

HOW TO PRODUCE POULTRY FOR SHOW

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A successful poultry exhibitor must:

1. Observe all show rules and regulations governing the purchasing and showing of broilers and turkeys.
2. Use top-quality feeds.
3. Follow recommended management practices during the entire brooding and growing period.
4. Cull birds closely and select the show entry properly.
5. Never brood or raise turkeys with or near other domestic fowl.

Housing

Any type of building that is **clean, dry**, and well **ventilated** will serve as a good rearing facility for poultry. A brooder or heat lamps to warm the birds, and feeding and watering equipment is essential.

Space is critical. Provide at least two square feet of floor space per broiler and at least 7-10 square feet per turkey. Openings on three sides of the building provides plenty of fresh air for the birds. Louvers or plastic sheeting can be used to close sides during brooding and in cold weather. The roof overhang should be sufficient to effectively protect against blowing rain.

Clean and sanitize the house, feeders, and waterers at least two weeks before chicks/poults arrive. Wash the house down with soap and water. Then spray a commercial disinfectant (bleach) on the floor and walls (3 cups bleach to 1 gallon of water). Make sure this is done in advance so the house will have time to dry and air out.

Litter

Make sure that the house is completely dry and free of fumes before putting the litter down. Place at least 4 inches of litter on the floor. Wood shavings, cane fiber, peanut hulls, rice hulls, or washed sand, all make good litters. The litter should be covered with a burlap sack or some other type of rough material to prevent eating of the litter during the brooding period. The litter needs to be stirred on a regular basis to prevent packing and caking of the litter. Breast blisters are caused from the hard, damp places in the litter.

Brooding

Be prepared for the chicks/poults two days ahead of time. Construct a brooder guard to keep the birds near heat, water, and feed. The brooder guard can be constructed of cardboard, tin or during hot parts of the year, chicken wire (3/4-inch mesh poultry netting). The brooder guard should be 18-24 inches high and must be a minimum of 5 feet in diameter for 50 birds. For turkeys, you may need to have a top cover to prevent the birds from jumping out of the brooder circle. When chicks are 7-10 days old, remove the guard and allow the birds full run of the pen. Since the birds are use to a circle formation, putting cardboard or poultry netting in the corners of the house would be beneficial to prevent or reduce pilling up. Fright, drafts, or low temperatures can cause pilling up.

During the first few weeks of life, chicks and poults need a dependable source of artificial heat. Electric heat lamps (infrared bulbs) are good heat sources for brooding chicks. Two 125-watt bulbs per 50 chicks are recommended. Fasten lamps securely so they cannot fall into the litter and cause fire damage. The lamps should hang 18-24 inches from the litter. The lamps can be raised or lowered depending on temperature conditions. Waterers and feeders should be placed adequately away from heat lamps.

Important: The rearing facilities should be ready two days ahead of time. Brooder guard, bedding, and feeding equipment should be in place. The heat lamps should be turned on. This is to warm the facilities and make sure everything is working properly.

If gas or an electric hover-type brooder is used, it should operate at a temperature of approximately 92ⁿ - 95ⁿ F. Each week, reduce the temperature 5ⁿ until the birds are four weeks old or until the house temperature reaches 70ⁿ F.

When chicks are comfortable, they will bed down in a semicircle around the perimeter of the heat zone. If cold, chicks will huddle under the heat source. This will cause death of the birds buried underneath. If hot, they will move to the outer limits of the brooder guard. Watch for signs of overheating (panting, wings spread or crowding against brooder guard), as it is easy to let birds get too warm. Chilling can stunt a bird's growth and heat can affect feathering, flock uniformity, fleshing and finish. Proper temperature control is essential to proper growth of the birds.

After birds are four weeks old and fully feathered, heat is seldom needed. Some exhibitors tend to keep their birds much too warm. Older birds, especially in hot temperatures, may require mechanical ventilation for cooling.

Lighting

Broilers should be provided with all-night lighting. Twenty-four hours of light (natural and artificial) improves feathering and increases weight, especially during the summer months. Hang a 40-watt bulb at least 6 feet above broilers after removing heat lamps. Broilers should have twenty-four hour lighting, from day one to show time. **Turkeys** should have twenty-four hour lighting for the first three weeks. After three weeks, turkeys should have 18-20 hours of lighting and 4-6 hours of darkness. The 4-6 hours of darkness should be in 1 ½ -2 hour increments. This will stimulate the turkeys to get up, move around and eat and drink.

At 12 weeks of age, check your turkey hens. At this point in their life cycle, long day length periods stimulate them into early egg production. This damages fleshing and finish, reducing their attractiveness as show birds. To trigger this phase it will depend on their maturity level and surrounding environment. Not all flocks mature during the same time frame due to outside conditions.

Prior to the onset of egg production, most hens go through a "heat period" in which they will "squat" in front of anything that moves. Once this squatting behavior has occurred, confine all hens in complete

darkness. The sooner the birds are confined, the more effective the darkness will be. You will be able to tell what you need to do with your own flock.

Keep turkey toms on the 18-20 hour light and 4-6 hour dark lighting schedule till show time.

Feed and Water Equipment

During brooding period, pie pans are used to feed baby chicks and poults to allow for easy access to feed. A few large marbles placed in the waterers and on top of the feed in the feeders often help teach the birds to drink and eat. Smashed hard-boiled eggs or white oatmeal sprinkled lightly over the feed once or twice a day for the first 3-5 days also helps the birds to start eating. **This can be overdone.** Be careful on the amount you use, the birds will prefer the eggs or oatmeal over the regular feed. Also avoid spilling the feed on the floor, since this may cause the birds to eat the litter. That is why the burlap sack or something similar is used during the brooding period.

Hanging tube-type feeders give better results than trough type feeders. Tube feeders can be easily adjusted to proper height as birds grow. There is also less waste of feed with the hanging feeders. If tube feeders are to be used, have them available during the brooding phase for the birds to get use to. Stir feed 2-4 times per day to increase feed consumption and growth. **Birds respond to attention.**

Gallon plastic waterers should be made readily available during the brooding period. Make it that the birds literally have to bump into them as they walk around the pen. After two weeks of age, gallon plastic waterers will not be able to supply enough water to the growing birds. So, 5 gallon waterers or automatic hanging bowl waterers should replace the plastic 1 gallon waterer. **Remember that fresh water is the most important nutrient in a birds life.** Not only is it fresh, but birds tend to get up and drink when the water has been changed.

Remember that the feeders and waterers should never be more than 6 feet apart. This insures easy access and availability to the food and water. The feeders and waterers should also be kept level to the bird's back. This allows them to consume the water and feed properly. They will not as likely choke on the feed.

Feeding Broilers

Good quality feed is your number one priority. Optimum performance of broilers depends on proper nutrition. Acco, Ful-o-Pep, Purina, and Nutrena are all top quality broiler feeds. (Feed Company names and new feed brands are being developed every day. References to trade feed names is in no way promoting any one product over the other.) The feed dealer that carries the brand of feed you choose, should be informed of the type of feed required at least two weeks in advance to insure fresh feed availability. Fresh feed should smell and look fresh. A good show ration would be feeding a high protein (26-30%) turkey or game bird starter to stimulate additional growth. Feed the high protein feed for three to four weeks of age. After four weeks of age a finisher ration with higher energy content and 21-23% protein level is fed. Furthermore, make sure to see if the feed you are feeding is a medicated feed, and if so, check the withdrawal time. Withdrawal time is the amount of time needed for a medication to work it's way through the animals system before slaughter.

Feeding Turkeys

As like broilers, turkeys also need a good quality feed to reach optimum performance. Acco, Ful-o-Pep, Purina, and Nutrena are all top quality turkey feeds. (Feed Company names and new feed brands are being developed every day. References to trade feed names is in no way promoting any one product over the other.) The feed dealer that carries the brand of feed you choose, should be informed of the type of feed required at least two weeks in advance to insure fresh feed availability. Fresh feed should smell and look fresh. Turkeys require high protein rations. A turkey starter or game bird feed with a 28-30% protein concentration is usually successful. The turkey starter or game bird feed can be fed from start to finish. However, you can also change to a grower/finisher the last four weeks till show time.

Feed particle size is important in the nutrition of young turkeys. Crumbles are good because there is little or no separation of feed ingredients. Heat required for pelleting increases digestibility; therefore, poult's consume more while wasting less feed. Furthermore, make sure to see if the feed you are feeding is a medicated feed, and if so, check the withdrawal time. Withdrawal time is the amount of

time needed for a medication to work it's way through the animals system before slaughter.

Broilers and Turkeys

Small amounts of feed mixed with cooking oil or milk and fed several times during the day will stimulate older birds to eat more and increase growth. This supplemental feeding practice is referred to as **mushing** birds and can be particularly beneficial in hot weather. **Caution:** Do not moisten feed until right before feeding time. Do not put more wet feed out than what they will eat in 10-15 minutes. Have enough pans out that all birds can eat at one time.

Start mushing broilers at 3-4 weeks of age until show time. As for turkeys, start mushing the birds at two weeks old until show time.

To prevent and reduce leg weakness, an adequate level of vitamins in the diet is needed. An adequate vitamin intake can be ensured and leg problems minimized by adding water-soluble poultry vitamins and electrolytes to drinking water at the recommended level of the manufacturer for the **first seven days**. Do not add vitamins and electrolytes past this period because it can create health problems.

Flock Health

Medications should not be given unless the birds are sick or stressed. If medication is needed, make sure to look and see what the withdrawal time is, especially close to show time.

Turkey poult's should be vaccinated for fowl pox at 8-10 weeks of age.

Parasites are seldom a problem where broilers and turkeys are properly managed and sanitary conditions maintained. On a monthly basis check birds for parasites. Pay particular attention to the vent (tail) area. If a problem does arise, applications of Seven Dust on the effected area, as well as on the body of the bird, will control the problem. Putting Seven Dust in the litter and around the perimeter will control the parasites, as well as ants.

Make sure the house is free of mice, rats, and birds. These rodents often carry disease and they can spread disease to your show birds.

Feather Picking and Cannibalism

Snub the top of the bird's beaks if feather picking or cannibalism starts. Do not de-beak birds younger than 14 days of age and do not make any management changes for 72 hours following de-beaking. Trim one-third of the upper beak with an electric beak Snubber.

"Vicks" vapor rub or an anti-peck compound applied to the bloody spots will usually stop cannibalism if snubbing is not feasible or birds are too old. Providing tennis balls or hay bales in the house will also help reduce the problem. The birds will attack the tennis balls or hay, forgetting about their pen mates. In turkeys, de-snooding them will help the turkey toms in the future. De-snooding is simply removing the snood of the birds at one day old. It is simple and painless operation to remove the snood with the thumbnail and index finger.

Clipping toes on each foot of day-old birds is a common practice to prevent scratches or torn backs. The major disadvantage of this practice is that, when grown, the turkeys may have trouble keeping their balance.

Turkeys: Separating Sexes

When you ordered your turkeys, you purchased "straight-run" poults. Separate the sexes as soon as you are able to distinguish male from female. That may be at a week old or it may be around 6-8 weeks.

A male turkey often struts at one day of age, and continues to do so throughout his life. At approximately 5 weeks of age, fleshy cranicles begin to appear on the top of the toms heads. If you did not de-snood your poults at day old then a tubular leader or snood will develop on both males and females. Males have a large elastic snood, while females' snoods are smaller and non-elastic. Even if you de-snooded your poults, the males will have a shorter, but still somewhat an elastic snood.

The main advantage of separating toms from hens is that, toms fight less when hens are not present. Furthermore, the hens will be able to feed with more availability to the feeders away from the toms.

Culling

Culling of birds is done to reduce competition and disease and to improve performance. **Culling should be done on a continuous basis.** Cull for runty, unthrifty, sick, deformed and crippled birds.

Broilers should be severely culled at four weeks of age. Remove the smaller and poor fleshed birds. Keep two to three birds per each bird to be shown. Uniformity and finish will increase with more floor and feeder space per bird. **Turkeys** should be culled on a continuous basis as well. Severely cull the birds at 8-10 weeks of age. Remove those birds with conformation defects (back and breast abnormalities, poor breast width and taper, etc.). Again, keep two to three birds per each bird to be shown.

Important: Remove the cull birds immediately to another pen. This will insure that cull birds are not mixed with your good birds. Also, this will enable the good birds to start improving their growth.

Selection

Just prior to show, catch the remaining birds and select a well-fleshed uniform pen of broilers with at least one alternate per pen. As for selecting a turkey, select the bird that carries the most muscle, little or no taper and that is well-finished.

Examine both broilers and turkeys for physical defects that would cause them to be sifted at the shows.

These include:

1. General Defects
 - Breast blister
 - Broken or disjointed bones
 - Bruises (other than on wing tip)
 - Cuts and tears
 - External parasites
 - Insect bites
2. Conformation Defects
 - a. Breast bones which are:
 - Crooked
 - Dented
 - Knobby
 - "Rocker" keels (turkeys)
 - V-shaped
 - b. Backs which are:
 - Crooked (hunched)
 - Narrow
 - Roached (arched) or humped

3. Other

- Legs and wings that are deformed
- Lack of body depth
- Lack of finish
- Crooked toes and beaks are not important and should be disregarded

Uniformity on Broilers

The following factors should be considered when selecting your exhibition pen.

1. Conformation - 25%

- Length - Breastbone should be long, straight, free from defects and carry well forward and back between legs. Breastbone should be parallel to backbone.
- Width - The back should be long and wide.
- Depth - Body depth should be consistent with breast width. Length, width and depth should be well balanced.

2. Fleshing - 30%

- The breast, thighs, and drumsticks carry the bulk of the meat
- The breast meat is the most valued part of the broiler and should be given maximum consideration. The breast muscle should be wide throughout the length of the keel bone and carry well up to the crest of the bone. A dimpled breast is desirable.
- The thighs and drumsticks should be heavy muscled.

3. Uniformity - 30 %

- Each bird should be near a carbon copy of the other birds. The size, shape, fleshing, and finish should all be as close as possible. If one bird has a defect or severe difference from another bird it will affect the entire pen.
- There should be less than a ½ pound variation between each bird.

4. Finish - 10%

- Amount of fat in and immediately under the skin. The fat deposition between feather tracts on the side of the breast is the best indication of finish.

5. Skin Pigmentation - 5 %

- Only minor consideration should be placed on pigmentation. A yellow or yellow-orange color to the outer skin is desirable.

Turkey Selection

The following factors should be considered when selecting your turkey for show.

1. Conformation

- Length - Breastbone should be long, straight, free from defects and carry well forward and back between legs. Breastbone should be parallel to backbone.
- Width - The back should be long and wide.
- Depth - Body depth should be consistent with breast width. The body should be full and deep.

2. Fleshing

- The breast should resemble a large rectangle, which the breast width equals the body depth or thickness.
- The breast conformation should resemble a giant “U”.
- The breast should be wide and full near the front of the body and carry back the entire length of the keel bone. The breast should be as wide between the legs as at the widest part. The less taper the breast has the better. You do not want a “heart” shaped breast.
- The muscle should extend the entire length of the keel bone, with the flesh carrying well up to the crest of the breast bone and around the side of the back toward the back.

3. Finish

- Without a good fat cover, a well-fleshed bird loses eye appeal.

Handling and Transportation

After you have made your selection of your broiler pen or turkeys to take to the show, you will need to mark the birds in some manner. Leg bands, tape, cable ties or using a marker on the legs **only** are all ways to identify your birds. For turkey exhibitors make sure to get the wing band numbers for a back up.

Properly reared birds are usually clean. Washing your birds is not recommended. If the birds are dirty, it is usually underneath on the breast area. If you will take a pair of scissors and cut the dirty spots off, you will be much better off (Do not cut the entire feather off, just tips or none at all). Baby wipes also work well.

Carriers can be made of all types of materials. The cheapest is a large cardboard box. Boxes made of wood, wire, pvc pipe, etc. all can be constructed as well. It depends on what you want. In either case, at least 4 inches of litter should be put into the bottom of the carrier. Make sure there is plenty of ventilation available for the birds. If a cardboard box is used, cut air holes in the side of the box. If using a homemade carrier or cardboard box, a rolling cart is ideal for easy transportation from a vehicle to the show area. Never put more than five broilers in a box, less if space is available. Only one turkey should be in each box or carrier.

Avoid bruising the birds by hitting them against the carrier while putting them into or taking them out. Above all, do not drop the container. Handle the birds only when necessary and as slowly and gently as possible.

Important: Check for bruises, cuts and tears one last time before birds are presented to sifter or judge. Above all, keep your birds cool, dry, and happy.

References

“**Producing Turkeys for Show**”; Dr. Fred Thornberry, Professor and Extension Poultry Specialist, Texas A&M University.

“**How to Produce Turkeys for Show**”; Dr. William O. Cawley, Extension Poultry Specialist, Texas A&M University.

“**How to Produce Broilers for Show**”; Dr. Fred Thornberry, Professor and Extension Poultry Specialist, Texas A&M University.

“**Nutrition and Feeding of Show Poultry**”; Dr. Lee Cartwright, Associate Professor and Extension Poultry Specialist, Texas A&M University.

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