

## Poultry Essentials

**Facilities.** Expensive housing and equipment are not necessary. However, a clean, dry structure that can be well ventilated, a brooder or heat lamps to warm the chicks, and feeding and watering equipment are needed. Provide at least two sq. ft. of floor space per broiler. Openings on three sides of the building provide plenty of fresh air for the birds. Plastic sheeting can be used to close sides during brooding and in cold weather. Make certain the concrete or dirt floor is at least six inches above ground level to prevent flooding. The roof overhang should be sufficient to effectively protect against blowing rain.

Clean and disinfect the poultry house, feeders and waterers at least two weeks before the chicks arrive. Wash the house down with soap and water. Then, spray a commercial disinfectant labeled for use in poultry houses. Be prepared for the chicks two days in advance. Put at least four inches of litter on the floor of the cleaned, disinfected house. Wood shavings, cane fiber, coarse dry sawdust, peanut hulls or rice hulls make good litter.

Electric heat lamps (infrared bulbs) are good heat sources for brooding chicks. Two 125-watt bulbs per 50 chicks are recommended. Make certain lamps are secured so they cannot fall to the litter and create a fire hazard. The lamps should hang so that the bottoms are 18 to 24 inches from the litter. Lamps can be raised or lowered depending on temperature conditions. Place waterers a good distance from the lamps to prevent splashing water from cracking the hot bulbs.

After birds reach four weeks of age, the ideal temperature range is 60 to 75 degrees Fahrenheit. When winter temperatures permit, the house should be partially opened to improve airflow and remove moisture. Supplemental heat may be needed when the outside temperature is low. In hot weather, fans or evaporative coolers are used to cool birds more than four weeks old.

Provide all-night light for broilers and roasters. Twenty-four-hour lighting (natural and artificial) improves feathering and increases weight, especially during the summer months. Hang a 40-watt bulb at least six feet above birds after removing heat lamps.

**Nutrition.** Optimum performance is dependent on proper nutrition. The feed dealer should be informed of the type of feed required at least two weeks before chicks arrive so that fresh feed can be ordered. It is absolutely essential that birds receive a high-quality poultry feed containing at least 20 percent protein. Lower protein feeds will not do the job. Some exhibitors start chicks on a high-protein (26 to 30 percent) turkey or game bird starter to stimulate additional growth. Feed the higher protein feed for two weeks. Switch to a broiler feed for the remaining feeding period.

Small amounts of broiler feed lightly moistened with cooking oil and fed several times during the day will stimulate older birds to eat more and increase growth. This supplemental feeding practice can be particularly helpful in hot weather with birds more than four weeks of age. Caution: Do not put out more moistened feed than the birds can eat in 10 to 15 minutes. Do not moisten the feed until feeding time. Be certain all birds can eat at the same time.

An adequate level of vitamins in the diet is required to prevent leg weakness. Adequate vitamin intake can be ensured and leg problems minimized by adding water soluble poultry vitamins to drinking water at the manufacturer's recommended level for the first seven days. Do not add vitamins past this period. Continued high levels can create health problems.

All birds should be able to eat at once. One pie or cookie pan for feed and one chick waterer per 25 chicks are needed the first seven days. For the first four weeks, one tube-type feeder per 25 birds is required. After four weeks, one tube-type feeder is needed for every 15 birds. Clean, fresh water must be available at all times. One two-gallon waterer per 50 chicks is required for the first four weeks. One two-gallon waterer per pen is required after birds are culled at the end of the fourth week. Waterers should be rinsed daily and scrubbed twice weekly.

Feed must be kept before birds at all times if maximum growth is to be attained. Tube feeders are recommended because they hold an ample supply of feed, can be adjusted easily as birds grow, and are less likely to cause bruises than horizontal trough feeders. Feeders and waterers should be kept adjusted so that the trough portion is level with the back height of the birds.

Broilers and roasters respond to attention. Walk among birds and stir feed three to five times per day. This will provide exercise and increase feed consumption and growth.

### ***Health.***

- Keep all other poultry away from broilers and roasters.
- Medication should not be given unless birds are sick or stressed.
- Chicks purchased from late August to early November should be vaccinated for fowl pox by 14 days of age.
- Parasites are seldom a problem where birds are properly managed and sanitary conditions maintained

***Selecting the Exhibition Entry.*** At show time, examine birds carefully for physical defects that would cause them to be sifted. These include:

- Cuts and tears
- Broken and disjunct bones
- Skin or flesh bruises anywhere other than on the wing tip
- Breast blisters
- Insect bites
- External parasites (lice, mites or fleas)
- Extremely dirty birds

The following factors must be carefully considered when selecting the show entry. Conformation (describes the skeletal system or shape of the bird):

- Length - The breastbone should be long, straight, free from defects such as dents or knobs and carry well forward and back between the legs. The breastbone should be parallel to the backbone.
- Width - The back should be long and wide with a broad spring of ribs.
- Depth - The body should be full and deep. Body-depth must be consistent with breast width. Length, width and depth should be well balanced.
- Fleshing - (the amount and distribution of muscle or flesh on the bird). The breast, thighs and drumsticks carry the bulk of the meat and should be examined closely. The breast meat is the most valued part of a bird and should be given maximum consideration. The breast muscle should be wide throughout the length of the keel bone. The muscle should carry well up to the crest of the bone. A dimpled breast is desirable. The thighs and drumsticks should be heavily muscled.
- Uniformity - Each broiler should be as near a carbon copy of its pen mates as possible in size, shape, fleshing and finish. If one bird has a defect, it will affect the rating of the entire pen. Uniformity is not a factor with roaster entries unless pens of two or three birds are shown.
- Finish - Finish(*amount of fat in and immediately under the skin*) is usually adequate on well-fleshed birds. Without an adequate finish, a well-fleshed broiler will lose a great deal of eye appeal. The fat deposition between feather tracts on the side of the breast is the best indication of finish. Do not confuse finish and pigmentation (skin color).
- Skin Pigmentation - Skin pigmentation results from the deposition of yellow or yellow-orange pigments in the outer skin layer. It is not an indication of finish. Only minor emphasis should be placed on pigmentation

***Handling and Transportation.*** Record leg bands of birds selected for show. Put selected birds back in the pen with the remaining birds until you transport them to the show. Properly reared birds usually are reasonably clean. Washing is not recommended. Large cardboard boxes are ideal carriers. Never place more than four broilers or two roasters in a box when transporting them to a show. Do not crowd. Put four inches of litter in

the container so breasts will not bruise or become reddened. Be certain to cut adequate air holes in the sides. Avoid bruising birds while putting them in or taking them out of the container. Above all, do not drop the container. *Important:* Check birds carefully for bruises one final time before presenting them to the sifter.

**Rules.** The Exhibitors' Handbook contains the rules for a particular show. Each show is different and the rules change from year to year. Each year, take the time to review the rules of each show and keep a copy of the rules on hand while at the show. Ignorance of the rules is not a valid excuse for breaking them. One key section in all Exhibitors' Handbooks is the "Animal Health Regulations." Most major livestock shows (and some county shows) require a current set of health papers on an animal before entry into the show grounds. Review the health requirements outlined in the Exhibitors' Handbook at least a month before the show because some tests required by the Texas Animal Health Commission take a week or more to perform.