

Home Production of Broiler Chickens

Raising chickens at home for broiler meat has become increasingly popular. It is a means of producing high quality, nutritious chicken meat. Home-raised chickens are often times older when butchered than those available at the supermarkets. Because they are older, the chickens are usually larger and the flavor is considered by many to be better. But remember, broiler chickens normally can not be produced at home as economically as they can be purchased at the supermarket.

Before starting broiler production, several items should be checked:

1. Do zoning laws permit raising poultry at your residence?
2. Is the necessary housing and equipment available?
3. Are the facilities strategically located to prevent noise, odor, and fly nuisance for you and your neighbors?
4. Is there someone available daily and willing to care for the chickens?
5. Is a family member able to butcher the chickens or is there a processing facility near by?
6. Is there ample freezer space available for storage?
7. Are there neighbors interested in buying your “home grown” chickens?

To begin the enterprise, you will need:

1. Housing – clean, dry, draft-free space (approximately 1.5 square feet per broiler).
2. Equipment – a heat source, a brooder guard, waterers, feeders, a fan and litter (bedding).

BEFORE THE CHICKS ARRIVE

Remove all dirt and old litter from the house. Sweep the floor, walls, and ceiling. Wash the house out thoroughly using a pressure nozzle, a lot of water and “elbow grease.” Repair the windows, doors, screens and ventilators to prevent drafts and keep out predators. Use a disinfectant to disinfect the building and all the equipment.

Cover the dry floor with 4 inches of dry litter. Use shavings, sawdust, or other available clean, dry material as litter. Put a brooder guard around the heat source, feeders, and waterers. Place the feeders and waterers around the heat source so the heat is in the middle of the circle. Adjust the temperature to 95 degrees F. about 2 inches above the litter several hours before the chicks arrive. Fill feeders and waterers at the same time.

Prepared by William J. Owings, Extension Poultry Specialist, Iowa State University, March 1995, Ames.

EQUIPMENT NEEDS

An electric or gas brooder will be needed for a heat source. Use one 250 Watt heat lamp/50 chicks. Always use two lamps in case one burns out. Feeders of various sizes will be needed. Use smaller feeders for the younger chicks and replace them with larger ones as the chicks grow. This helps reduce feed wastage. Allow 1 inch of feeder space per chick to 4 weeks, 2 inches to 8 weeks, and 3 inches to 16 weeks.

Start the chicks on small glass jar waterers. Have several of these inside the brooder ring. And the larger waterers as the chicks grow. Leave the older style waterers in the ring for several days so that the chicks can adjust to the new waterers. Allow .25 inches of waterer space per chick for the first 2 weeks, .5 inches per chick from 2 to 8 weeks and 1 inch from 6 to 16 weeks.

A brooder guard can be made of cardboard or other stiff material and set up around the chicks for the first 7 to 10 days. Litter (bedding) can be dry and clean wood shaving, sawdust, straw, crushed corncobs or shredded paper. If the broilers are allowed out-of-doors, be sure and include sturdy fencing to keep the broilers confined and predators out, especially dogs.

WHEN TO START

The best time, in Iowa, to raise broilers is from April to October. The heat requirements and weather present fewer problems. Broiler-type chicks are more available from hatcheries at this time also. It takes about 6 to 8 weeks to produce a broiler-fryer type chicken (3.5 – 6.5 lb.). The chickens will have a dressed carcass weight of 70-75% of the live weight. In considering when to start the chicks be sure to consider the daily labor available, especially during the first 3 weeks when they will require the most attention. Plan the family vacation ahead of time to avoid any conflicts when it's time to butcher.

WHAT KIND OF CHICKENS SHALL I GET?

The best type of chicken for meat production is the Cornish-Rock cross, a very fast growing and a heavy-type chicken. The cost will vary from 60-75 cents per chick depending on the source, type and whether they are straight-run (mix of males and females), all males, or all females. They can be obtained in Iowa through chick stores, directly from hatcheries, or ordered by mail.

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WHAT ABOUT FEED?

Feed is usually the most expensive production cost with broilers. A complete feed is the most expensive. Using a protein concentrate mixed with home-grown grain will reduce the costs. Commercial broiler producers use a two – or three- diet sequence, such as, 24 percent protein, 0-2 weeks; 22 percent, 2-5 weeks; and 19 percent 5-8 weeks. A single 20 percent protein feed from 0-8 weeks should be adequate for most home flocks. The broilers will consume 2-2.5 pounds of feed per pound of gain during an 8 to 9 week growing period. Feed wastage must be controlled to keep the feed to gain ratio less than 2.5.

OTHER MANAGEMENT CONSIDERATIONS

If you have had problems with Marek's disease, you can have the chicks vaccinated for this disease at the hatchery. It costs approximately 10 cents per chick extra to have this done. It will reduce the mortality from this disease and also reduce the number of "poor-doing" broilers.

A coccidiostat should be included in a medicated feed to prevent coccidiosis, a disease of young chickens. Some coccidiostats must be removed from the feed several days prior to butchering, other coccidiostats do not need to be removed. Check the feed tag or coccidiostat label in order to make sure the proper withdrawal time, if necessary, is adhered to.

The cannibalistic nature of chickens is increased by overcrowding, improper ventilation (air movement), barn temperature, and insufficient feeder or waterer space. If cannibalism cannot be controlled with proper management of these factors, the beaks of the broilers can be trimmed at any age. Beak trimming involves removing a portion of the upper mandible (beak) with a hot blade.

Poor air movement in small poultry houses during hot, humid weather can result in excessive broiler mortality, especially when the broilers are approaching market weight. Placing fans in the house to blow air past the chickens will reduce mortality from this problem greatly.

During the growing period, check the broilers for external parasites (mites, lice, ticks). Certain chemicals can be used directly on the chickens to control the parasites and also to spray the premises.

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HOME BROILER PRODUCTION COSTS

100 BROILERS – EXAMPLE

<u>ITEM</u>	<u>COST</u>	<u>RANGE OF COSTS</u>
Chicks (100 @ \$65.00)	\$65.00	\$60.00 - \$75.00
Miscellaneous (heat, litter, disinfectant)	\$12.00	
Feed (11 lbs/broiler, \$.14/lb)	\$154.00	\$121.00 - \$180.00
Subtotal (96 broilers remain at 5 lb/broiler, 480 lbs.)	\$231.00	\$193.00 – \$267.00
Per lb., subtotal	\$.48	\$.40 - .56
Processing (\$.15 - \$1.55/head, use \$1.35)	\$129.60	\$ 14.40 – \$155.00
Total Cost	\$360.60	\$207.40 - \$422.00
Total Cost/lb	\$.75	\$.43 - .88

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