel biomarker for gender together with Leiden University. Together with engineering company Demcon, a precise and automated sampling method for tiny amounts of fluid from the egg was developed. Additionally, In Ovo is the first to apply the fastest mass spectrometer in the world, the Sciex Echo® MS, outside a laboratory. This combination of cutting-edge engineering and high-tech biochemistry results in an in-line, fully automated solution, capable of gender typing eggs at day-9 of development. Ella can be seamlessly integrated in existing hatcheries.

### **Joint effort**

The killing of male chicks presents an ethical problem for society, felt by consumers, policy makers, NGOs, retailers and the industry. Over the past years, In Ovo received important input and support from various stakeholders. The company is proud that commercial hatchery Het Anker has adopted the technology. Major Dutch egg traders G. Kwetters & Zn., Interovo Egg Group and Gebr. Van Beek have committed themselves to welcome the first chicks to the production channel. This group of strong partners is truly unique and has made it possible to scale up the technology in the coming year.

### **The future: making impact**

In Ovo is on a growth path, ready to increase its impact. To speed up the adoption of this important technology, existing shareholders VisVires New Protein and Evonik Venture Capital funded another round of several million euros. 150,000 chicks is only the start, hatcheries using the current Ella system can hatch one million cull-free hens per year. As high demand is projected in the coming years, In Ovo is continuously improving its technology on speed, accuracy and day of testing. In a few months from now, one new Ella machine will be able to enable hatching of 5 million hens per year and In Ovo will start implementing its technology outside the Netherlands.

### **Contact**

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