CC56-131 Poultry Profit Pointers: Raising Chicks

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Poultry Profit Pointers

Raising Chicks

EXTENSION SERVICE
UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE
AND U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
COOPERATING
W. V. LAMBERT, DIRECTOR
RAISING CHICKS

Elvin C. Schultz

Housing

An ideal housing unit should provide the following:

1. Adequate floor space. There should be at least 1/2 square foot per chick for the first six weeks. Allow one square foot per chick if birds are to be confined until ten weeks of age.

2. Ventilation without drafts. Opening windows from the top on one side of the house, preferably the south side, will usually provide adequate ventilation without drafts.

3. Protection. Chicks need protection from sudden changes in temperature, from rats and other animals, and from birds. The roof should not leak; the house should not have cracks in the walls; the doors should also fit tightly; and the windows should be covered with 3/4" wire netting. Insulated walls and ceiling save brooding fuel and protect against sudden weather changes.

4. Light. Provide enough light for chicks to find feed and water. Good lighting will also help to prevent crowding.
Preparing for Chicks

Clean the brooder house thoroughly. Scrub the floor, lower part of walls and all equipment with hot lye water. (one ounce per gallon of water). When dry, spray the walls and floors with a good disinfectant. This should all be done several days before chicks arrive.

If possible, provide clean ground around the brooder house. Make necessary arrangements to move pullets to range when birds are 8 to 10 weeks of age, weather permitting.

Cover the floor of the brooder house with at least 2 inches of litter that will absorb moisture. Coarsely crushed corn cobs, shavings, chopped straw or commercial litter may be used.

Place a chick guard around the brooder and use a 15-watt light to keep the chicks nearer the heat and also to prevent piling in corners. Corrugated cardboard about 12 inches in height is satisfactory. Have the guard long enough to encircle the brooder, with about 2 feet from edge of brooder to the guard.

Provide one inch of feeder space per chick for the first three weeks and two to three inches of feeder space from three to twelve weeks of age.

Provide plenty of watering space. From one day to three weeks, allow two one-gallon water fountains per 100 chicks. In general, 100 chicks will consume half as many gallons of water daily as they are weeks of age.
Brooding Chicks

Many kinds of brooders will do a satisfactory job of keeping chicks warm. When using an oil brooder, allow seven square inches of hover space. Allow ten square inches of space per chick with a gas or electric brooder. In general, limit the capacity of the brooder to 350 chicks.

The brooder should be installed and operating properly at least two days before the chicks arrive. The floor under the brooder stove should be covered with a fire-resistant material. Sand placed under the brooder two inches deep makes an ideal cover and is also a good litter.

Operate the brooder at 95°F. during the first week. Lower the temperature about 5°F. each week until birds are put on range, or until temperature reaches 60°F.

Start the heat lamps about 18 inches above the floor, and then raise and lower them according to the chicks' comfort.
Gradually increase the area enclosed by the draft shield by moving it back six to twelve inches each several days. At the end of two weeks the draft shield or guard can be removed entirely.

Use all-night lights, equivalent to 15 watts per 200 square feet of floor space, to help prevent pile-ups.

Feeding Chicks

Start the chicks on a balanced ration containing 18 to 20 percent protein. For the first few days keep the feeders full. This will help the chicks to find the feed. From then on the feeders need to be filled only half full to prevent wastage of feed.

It is helpful to sprinkle some feed on egg case cup flats or paper plates to get the chicks started eating.

Provide one grit feeder for every 100 chicks. Use chick-size grit.

Increase the number and size of the feeders as the chicks grow. Allow 2 to 4 inches of feeder space per bird at 6 to 12 weeks of age.

At about 6 weeks of age the chicks can be changed from a starter ration to a grower ration.
Provide two Mason jar waterers per 100 chicks at the start. Plenty of watering space is essential in getting chicks off to a satisfactory start. After several weeks it is advisable to use larger type waterers.

The chicks should be fed not more than twice each day. If more feeding is necessary, it is advisable to put in more feeders and waterers.

Be sure to store the feed where it is protected from the weather, rats and other animals, and birds. The storage place should be dry and if possible located near the chicks to save labor of carrying the feed to the feeders.

Feeding of chicks requires sound management practices. Feed costs make up about 65% of the total cost of production.