

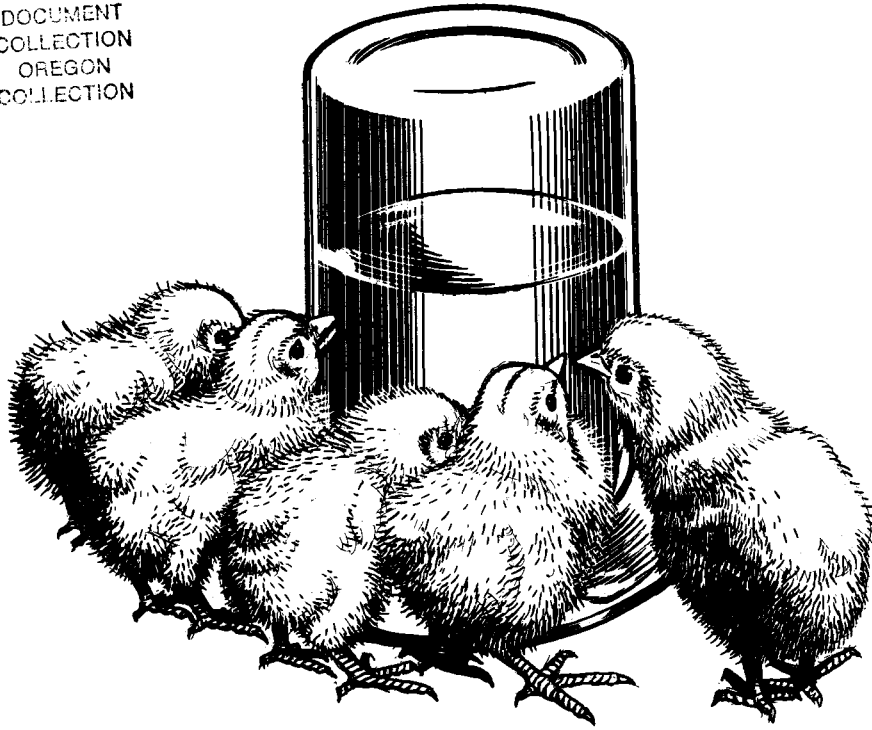
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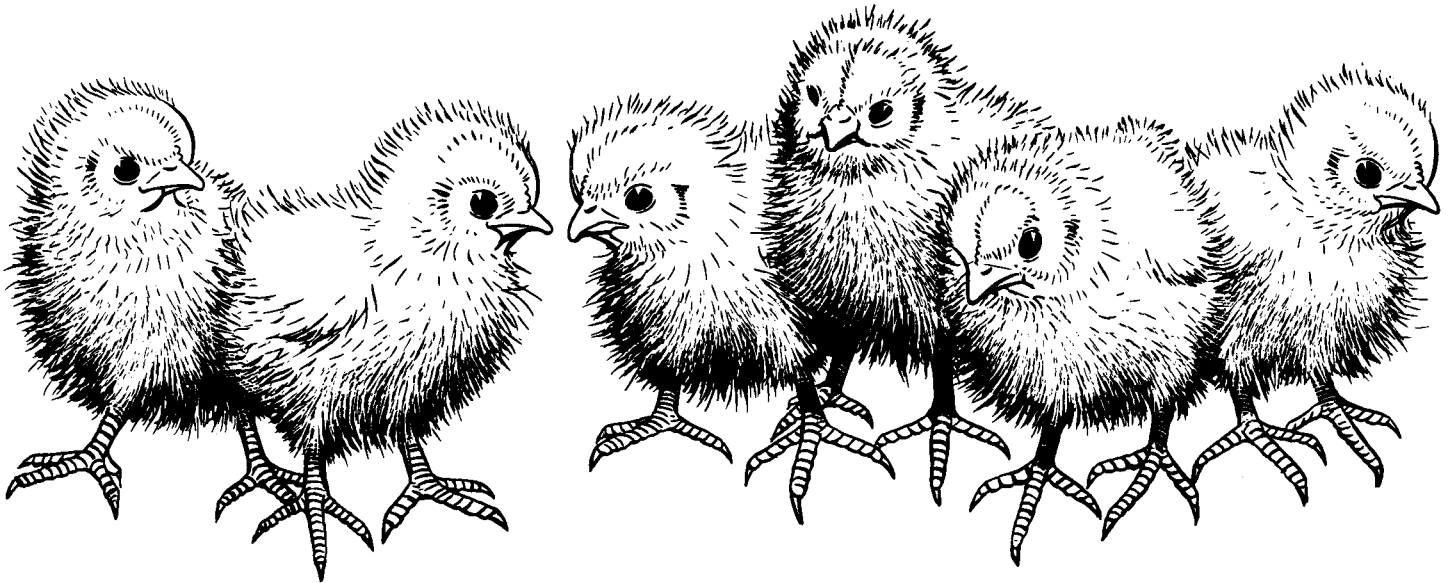
The Home Unit

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Poultry Flock



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The Home Unit Poultry Flock

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Mass production of broilers and eggs has resulted in prices that usually make it uneconomical for a family to produce their own eggs or fryers. A small flock of layers can be an excellent project for youngsters, however, and a delivery route serving customers who are willing to pay a premium for fresh, high-quality eggs can be a profitable enterprise. A small flock of broilers could be profitable if prior arrangements were made with neighbors to buy the broilers for home processing.

Bantams and some unusual or exotic breeds of chickens often are kept as a hobby—a source of enjoyment and education for youngsters and adults.

Regardless of the type of poultry project under consideration, it is desirable to determine as precisely as possible all potential costs and to provide adequate housing and equipment. A well-planned and well-managed poultry project can be a source of pleasure and, perhaps, some profit.

LAYERS

The best breed for production of eggs is the White Leghorn, a small hen with a high rate of egg production. Some breeders have developed high-producing heavy-breed hens that lay brown-shelled eggs. Usually it is not profitable to keep dual-purpose breeds for both egg and meat production.

Laying stock can be purchased as pullets at 16 to 20 weeks of age. Another possibility is to purchase hens from a commercial egg producer who has already kept them through one production year. By selecting the best layers in his flock it is possible to obtain, at a low price, hens that may give several months of good egg production. A third alternative is to rear your own replacements, especially if you plan to have two separate laying flocks, one started six months later than the other. One rearing facility could provide pullets 20 weeks of age to both flocks. Day-old pullets should be bought sexed (females only). Leghorn males do not grow fast enough or utilize feed efficiently enough to be grown out as fryers.

Economic considerations

Consider these points in estimating the cost of rearing pullets to 20 weeks of age.

1. Chick cost—1.2 X cost of each chick to allow for 10% mortality and some culling.
2. Feed to 20 weeks—about 20 to 22 pounds for Leghorns, 25 to 28 pounds for heavy breeds.
3. Equipment and house cost—initial cost spread over 2 broods per year for 10 years on equipment and 20 years on housing.
4. Litter—enough shavings, sawdust, etc., to cover the floor 4 to 6 inches deep.
5. Heat for brooding and electricity.
6. Labor for caring for birds, cleaning out house, etc.

Consider these points in estimating the cost of producing one dozen eggs.

1. Layer depreciation cost—cost of pullets at 20 weeks or at laying age (whether reared to that age or purchased at that age). The salvage or meat value of layers at the end of the laying year will just about offset the loss from mortality of layers.
2. Feed for 11 months—about 90 pounds for Leghorns and 110 pounds for heavy breeds.
3. Equipment and house cost—initial cost spread over periods of 10 and 20 years, respectively.
4. Litter—enough shavings, sawdust, straw, etc., to cover floor 6 to 8 inches deep.
5. Electricity for artificial lights in fall and winter.
6. Labor for feeding, for collecting, cleaning, and delivering eggs, and for cleaning the house.
7. Transportation cost if eggs are delivered to customers.

The total cost per hen should be divided by 18 to arrive at an approximate cost per dozen eggs.

Nutrition

It is best to purchase a commercial feed and thus avoid the possibility of not providing sufficient amounts of certain nutrients. Replacement pullets should receive a chick starter or broiler feed from 0 to 6-8 weeks (about 2 to 4 pounds per chick for Leghorns and 3 to 5 pounds per chick for heavy breeds); a developer (grower) feed thereafter to 20 weeks (about 16 pounds for Leghorns and 20 pounds for heavy breeds); and a layer ration from 20 weeks on. If eggs are to be hatched, a breeder ration instead of the regular layer ration is recommended. It is best to not store feed for more than about 2 or 3 months.

Lights

A good lighting program is essential for maximum egg production. Replacement pullets should be provided a total of 13 to 14 hours of natural plus artificial light at 22 weeks of age. Day-length for laying hens should never be allowed to decrease below 13 or 14 hours. Thus laying hens should be provided artificial lights from September to April. One 25-watt incandescent bulb (clear or white frosted) per 100 square feet of floor space will give an adequate light intensity.

BROILERS

Commercial broilers are crossbreeds, usually involving White Cornish, White Plymouth Rock, and perhaps the New Hampshire breeds. They will attain a weight of 3½ to 4 pounds at 8 weeks, with 8 to 9 pounds of feed. Some of the fast-growing males will reach a weight of 3½ pounds at 6½ to 7 weeks. Broiler chicks usually are purchased straight-run (males and females mixed), and perhaps already debeaked.

Economic considerations

Consider these points in estimating your cost of producing broilers:

1. Chick cost—hatcheries usually give 2% extras, which often will cover mortality.
2. Feed required to 8 weeks—8-9 pounds.
3. Equipment and house cost—initial cost spread over 5 broods per year for 10 and 20 years, respectively.
4. Litter—enough to cover floor 4 to 6 inches deep.
5. Heat for brooding and electricity.
6. Labor to care for birds and to clean house.

The estimated cost per pound can be determined by dividing the total cost per bird by 3.8 pounds.

Nutrition

Broilers should have a complete feed available at all times. A special “pre-starter” sometimes is used for one week to get the chicks off to a good start (about ¼ pound per chick). A regular broiler feed may be used up to 5 weeks (about 2¼ pounds in addition to the special feed) and a finisher feed from 5 to 8 weeks (about 5.5 pounds per bird); or a single broiler feed furnished from one day to 8 weeks. Either system will give satisfactory results, but be careful to determine which feed is being purchased and use it accordingly. Feed can be purchased as mash, crumbles, or pellets. Crumbles or pellets usually give a better feed conversion, but may aggravate cannibalism problems.

Management Recommendations for Broilers, Replacement Pullets, and Layers

- *Floor space:* 0.8 to 1 square foot for broilers; 1.5 to 2 square feet for Leghorn replacement pullets; 2 to 2.5 square feet for heavy breed replacements; 2 to 2.5 square feet for Leghorn layers; and 2.5 to 3 square feet for heavy-breed layers.

- *Feeder space:* Broilers and replacement pullets need 1 lineal inch for 0-2 weeks, 2 lineal inches for 2-6 weeks and 3 lineal inches after 6 weeks, or 1 hanging tube feeder per 30 birds; layers need 3 to 4 lineal inches per bird or 1 hanging tube feeder per 25 birds. Since chickens eat from both sides of most feeders, a feeder 4 feet long provides 8 lineal feet of feeder space.

- *Water space:* Broilers and replacement pullets need water jars to give one gallon capacity (using quart, half-gallon, or gallon containers) per 50 chicks for 0 to 2 weeks; from 2 to 10 weeks they need one gallon capacity per 16 chicks or 0.4 inches trough space per chick; and after 10 weeks they need one gallon capacity per 12 birds or 0.6 inches trough space per bird; layers need one gallon capacity per 10 birds if using fountains, or 1 inch trough space.

- *Litter:* Broilers and replacement pullets need 4 to 6 inches; layers need 4 inches to start, with more added as needed to total of 6 to 8 inches. Fir shavings, sawdust, peat moss, chopped straw, or other clean, dry, absorbent, mold-free material makes satisfactory litter. Remove any wet or caked areas as they develop. Clean out and replace litter after each group of replacement pullets or layers. If no disease or parasite problems are encountered and litter is still dry, it can be re-used for 2 or 3 broods of broilers.

- *Brooder space:* Broiler or replacement chicks need 7 to 10 square inches of space under the hover or brooder; or use one 250-watt heat lamp per 40-50 chicks. Since heat lamps eventually burn out, use at least 2 bulbs. Replacement pullets may develop enlarged eyes if brooded with heat lamps, but the effect of this on subsequent performance is not serious. Start all baby chicks with a temperature of 95°F. under the hover and reduce this by 5°F. per week to 70°F. They should not need supplemental heat after 6 weeks, except in cold weather. Use a solid chick guard about 18 inches high around the brooder about 1 to 2 feet from the edge of the brooder for 1 to 2 weeks.

- *Roost space:* Replacement pullets need 6 inches per bird provided at 4 to 6 weeks of age. Layers need 6 to 8 inches, depending on body size.

- *Nest space:* Layers need 1 nest per 4 hens, or if using community nests, provide an area 1 foot square per 4 or 5 hens.

- *Health and sanitation:* Thoroughly clean and disinfect house and equipment after each group of replacement pullets or layers, and at least every 6 months with broilers. Bury or burn (if you have the proper equipment) all dead birds. Keep all wild birds and rodents out. Consult a local veterinarian, your county Extension agent, or commercial field service man for vaccination programs and disease problems in your area. The same people can be of assistance in case of a disease outbreak. If mites or lice get on birds or roosts be certain to use an FDA approved insecticide.

- *Cannibalism:* Broiler chicks should be debeaked to prevent feather picking and cannibalism. This may be done at the hatchery. Replacement pullet chicks properly debeaked at 5 to 8 days should not need further debeaking, or they can be debeaked at one day of age and again at 16 to 18 weeks. Use an electric debeaker, if available, and remove ⅓ to ½ of the upper beak and about ⅓ of the lower beak. If cannibalism occurs, use commercially available anti-pick pastes, and if it persists the birds can be fitted with plastic or aluminum blinders or “specs.”

CAGES FOR LAYERS

Performance of layers housed in single-bird cages is comparable with that of layers kept on litter. However, egg production may be 5 to 10 eggs less per hen per year with more than one hen per cage; and caged layers may require 0.1 to 0.2

more pounds of feed per dozen eggs than floor layers. Cannibalism can be a greater problem with several hens in a cage than with hens on litter. Layers kept in multiple-bird cages have more ragged feathers and are not as clean and neat looking as hens on litter.

Hens housed in cages are easier to inspect individually, require less space per hen, and do not produce as many soiled eggs. Certain health problems, such as worms and coccidiosis, are reduced by keeping layers in cages.

Pullets housed in single-bird cages need a cage at least 8 inches wide by 16 inches deep. White Leghorns housed in multiple-bird cages require a minimum of 0.4 square foot (58 square inches) per hen, but they will perform better if provided 0.65 to 0.75 square foot (94 to 108 square inches) or more per hen. Heavy breed layers need a minimum of 0.65 to 0.75 square foot, or preferably one square foot, per hen. Multiple-bird cages should be at least 16, but not more than 24, inches deep and 16 to 18 inches high. Most are from 8 to 18 inches wide, although they can be wider. Cages more than 24 inches deep do not allow sufficient feeder space for layers.

Cages can be purchased or home-made. Cage floors should slope about 1 inch per 6 inches of cage depth (an angle of about 10 degrees) so that eggs will roll out. With a steeper slope eggs will roll faster and result in more cracked eggs; with a lesser slope eggs will not roll as well and may result in more cracked eggs from hens stepping on or pecking at eggs that have not rolled out. The cage floor should be heavy welded wire with a mesh not more than 1 inch wide and should be well supported to prevent sagging. It is desirable for the cage floor to extend about 8 inches beyond the cage front, with a curved lip to stop eggs gently when they roll out.

A common arrangement for cages is to place two rows back to back with a feeder on the front of each row and one water trough between the two rows. Water troughs should be v-shaped and about 1.5 to 2 inches deep. Feed troughs should be about 4 inches deep, 6 to 7 inches wide at the top, and slope inward to 3 to 4 inches wide at the bottom. There should be a ½- to 1-inch lip at the top of the feed trough to reduce feed wastage.

Manure under cages should “cone-up” and partially dry out as it is deposited—especially if the house is dry enough and there is no water spillage. Manure under multiple-bird cages does not cone-up as well as that under single-bird cages, is usu-

ally wetter, and requires more frequent removal to prevent odors and fly breeding. Spray the manure occasionally with an approved larvacide or insecticide to reduce fly populations.

SPECIALTY PROJECTS

Bantams

Bantams are about one-fourth to one-fifth the size of normal chickens. Adult bantams will consume about 20 to 25 pounds of regular layer feed per year and lay eggs weighing about 11 to 16 ounces per dozen. They start laying at about 6 to 8 months of age. If allowed, they will incubate their own eggs and make excellent mothers. One male can mate with 1 to 15 females. Nests should be about 6 inches wide, 8 inches deep, and 9 inches high. Baby bantams should be given a good starter chick feed.

Although bantams are small, they need $1\frac{1}{2}$ to 2 square feet of floor space and should be provided a sun porch or even a range. They need 4 or 5 inches of roost space per bird. Bantams have the same disease problems as normal chickens.

"Rock Cornish Game Hens"

These are simply young broilers 4 to 6 weeks of age with a live weight of 2 to $2\frac{1}{2}$ pounds. Their care is the same as required for young broilers, except that they only need $\frac{1}{2}$ square foot of floor space.

Roasters

Roasters are broilers kept beyond 8 to 9 weeks, often as long as 6 months. They may have a live weight of 9 to 10 pounds. Roasters require considerably more feed per pound of meat produced than do broilers.

Roasters kept after 8 or 9 weeks of age need 2 square feet of floor space to 16 weeks and 3 square feet after 16 weeks. Roasters should be given cracked corn in the afternoon, beginning with a small amount at 8 or 9 weeks of age and gradually increasing this until they are getting equal amounts of grain and broiler finishing feed at 15 weeks of age. Granite grit should be furnished once a week when cracked corn is fed.

Breast blisters may be caused by irritation of the breast on floor, feeders, waterers, etc., and can be a serious problem with roasters. Litter should be at least 4 to 6 inches deep, clean, dry, and loose. Wet or caked litter will aggravate the problem. Provision should be made to keep birds from sitting on feeders or other sharp objects which might irritate their breast.

THE POULTRY HOUSE

Figure 1 shows plans for a basic 8' x 12' poultry house that will hold up to 100-120 broilers, 50 replacement pullets, or 40 Leghorn hens. The sun porch shown in Figure 3 is not desirable for broilers and is optional with replacement pullets and layers.

The walls can be made of conventional drop siding or of exterior or marine grade plywood. The windows shown are from 48 inches above the floor plate up to the roof plate. For broilers or replacement pullets the windows should be covered with an adjustable curtain that can be closed for young chicks and opened as additional ventilation when needed. They may be partially covered in winter for layers. Ventilation is adequate when the relative humidity and ammonia odors do not make the caretaker uncomfortable.

The roof can be sheet metal, wood shingles, or any other type desired. For composition shingles or roll roofing the sheathing should be solid. A 1" x 6" board can be placed on edge just inside the door to prevent litter from falling out the door.

EQUIPPING THE POULTRY HOUSE

For broilers and replacement pullets necessary equipment includes feeders, waterers, heating units or brooders, and perhaps roosts for replacements. Layers will need roosts and nests, but will not need heating equipment. A hanging tube feeder is good with this type of house for broilers, replacements, and layers. Waterers can be purchased or homemade. Heating units can be of several types. For a small operation, infrared heating lamps are suitable, or radiant-ray infrared heating units are available in various sizes. A small hover-type brooder, either electric or gas, would be suitable for operations that can use this size equipment.

Roosts in the form of a droppings pit will be desirable for replacement pullets and layers. Figure 2 shows an arrangement that can be used for the laying house. The nests would not be needed for replacement pullets. The droppings pit can be made from 12 to 20 inches high in front and may slope to as high as 36 inches in the rear. A pit 30 inches wide, running the length of the solid 12-foot wall, with two 2" x 2" roosts running down the center, 12 to 14 inches apart, will provide ample roosting space for replacement pullets or layers. The pit should be covered with heavy wire netting or welded wire to prevent birds from getting into it. Installing the pit so that it can be lifted out easily will facilitate cleaning.