Production Basics
How Do I Raise Poultry for Eggs?

CHUCK SCHUSTER
UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND EXTENSION
CENTRAL MARYLAND
CFS@UMD.EDU

JESSIE FLORES
UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND EXTENSION
LOWER EASTERN SHORE MARYLAND
JFLORES@UMD.EDU
Getting Started

- Check the laws and zoning regulations where you live.
- Not all incorporated towns will allow poultry production.
- Make friends with your neighbors, let them know your plans before you start.
Why Raise Chickens for Eggs?

- Affordable food
- Producing fresh, home grown eggs is one of the top reasons for having a small flock.
- Family involvement
  - 4-H project
  - Hatching and raising chicks
- To have some chickens ...lifestyle.
Selecting the Right Variety

- A hen will produce eggs, the eggs can either be eaten or incubated to produce a bird to be raised.
- Not all breeds are the same.
- Other speakers today will discuss the breed characteristics.
Egg Production Breeds

- These are generally lighter breeds selectively bred for their ability to produce a high numbers of eggs over their lifetime.
- Remember that laying hens rarely start laying until they are around 6 months old.
- Plan your production cycle around this point.
Egg Layer vs. Dual Purpose?

- Are you looking to have a flock that produces only egg or also serves the purpose of a meat bird?
- There are many breeds of chickens that have been bred to do both.
- Dual purpose breeds produce a reasonable amount of eggs, while utilizing feed to produce meat well enough to produce a good meat bird.
Getting Started with Chicks

• When you first get your chicks, be sure to offer them five things right away:
  ○ Warmth of about 100 degrees
  ○ Suitable floor covering
  ○ Cool, fresh water
  ○ Chick starter feed
  ○ Protection from predators
  ○ More is discussed on this topic later today...
Getting Started with Chicks

- Measure the temperature inside enclosure at **their** shoulder level.
- If they regularly huddle together, they are not warm enough.
Lighting

- Layers produce more eggs as the day length increases.
- Electric lighting can be used to provide additional light to keep layer production up.
- Hens prefer 15 hours of light per day.
- One 40 watt bulb can supply enough light to keep up to 100 birds
When Does Egg Laying Begin?

- Pullets will not start to produce eggs until about 22 weeks old.
- A hen will produce an average of 260 eggs in a year, that works out to one egg every 28-34 hours.
- Have enough hens to provide for your needs in eggs, either for
  - Family consumption, or
  - For anticipated sales.
Starting with Chicks

- If you start with day-old stock, you will have to be prepared for your baby chicks.
- Set up an enclosed brooder which is free from:
  - drafts
  - protects from rodents, cats, etc.
  - contains an absorbent litter such as wood shavings and,
  - a source of heat such as a 250-watt lamp or two.
Feeding for Optimal Growth & Egg Production

- Space feeders to avoid overcrowding
- Offer continuous feed first week of life
- Use a good chick starter feed
- Size of feed for chicks is important!
- 70% cost in raising birds is in the feed
  - Chicks cannot consume larger sized feeds
  - Remember chicks don’t chew!
- Feed should be converted to a layer feed once birds are old enough and are mature for egg production
• The waterer should be designed so that the chicks cannot wade into it and get wet.
• Should be set at the height of their back
Brooding Chicks

- Temperature should be maintained so that the chicks are neither huddling
  1. Under the heat source, nor
  2. In a corner as far as possible from the heat.

- If they are moving around the brooder, all is well.

- Frequent monitoring of the brooder is the key to success.
Figure A – Brooder set-up recommendation
Figure B – Too cold
Figure C – Too hot

- Brooder Guard
- Chicks
- Brooder
- Heat Source
Figure D – Just right
Brooding Chicks

- Of course, if you have a mother hen who is raising your new chicks, you don't have to worry about any of this.
- When it comes to raising baby chickens, a mother hen is a lot smarter than you.
Production Basics

- Will you let your chickens roam your fields, or will you keep them confined in a coop and/or run?
- A combination of both is often used in small flocks.
- Caution should be used for layer flocks – you do not want your birds laying eggs everywhere!
Production Basics

- Your space limitations may determine the answer to this question.
- If you live in an urban or suburban setting, you probably want to keep the birds confined - with a fenced run outside their coop for fresh air and sunshine.
- Be mindful of your non-bird neighbors!
Housing for chickens can be extremely simple. The fundamental requirements are:
- Birds be protected from the wind or heavy drafts;
- Birds have the ability to remain completely dry.

Chickens have a strong instinct to roost; so will be more content if furnished with some structure on which to roost.
Free Range, Confined or a Combination?

- Many home flocks are designed to allow the chickens to be on the ground.
- This can fit in with vegetable production to help control grubs and small insects in the soil
  - Can also control insects and grubs around the yard lawn
- To eat weeds and weed seeds.
Roosts
Different Housing/Coop Styles

“Chicken Tractors” are moveable and can be shifted to provide fresh forage around your property.

Many are built on wheels so they can be moved by you pushing or pulling with a lawn tractor.
Different Housing/Coop Styles

Regardless of style, a coop should be easy to access in order to enter and collect eggs.
The intended purpose of your flock helps determine many aspects of your production basics. Poultry housing protects the birds from the elements (weather), predators, injury and theft. Layers would require year round enclosures. Broilers may not require year round enclosures-dependent on the time of year you wish to be raising the birds.
Chickens Need Space

- Space requirements vary according to the type and age of the birds.
- Small breed varieties (Bantams) will need 2-3 square feet of space
- Layers and larger breeds may require from 3 to 5 square feet per bird.
- Overcrowding leads to many problems.
Chickens Need Space

- Space for resting, feeding, watering and movement.
- Protection and escape from the weather and from predators.
- Adequate ventilation to avoid moisture buildup and stale air.
- If the flock has constant access to the outside, they will do fine with less space in their "sleeping quarters" inside.
Protection Against Predators
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Protection Against Predators

- Design your housing with predator protection (especially at night) in mind.
- But don't anticipate threats like dogs, raccoons, and foxes only - a least weasel can get through any opening large enough for a rat!
- ½ inch hardware cloth works very well.
- Plan ahead - it is easier than having to purchase replacements.
Rodent Control

- Mice, rats, wild birds, varmints (raccoons, fox, etc), snakes
- Tight, well constructed house
- Cover openings with $\frac{1}{2}$ mesh hardware cloth
- Sanitation/housekeeping, clean up spills
- Keep grass cut and trimmed around house
• If the chicken shelter is tight and dry, it is not necessary to provide artificial heat; and it could be detrimental to do so.
• Chickens are very cold tolerant.
Be sure to provide sufficient nest boxes (one for each seven to nine hens)
- positioned above floor level;
- keep them lined with plenty of clean straw; and
- collect eggs frequently.

These measures help keep the eggs clean and unbroken.

Will reduce the likelihood of egg eating, a bad habit which - once established - is difficult to break.
Nesting Boxes
Nesting Boxes
Egg Laying Flock Health

- Many health problems can be avoided by following the following five steps
  - Purchase healthy birds from healthy flocks.
  - Keep coops clean.
  - Provide clean food and water. Clean equipment that holds food and water regularly.
  - Remove wet or damp bedding.
  - Keep vaccinations up to date.
Collecting Clean Eggs

- Start with a clean and disinfected coop and nest boxes
- Collect eggs daily
Collecting Clean Eggs

• The shell protects and defends against dirt and other foreign materials.

• However, if the egg is not properly handled or cleaned, bacteria can gain entry into the egg due to the shell being porous.

• For a slightly dirty egg, rub clean with a piece of fine grain sandpaper.

• For a very dirty egg, rinse the egg with hot water (cooler water forces bacteria through the shell into the egg)
QUESTIONS?