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EC1401 Baby Chicks - Their Care and Feed

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POULTRY HUSBANDRY EXTENSION WORK
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The University of Nebraska College of Agriculture
U. S. Department of Agriculture Cooperating
W. H. Brokaw, Director

BABY CHICKS - THEIR CARE AND FEED
H. M. Wells, Extension Poultry Husbandman

The essentials for successful chick raising are, good healthy vigorous breeding stock, well hatched chicks, good feeding practice and good management. If the chicks are subject to faulty incubation and improper brooding, the breeding stock and the feeding methods may be of the best, yet we may have trouble in raising the chicks. Again if the proper ingredients for the building of bone and flesh are lacking in the feed, neither breeding nor care will give the best results.

Our breeding stock for the production of hatching eggs should preferably consist of vigorous yearling hens mated to strong vigorous cockerels. Eggs from such matings with careful incubation will produce strong lively chicks.

ARTIFICIAL BROODING

Hovers

The most important essential of a good brooder is that it supply a warm temperature requirement. Further than that the brooder is nothing more than a comfortable poultry house for little chicks. That part of the brooder which is kept especially warm is known as the hover.

One type of brooder which has become very popular in recent years is the coal burning brooder. These brooders have also been adapted so that oil burners or gas may be used for fuel.

A brooder house that is roomy, well ventilated and free from drafts is also desirable. Very often it is possible to remodel an old chicken house or the farm building or to build a house that can be used both as a colony brooder house or a breeding house.

Care of Chicks

When the chicks are placed under a hover, the brooder should be operated for two or three days so as to have the heat regulated and properly warmed up. Be sure a uniform heat is supplied both day and night, especially at night. If the heat is allowed to go down during the night the chicks will pile up and crowd so they will be trampled on and die. The others will become overheated and in the morning when they are allowed out in a cooler temperature, will become chilled. This is one of the causes of brooder pneumonia and diarrhea.

Place a litter on the floor, of either alfalfa or hay cut fine, and around the base of the heater to the edge of the deflector a layer of sand about an inch deep. The sand will hold the heat which is deflected down. When the chicks are from 24 to 36 hours old and thoroughly dried off, they should be removed to the brooder in the evening. The temperature under the hover should preferably be maintained at about 100° for three or four days and gradually lowered five degrees a week. These temperature suggestions apply when the thermometer is hung on the outside edge of the hover about one inch above the floor.

Use twelve inch hardboard cloth or a strip of roofing paper about a foot high to keep the chicks confined close to the hover during the first two or three days, so they will know the source of heat, and can run to it when they become chilled. After the third day, gradually enlarge their run so that by the end of the week or ten days they will have more exercising space.

During February and March and perhaps the first week of April, the chicks should not be let out doors until they are ten days or two weeks old, and then only on pleasant days during the warm part of the day for an hour or so. They will have to be watched at first so they will not stand around and become chilled. After they have learned to run back into the house to get warm the yard space can be made larger. The later hatched chicks can be let out on the ground after the fourth or fifth day in the brooder.

NATURAL BROODERS

Where the hen is used to brood chicks she should be confined in an "A" shaped coop or some small brooder coop under a shelter for at least two weeks until the chicks are strong enough to follow her. If the hen is allowed to run with the chicks as soon as they are hatched, they are apt to become chilled or may be kept on the go too much of the time and become tired and exhausted. A litter should be provided as suggested above.

FEEDING PRACTICE

The first eighteen hours in the brooder the chicks should be fed nothing but slightly warmed sour milk or buttermilk and a little fine grit or sand. The following day they should be given a light feeding of either bread crumbs with chopped egg, johnny cake, a commercial chick feed, or equal parts of fine cracked corn and cracked wheat. By putting the grains on a board, the chicks will see it more readily and will soon know what to look for. Feed little and often, but do not overfeed. The next four or five days, give them four feedings of fine cracked grains or a good sweet clear commercial chick feed, scattered in the litter. When the chicks are seven days old, a dry mash should be fed and green feed such as sprouted oatstops or alfalfa should be supplied.

There are a number of commercial dry mashes available at reasonable prices which are prepared especially for the development and growth of baby chicks. The following dry mash which may be mixed at home may be used with good results:

- 2 parts bran
- 2 " shorts
- 2 " cornmeal
- 1 part ground oats (sifted)
- 1 " meat scrap "

If buttermilk or sour skimmilk is available, it may very well be kept before them at all times, or at least until they are six weeks old.

Feed the chicks some good commercial feed, or equal parts fine cracked corn and cracked wheat, four times daily until they are two weeks old. After this, the commercial chick feed should be changed to a coarser grain ration of medium cracked corn and cracked wheat and fed only three times a day.

WEANING CHICKS

Chicks at ten weeks of age should need no heat during the night, provided the temperature has been lowered five degrees a week as previously suggested. The cockerels should be separated from the pullets, and the cockerels that promise to develop into good breeders should be banded, while the others should be put in a separate pen, fattened and sold as broilers. This will give the pullets more room and will insure quicker growth and earlier maturity. The following suggestions will summarize the essentials for successful chick raising:

1. Do not feed chicks until they are at least 48 hours old.
2. Feed buttermilk or skimmilk for first feeds if possible.
3. Keep drinking vessels clean.
4. Feed only clean sweet chick feeds.
5. Keep chicks busy.
6. Feed green feed in small amounts.
7. Feed early and late.
8. Keep brooder temperature regulated so chicks will not chill over night.
9. Allow chicks out of doors as soon as possible.
10. Feed all the sour milk or buttermilk they will drink.
11. Grit and oyster shells are necessary.