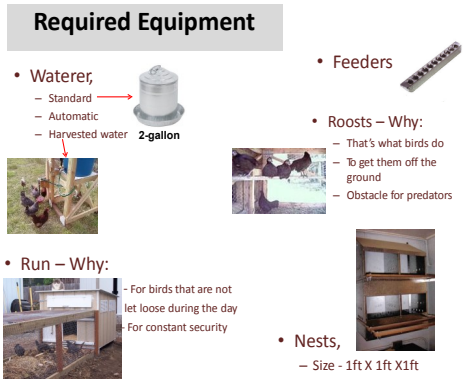
Wichita County Poultry News

March 2015

Extension Office * 600 Scott Ave, Suite 200* Wichita Falls, TX 76301* 940-716-8610

IN THIS ISSUE



Considering A Backyard Flock

Purina Animal Nutrition Expert

(excerpts)

http://purinamills.com/animal-nutrition-information/articles/backyard-poultry/considering-a-backyard-flock/

Chickens For egg production – Optimal egg production may be achieved using **White Leghorn hybrids**, the most efficient breed when it comes to converting feed to eggs. These birds weigh about 3 pounds at 20 weeks of age and about 4 pounds when mature. **Rhode Island Reds** and **Andalusians** also are good egg layers and add a splash of color to your flock. If you're looking to gather more colorful eggshells, though, look no further than the **Ameraucana**. They are known for laying blue and blue-green eggs.

Chickens for meat production – Chickens raised for meat often are hybrids or combinations of many breeds that result in desirable growth and carcass traits. One such hybrid is the **Cornish cross.** These chicks grow very rapidly, reaching 4 to 6 pounds by 6 to 8 weeks of age, and do so with excellent feed conversion (that is, the pounds of feed needed to attain 1 pound of weight is quite low). This allows them to reach market weight faster.

Chickens for dual-purpose production – Many small-flock owners prefer **Rhode Island Reds, Rocks, New Hampshire, Orpingtons or sex-linked hybrids**. These birds produce brown-shelled eggs and have meatier carcasses than Leghorns. They may produce fewer eggs than Leghorn hybrids and are less meaty than true meat birds, but they do well serving the dual purpose of providing meat and eggs for your family. In addition, many breeds with a variety of colors and patterns fall into this class, making for a colorful, eye-pleasing flock.

Chickens for show or pets – There are a multitude of unusual, exotic-looking, chicken breeds that are fun to show or simply own as unique pets. Consider, for example, the **Silkie, White Crested Polish or Japanese**. They display a wide variety of personalities, colors, patterns, plumage styles and comb types. Many of these standard breeds also are available as bantams. **Bantams** are significantly smaller and may be a better option because they require less space. Be sure to thoroughly research the needs of individual breeds before purchasing them.

Local Municipal Rules on Poultry in City Limits

Each municipality is different, but here is a generalization of the primary guidelines for keeping poultry inside city limits in this area.
****location is subject to obtaining a permit and inspection by the city**
****minimum of 100 to 50 feet from a building that houses a human**
****minimum of 10 to 12 square feet per bird**
****must clean pen every 24 to 48 hours. No offensive odors.**
****treat facility regularly for pests**

POULTRY Q&A

J. B. Carey, A. L. Cartwright, M. B. Farnell and M. Davis*
L-5323
(selected excerpts by David Graf)

Q: What is the average life span of a chicken? A: Many commercial laying hens are kept for up to 3 years. There are undocumented accounts of "yard chickens" living for more than 10 years.

[pd4pic.com]

Q: At what age do chickens begin to lay eggs? A: If all necessary conditions (day length, nutrition, etc.) are met, chickens should begin egg production at about 20 weeks of age. (some breeds may lay earlier)
Q: How can baby chicks survive without a mother hen? A: Newly hatched chicks have certain inborn behaviors. They are curious and they peck and scratch. In this way, newly hatched chicks learn what to eat.
Q: Why do hens stop laying eggs? A: Healthy hens stop laying for either of two reasons: 1) They have been in production for a while and are entering a molt; or 2) They are not stimulated appropriately by light. Hens lay when they receive the required hours of light (day length) each day.
Q: Should fertile eggs with dirty shells be incubated? A: Dirt on an egg can restrict oxygen and gas exchange in the egg. A very fine sand paper can be used to remove soiled areas. The main problem is that the soiled area can cause bacterial infection. It is best to incubate only clean eggs.
Q: What are "free range" chickens? A: Free range refers to chickens that have access to an environment outside a chicken house or sheltered area.
Q: Are "free range" and "organic" poultry more wholesome than conventionally raised poultry? A: All poultry—whether free range, organic or conventionally raised—are fed diets that meet or exceed the National Research Council's recommendations for Poultry Nutrition. While the feed formulations used by different growers may vary, the actual nutrient content and wholesomeness of all poultry products is comparable.
Q: What are blood spots? A: These spots can sometimes be found when an egg is cracked open. They are caused by the rupture of a blood vessel during the formation of the egg. They do not indicate that an egg is fertile. After a period of time a blood spot will dissipate, so if you see a blood spot it means the egg is fresh. Eggs with blood spots are fine to consume. The blood spot can be removed with the tine of a fork or the tip of a knife.
Q: Is there a difference in the nutritional quality of brown-shelled and white-shelled eggs? A: No, there is no difference. The color of the eggshell is determined by the breed of hen that lays the egg. White egg layers have white feathers and ear lobes, while brown egg layers usually have darker feathers and always have red ear lobes. Hens that lay brown-shelled eggs are usually larger than hens that lay white-shelled eggs, and thus require more food. This is why brown eggs are typically more expensive than white eggs.

The Small Laying Flock

Fred D. Thornberry Professor and Extension Poultry Specialist
Texas A&M University System
PS5.250
(selected excerpts by David Graf)

Brooding Chicks

**1 square foot of floor space per bird. At least 4 inches of litter on the floor (wood shavings). Hay makes very poor litter. Stir the litter weekly with a hoe to prevent packing.
**Maintain a temperature of 88 to 92 degrees F. for the chicks. Reduce the thermostat temperature 5 degrees each week until the pullets are 3 to 4 weeks old or until the outside temperature reaches 70 degrees F. Two 125-watt bulbs per 50 chicks are recommended. (be aware of fire danger).
**When pullets are 3 to 4 weeks of age and fully feathered, heat seldom is required. After the brooding period, do not expose pullets to artificial light until 18 weeks of age. At 8 weeks of age, pullets should be given 2 square feet of floor space or allowed to range outside the pullet house during the day.
**Feed chicks a high quality 18 percent protein pullet starter for the first 8 weeks. You may choose to feed one without or with a coccidiostat. They can then be maintained on a 16 percent protein pullet developer until the first egg is laid. All chicks should be able to eat at the same time. One pie pan for feed and one chick waterer per 30 chicks are needed the first 7 days.
**Clean, potable water must always be available. Add poultry vitamins, at the recommended level, to the drinking water the first week to ensure that birds have sufficient vitamins and to prevent leg problems. Waterers should be rinsed daily and scrubbed twice weekly. Keep feeders and waterers adjusted so that the trough position is level with the back height of the birds.*(some research shows variable results when adding vitamins due to variance in genetics and environment, graf)*

Layer Housing

Small laying flocks are generally floor housed with 3 square feet of floor space per bird. Protect them from adverse weather conditions and predators. The structure must also protect feeders and be suitable for nests and a roost. Tube feeders and an automatic waterer are recommended for floor layers.
**Nests- 1 nest per 4 layers. Nests should be 24 inches above the floor. Nesting material such as shavings or hay should be placed in the nests and replaced frequently to keep eggs clean.
**Roost width requirement is 8 inches per bird. Poles should be 14 inches apart and 18 to 36 inches above the litter. *(some recommend 2" X 2" strips with the edges filed off, graf).* The dropping pit beneath the roost should be screened to keep the layers out and minimize internal parasite problems. The manure must be kept dry to prevent fly problems.
**Increasing day length stimulates maturing pullets to lay. At about 18 weeks of age, pullets should be placed on a 14-hour day length. At 50 percent production the birds should be given 16 hours of light and be maintained on this day length the remainder of their productive lives. A time clock and one 60- watt bulb per 200 square feet of floor space will provide the necessary supplemental light.
**At the first egg, the birds should be full fed a 16 to 18 percent protein laying ration containing 3.5 percent calcium. Other feeds, including corn or milo, should not be fed. Only healthy pullets should be housed.
** Remove unhealthy hens from the flock. Cannibalism, should it occur, can usually be stopped by applying a commercially available anti-peck preparation. *(small flocks may be able to provide a separate pen, graf).*

MOULTING IN LAYING HENS

The Poultry Site.Com

A natural occurrence, moulting (loss of feathers) is the cessation of laying and indicates that the birds' physical condition is deteriorating, and is therefore unable to support egg production, continued nourishment of their feathers and body maintenance.

Poor egg producers seldom cast more than a few feathers at a time and rarely show bare patches. High producing hens moult late, moult for a short period (no more than 12 weeks) and come back into production very quickly. Below is a very good article on moulting.

http://www.thepoultrysite.com/articles/217/moulting-a-natural-process/

Poultry Facility Biosecurity

John B. Carey, J. Fred Prochaska, and Joan S. Jeffrey*

L-5182

(selected excerpts by David Graf)

Biosecurity is a set of practices that limit the spread of disease-causing organisms. When teamed with disinfection and sanitation procedures, biosecurity practices can eradicate or reduce pathogens to noninfectious levels.

Precautions are needed to reduce the spread of disease from one facility to another. *(can be carried on shoes, cloths, etc., graf).* Poultry diseases can be spread from infected birds by egg transmission during incubation or hatching. It can also occur from bird to bird through chicks at the hatchery being contaminated after hatching. A third vector is an infected bird or through indirect contact with fomites such as feed, fecal material or wind-borne pathogens.

Vectors

Efforts to minimize vectors can significantly reduce disease transmission. Vectors include rodents, wild birds, insects and internal and external parasites. Pathogens may be transferred via fecal material (including wild birds' feces, feathers or dust) and by wind, water or in feed. Effective rodent and wild-bird control programs should be developed. Rodents consume and contaminate feed and spread numerous diseases. Wild birds can be excluded from the premises by covering all vents and openings with a narrow-mesh wire screen. Insects and parasites can be controlled with preventive programs and proper use of insecticides and medications.

(Simply be aware that your healthy flock may have different pathogens than a friend's healthy flock and when the two sets of variable pathogens are combined, the result can be sickness and disease. graf)