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CC143 Poultry Profit Pointers: Choosing Your Baby Chicks

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Where to Buy Them

The successful poultryman is very careful in buying chicks, and in selecting birds for his breeding or laying flock. Well-bred stock will do quite well even when conditions are poor, but poor stock will not pay under the best conditions.

Be sure the flock from which you obtain your chicks is a healthy, disease-free producing flock. This can be determined by progeny records. Buy your chicks from a reputable breeder or hatcheryman who is noted for honesty and square dealing in his own community.

Look for the Best

Some characteristics of good quality chicks:

1. Free from pullorum disease. Breeders, both females and males, should be tested and all reactors removed.

2. Vigorous—reflected in a full, bright eye; long, downy fluff that is not sticky; plump, well-filled sheinks.

3. Well-healed umbilicus, indicating good yolk absorption.

4. Weigh eight pounds or more per 100 chicks at 24 hours.

5. Intensive pigmentation in shank and beak, indicating good nutrition during the prehatch period. (This applies only to chicks of the yellow-shanked varieties.)

6. Representative of the breed and variety best suited for use intended.

For market production, buy chicks from high egg-producing stock.

For market poultry production, select chicks for rapid growth, rapid feathering, and good meat quality.
Your Baby Chicken

Elvin C. Schultz

The Types and Breeds

The type or breed depends upon the purpose intended—eggs, meat, or both. Buy the type or breed that most nearly satisfies local market conditions as well as personal preference. Each breed or strain of chickens has both advantages and disadvantages.

Terms that indicate kind of breeding are:
- **Crossbred**—first generation poultry, chicks, or eggs produced by crossing two different breeds or varieties, or first-generation combinations of breeds or varieties.
- **Inbred line**—a group of inbred chicks resulting from breeding closely related poultry and in which the individuals have an average coefficient of inbreeding of 37.5% (equivalent to two generations of brother-sister matings).
- **In-crossbred**—first generation poultry, chicks, or eggs produced by crossing two inbred lines, first-generation combinations of inbred lines, or an inbred line with a first-generation combination of inbred lines.
- **Strain**—poultry bearing a given name produced through at least five generations of closed flock breeding.
- **Hybrid chickens**—the progeny produced by crossing inbred lines of different breeds and varieties.

The Federal Trade Commission has this to say about the use of the term hybrid chicken: “In the interest of avoiding deception of purchasers and prospective purchasers, industry members desiring to use the term ‘hybrid’ as descriptive of such chicks and hatching eggs, shall in addition, confine the use thereof to establish industry products obtained by crossing different breeds, varieties, strains, or lines, and shall qualify the word ‘hybrid’ by stating in immediate conjunction therewith the type of cross used in the production of the industry product, such as ‘inbred linecross hybrid’ or ‘inbred hybrid’, ‘straincross hybrid’, etc.”
How Many to Start

Housing and equipment available may determine the number of chicks you can start. Provide at least 1 square foot of floor space for each two chicks up to six weeks of age. Provide 2½ to 3 square feet of floor space for each bird that is housed for laying.

For each mature pullet that you plan to house, start three straight-run chicks or one and one-half sexed pullets.

Be sure to provide plenty of watering and feeder space. Sanitary practices should be followed in the management of your chicks and your growing and laying flocks.

When to Start

It will take the birds between five and six months to grow into layers. Egg prices are usually highest in September, October, and November. Therefore, plan to start your chicks so they will be ready to lay well by that time.

Consider facilities and climate in deciding when to start your chicks. If you are raising replacement pullets for a caged operation or a large floor operation, it will be necessary to start chicks at various intervals during the year to fill the space left by the birds you have culled out. Provide the birds with a balanced ration, and avoid sudden changes in the feeding program.

Why Keep Records?

Egg producers, feed servicemen, and manufacturers need a gauge by which they can measure appetites and conditions of the layers as well as forecast needed changes in management. Records of daily feed consumption on the basis of 100
chicks, or 100 hens plus egg production, are considered the best barometer to measure and forecast these conditions.

Accurate records help the serviceman who is trying to prevent or find the cause of egg production slumps. The feed manufacturer needs these records to know how each strain and variety of chickens performs when each type of feed and feeding program is used as recommended.

Records of production, livability and feed conversion are of vital importance to the poultryman who is choosing chicks for his flock of layers or selecting broilers for the coming year.

The various random tests and progeny tests will be good guides in selecting the breeding stock for your poultry program.

Heredity and environment are very important factors in poultry production. Careful selection based upon heredity can be done before you select your chicks; the environment is primarily up to you to provide.

How to Feed Them

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 fill the feeders only half full to prevent wastage of feed.

Place several of the “cup type” egg case flats on the brooder floor and sprinkle mash on them. The chicks will pick at the feed and will start to eat more readily.

Feed not more than twice each day. If more feeding is necessary, put in more feeders.

Provide one grit feeder for every 100 chicks. Use chick-size grit.
Are you ready for your chicks?

Have brooder house thoroughly cleaned and disinfected.

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.

Be sure brooder is operating satisfactorily before chicks are placed under it. Allow 1 square foot of space for each two chicks.

Place a chick guard around the brooder to keep chicks from piling in corners.

Provide 1 inch of feeder space per chick for the first three weeks and 2 to 3 inches of feeder space when chicks are three to twelve weeks of age.

Provide plenty of watering space. Two one-gallon water fountains are needed per 100 chicks from one day to three weeks of age.

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