

Growing broilers in Oregon

Facts for the potential grower

J.C. Hermes



A typical broiler-producing facility.

The broiler (or fryer) is the basis for the chicken meat industry in the United States. In 1993 more than 6 billion broilers were produced nationwide, including some 24 million produced here in Oregon. The 1993 value of broiler production in Oregon was estimated at \$37.2 million, ranking 15th on Oregon's agricultural commodities list.

For many years, broiler chickens have been selected for fast growth, large size, good body conformation, and efficient feed conversion. At present, these birds grow from hatch to about 5 pounds in fewer than 7 weeks while eating less than 10 pounds of feed.

The Oregon broiler industry markets its product primarily as whole-bodied birds or as cut-up pieces. Beginning

recently, some additional processed broiler meat is being produced in the State, in the form of corn dogs and sausage—but it's still a minor part of our broiler industry.

The market share of Oregon-grown broilers in Oregon is about 32 percent; the remainder is imported primarily from the Southern States.

The industry's potential for growth is great. Consumption of broilers is increasing substantially each year. Because of ever-advancing technology, the cost of broiler production remains low compared with the production cost of other livestock, making chicken more economical to the consumer.

With the demand for chicken meat, the broiler industry should remain stable for many years.

The Oregon situation

The Willamette Valley's mild year-round climate is ideal for growing broilers. Most Oregon broilers are grown on family farms distributed west of the Cascades, from Eugene to the Columbia Gorge. At present, there are about 65 broiler growers in the State; and there are three integrators, who own 10 additional farms.

On many of the family-owned farms, broiler production is only a part-time endeavor. In many cases, one member of the family works off the farm or farms other crops while others in the family care for the chickens.

The minimum size for a new broiler farm is about 125,000 chickens per year, but the average family broiler farm produces about 300,000 per year.

Broiler production

Producing broilers is a year-round proposition. They're grown to about 7 weeks of age before processing. Then the grower has about 3 weeks to clean and prepare the growing facilities for the next brood. This schedule allows the grower the opportunity to produce slightly more than five broods per year.

In most cases, broilers are grown in large buildings with a partially or completely controlled environment to maintain the necessary conditions for maximum growth. The buildings used in broiler production vary in size; newly constructed buildings average about 45 feet wide by 400 feet long. Most have dirt floors, insulated walls and ceilings, metal siding, and a concrete footing around the perimeter.

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Ventilation in these buildings is accomplished either by

- natural air currents that use large windows with curtains, circulating fans, and roof vents, or
- large exhaust fans that move a great deal of air to develop static pressure in the house.

Whichever method is used, it must be designed to maintain the proper environment in the house. Completely automated systems are available that keep the house environment at or near the ideal level, but they can be costly.

The broiler production facility also requires a source of heat. Several choices are available, using either gas or electricity. Propane gas is most commonly used for heating in Oregon.

Heater or brooder types include hovers, radiant heaters, and space heaters. Most new facilities use warm-room brooding instead of hovers that heat only the area near the floor where the birds gather.

Feed and water are delivered to the birds by automated systems. Many types are available from several manufacturers. Feed can be delivered by pans or troughs, and water can be supplied by trough, cup, or nipple.

In any case, to determine your equipment type, design, and quantity, you must consider the size of your building, the number of birds you'll grow, and your integrator's management specifications.

Contracts

Oregon broiler growers are under contract to one of three integrators (see the righthand column). Contracts provide advantages to both growers and integrators:

- Integrators don't have to own numerous farms, and they employ only the people who run *their* farms—

but they can count on a certain amount of production at an agreed-on price.

- Growers have the security of not having to sell animals on the open market, and they have the backing of a large company—but they're still in business for themselves.

Under most contracts, the integrator provides to the grower the birds, the feed, any needed medications, and technical advice. In addition, the grower doesn't have to pay the costs to deliver chicks and feed or to ship the birds to market.

The grower is responsible for providing the growing environment, bedding, utilities, and labor. Overall, the grower supplies between 10 and 15 percent of the cost of producing the birds, and the remainder is borne by the integrator.

Grower payment depends on the contract, which may vary from integrator to integrator and from time to time. In general, growers are paid by the weight of birds produced, the number of birds produced, or the amount of space in the chicken house.

Payment may be:

- guaranteed,
- based on growth and feed conversion, or
- tied to current market prices in the Northwest or in the Southern States.

An integrator may base payment on your production skills compared to other growers. In some instances, premiums are paid to the top growers based on body weight, feed conversion, and carcass grade.

Discuss your contract with your integrator, in detail, before you reach any agreement.

Organizations

Oregon Fryer Commission is an agency of the Oregon Department of Agriculture; its purposes are promotion,

education, market expansion, and research for the broiler industry. Commissioners are growers, elected from among their own ranks. The commission is financed through a mandatory 0.25 cent per pound assessment on all Oregon-grown broilers.

The commission also oversees a labeling law that requires all fryers sold in Oregon to be labeled with the state in which they're grown.

Oregon Broiler Growers Association is a statewide organization that runs solely on the dedication of its members. It's a nonprofit group that uses its finances from dues and promotions to support broiler research and scholarship at Oregon State University and other worthy causes, including 4-H.

The membership is divided into three chapters (South Willamette, Mid-Willamette, and Clackamas); these have regional grower representation, and they correspond to the three districts of the Oregon Fryer Commission.

More information

For further information, contact:

- your county office of the Oregon State University Extension Service;
- the OSU Extension poultry specialist (503) 737-2254; or
- the OSU Department of Animal Sciences, Poultry section, (503) 737-2301.

Oregon poultry integrators

Belozer Poultry Farms (Lynden),
Oregon City, OR 97045; (503) 656-6819.
Fircrest Farms, Creswell, OR 97426;
(503) 895-2161.

Pederson's Fryer Farms, Tacoma, WA
98442; (206) 537-0243.

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