

Managing a Small Poultry Flock

Commitment

Caring for chickens can be rewarding, but poultry are fragile and need to be well cared for at all times.

Breed Selection

Cornish are recommended for meat and White Leghorn for eggs. Dual-purpose birds – for both meat and eggs – include Barred Rock, New Hampshire, Light Sussex and cross breeds of them. When ordering chickens for your poultry operation, be sure to order sexed chicks: cockerels (male) for meat and pullets (female) for egg production.



Housing Location and Construction

The more of these factors you address for the building and yard, the more successful your operation will be:

- out of the prominent wind
- well-drained land with sun exposure
- moveable to allow better grazing options
- seamless with no cracks or holes, to prevent draught
- treated timber for endurance
- well-insulated, if starting to raise birds early
- rodent and dog-proof with lockable door for security

- hydro access for a light and heat bulb
- screened windows and/or vents for ventilation
- cardboard for the corners with litter for the brooder
- roosts and perches
- a separate, secure place to store feed and supplies, either in the building or in a space close by

Spacing

Supply a building that will give a mature bird 0.2 square metres (two square feet) of floor space. For example, 60 birds require 12 square metres (120 square feet), which is a 3 by 4 metre (10 feet by 12 feet) building. If birds have less space, the larger ones may need to be removed for slaughter before they reach their mature weight.

Brooders will require a space about 2 metres (six feet) across and 38 to 45 centimetres (15 to 18 inches) high for each one.



Temperature, Heat Bulbs and Ventilation

- Suspend the heat bulb from the ceiling so that the bottom of the bulb is 60 centimetres (two feet) off the floor. Any lower and it could start a fire.
- Room temperature should be 21°C (70°F).
- The temperature at 5 centimetres (two inches) above the floor should be 35°C (95°F).
- Reduce this temperature by a few degrees every week by raising the heat bulb.

When the birds are comfortable they will be resting under and around the heat bulb. When the birds are too hot they will try and get as far away from the heat bulb as possible. They may even start panting from the heat. If this happens, raise the heat bulb.

If the birds are panting in the summer, open the windows or vents to cool the air. Remember to adjust the windows and vents morning and night in the summer, and use screens and wire for bugs and predators. If the birds are not warm enough they will be piling up under the heat bulb. Lowering the bulb will fix this.

The temperature of the heat bulb can be controlled by installing a household thermostat in the wire of the heat bulb. Set the thermostat to the desired temperature. You should calibrate your thermostat using a thermometer.

Litter

- Use cardboard, paper, dry peat moss, dry grass and or leaves.
- Remove wet litter from around the water feeder and compost it if you like.
- Add layers or remove the litter once it becomes saturated.

Taking care of the Chicks

- Feed and water the chicks as soon as they arrive. Have water containers (waterers), hand-feed trays and self-feeders out.
- Put enough feed for one day in the self-feeder before they arrive.

- Dip the chicks' beaks in the water containers to make sure they drink.
- Have a small wattage light bulb on 24 hours a day.
- From day one through three, have a cardboard ring about 2 metres (six feet) across and 38 to 45 centimetres (15 to 18 inches) high around the heat lamp, to keep birds close to the heat source.
- Put the waterer and feed containers inside the ring.
- Keep the feed and water containers refilled 24 hours a day and use fresh, room temperature water.
- From day four through six, expand the brooder area as the chicks grow.
- When the cardboard ring is taken down, put cardboard across the corners of the building to block the corners so the chicks don't bunch up in them and smother.
- At day seven, lower the temperature a few degrees near the floor, by lifting the heat bulb.
- At three to six weeks, start feeding the birds grower feed rations on top of starter rations. You can start this earlier, if your starter feed is running low.
- After six weeks, start feeding the birds some greens (a handful per day) and increase the amount as the birds start to eat all of them.

Lighting

Use a small wattage bulb (40 watts) for the first two days, 24 hours a day. The wattage can be reduced after this, but leave the light on 24 hours a day. The hours of light can be reduced gradually, starting by turning it off during the day if there is a window; if not, leave it on all day.

Water

- Use fresh, room-temperature water every day.
- When the birds arrive, dunk their beaks into the water as this is how they learn to drink and find out where the water is. Repeat this on the second day if the water has not gone down.
- Use shallow containers with water and feed as well as the permanent ones. The shallow containers can be removed once the birds are eating and drinking from the permanent feeder and waterer.
- As the birds grow, gradually raise the waterer and the feeder. The waterer should be level with the birds' shoulders and the feeder halfway up their backs. This will keep the birds from walking in them and getting them dirty.

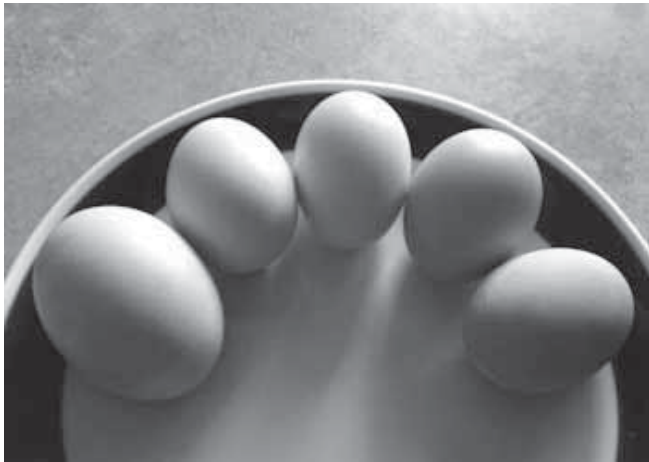
Roosts

As the birds become larger, supply a small tree log 30 millimetres (1 ¼ inches) in diameter. Place it horizontally across the building, starting 5 centimetres (two inches) off the floor and 30 centimetres (12 inches) apart. Gradually raise it 30 centimetres (12 inches) off the floor. Depending on the size of the building, a few of them can be used 30 centimetres (12 inches) apart. The birds will use the logs as roosts to sit on. Their droppings will fall from the roost to the floor and the birds will be cleaner.



Feed

- Use a starter ration feed at first and then switch to a grower feed at three to six weeks.
- Supply crushed oyster shell in a separate feed container that the birds can choose to feed at. You can use empty plastic margarine tubs or similar containers.
- Chicks require 2.5 centimetres (one inch) of space per bird at the feeder.
- Use flat containers for feed in addition to the feeder (ex: plastic container lids or egg cartons).
- Feeders must have feed at all times.
- Add a container of sand when birds are four to six weeks old or if/when the birds are let outside.
- Check at least twice a day to ensure there is adequate water and feed.
- As the birds get older, raise the height of the feeders.
- Eventually, eliminate the hand feeding, and just use the self feeder. Make sure it always has feed.
- If the birds are for egg production, switch from grower feed rations to layer feed rations at 19 weeks.
- If the plan is to butcher the birds, remove the feed from them eight to 10 hours before they go to slaughter.



Eggs

If the hens are for egg production, they should start laying at around six to eight months. Switch from grower feed rations to layer feed rations at 19 weeks.

- Provide a box at least 0.1 square meters (one square foot) for nesting, with one nest per four hens. Use clean straw or shredded paper and replace it often. You can compost the used nest material.
- Check daily for eggs.
- Write the date on each egg so the oldest can be used first.
- Keep eggs in the refrigerator until used.
- Do not eat uncooked eggs.
- You can crush and compost the shells.

Additional Feeds

Chickens must have a steady, formulated grain diet for healthy growth and egg production. However, the following can also be added:

- greens (ex: grass, weeds and especially clover) one handful a day
- grass or plants that have gone to seed
- fresh table scraps (ex: bread crusts, fruit, vegetable peelings)
- fish or fish remains but not two weeks before slaughter as it can affect the taste of the birds
- wild rice

Grazing Birds

- At six weeks, the birds can be let outside to graze in a fenced in cage attached to the chicken house.
- When first grazing the birds, start with 15 minutes per day and increase to 30 minutes per day.
- Eventually open the door in the morning and put them back in by dark.
- To optimize access to fresh grazing material, a mobile cage can be built. (See photo)

Predators

- Keeping the building free of holes and cracks means mice and other small rodents will be less of a problem.
- If doors, windows and vents are kept covered with screen and chicken wire, it will reduce nuisance from bugs and wild birds.



- Chickens left unattended in outside cages, especially overnight, are more likely to be attacked by dogs, minks, hawks, etc.
- If dogs or other animals are around, supervision will be necessary to control these predators.

Daily Routine

- Check twice a day and collect any eggs.
- Provide fresh, room-temperature water daily.
- Clean the waterer if required.
- Replenish feed as required.
- Clean feeder and keep feed available 24 hours a day.
- Check for temperature and ventilation.
- Remove and burn or bury dead birds.
- Maintain proper light.

Preparing for Butcher

- Keep track of the amount of feed to predict when it is time to butcher the birds.
- Stop feeding fish to the birds two weeks before slaughter. Pick cooler days for butchering.
- Larger birds may be butchered earlier than the rest.
- Remove all feed from birds eight to 10 hours before slaughter. Catch birds at night while roosting and place in smaller pen or box for easy catch next day.
- Birds eating greens will have yellow fat.



After Butchering

- Clean all feeders with soap. Rinse with a mixture of water and household disinfectant (ex: bleach). Then rinse with clear water and let them air dry.
- Clean all manure out of building (can use for compost or garden fertilizer) and disinfect it with mild bleach. Use a mixture of 15 millilitres (one tablespoon) bleach with 4.5 litres (one gallon) water.
- Let the building dry out completely before preparing it for more birds.

Safe Food Handling

- Wash hands before preparing food.
- Use clean utensils and non-porous cutting-boards.
- Avoid cross-contamination from raw chicken to other food and surfaces.
- Use a thermometer to check meat is fully cooked.
- The temperature in the thickest part should be:

whole chicken	85°C (185°F)
poultry parts	74°C (165°F)
- Refrigerate or freeze leftovers immediately.
- Wash utensils and cutting-boards with soap and rinse with a mixture of water and bleach. Let them air dry.



Cost of production for 60 chickens in 2012

Chicks	60	\$ 1.98	\$ 118.80
Starter	2 bags	\$12.50	25.00
Finisher	21 bags	\$11.50	\$241.50
Oyster shell	1 bag	\$14.00	\$14
Brooder lamp	1	\$30.00	\$30
Light bulb	1 & 1 extra	\$21.00	\$21
Waterer	1 X 27 litre (6 gallon)	\$60.00	\$60
Feeder	1 x 16 kgs (35 lbs)	\$50.00	\$50
Roll of wire	1 m X 15 m (4 ft x 50 ft)	\$31.00	\$31
Total	60 birds		\$591.30
Total cost	Per bird		\$9.86
Freight for supplies on winter road*	590 kgs/3 or 197 (1300lbs/3 or 435)	\$.35/kg \$.16/lb	\$69.70
Total Cost not including storage, building costs or freight for the chicks			\$661total or \$11/bird

* This is an example only. You will need to substitute an actual freight cost depending on location.

Premises Identification

Legislation now requires producers to identify their operations, if they are raising livestock or poultry. It allows authorities to track livestock and poultry to their original geographic locations if it is needed in an emergency. The term 'premises identification' refers to an official method used to identify a parcel of land where livestock or poultry are grown, kept, assembled or disposed of.

Some of the advantages of premises identification include:

- allows rapid notification of livestock and poultry stakeholders in the event of an emergency
- helps prepare for animal health emergencies such as flood, fire or disease
- reduces the impact of an emergency

All information collected in the Premises Identification Program is kept confidential and can only be used for emergency management. There is no cost to producers.

For applications/ information on the program:

- visit your local MAFRI Growing Opportunities Office
- email: traceability@gov.mb.ca
- go to: manitoba.ca/agriculture/pid

Other links:

- www.gov.mb.ca/agriculture/livestock/poultry/bba04s00.html
- www.bergshatchery.com/