

# Broiler Production

LPM-00341

Of all the livestock produced in Alaska, broilers or fryers require the least amount of equipment and time for the meat produced. Most homeowners should have no problem in raising 25 birds for home use.

## What Kind of Chicks to Buy

When choosing chicks for broiler production, pick birds that will grow meat rapidly; thick, meaty thighs and breasts are especially desirable traits. You will want to select birds that have strong bones at an early age to carry the extra weight of this meat.

Commercial broilers are crossbreeds, usually involving White Cornish, White Plymouth Rock and, in some cases, the New Hampshire breeds. These breeds will attain a weight of 3½ to 4 pounds at eight weeks



Photo by Keith Weller, USDA Agricultural Research Service

on 8 to 10 pounds of feed. Some of the fast growing males will reach a weight of 3½ pounds at seven weeks.

## Brooding Chicks

Chicks may be brooded (artificially heated and cared for) by a variety of methods. A box brooder using a hover that gives 7 to 10 square inches per bird works well. A 250-watt heat lamp will be adequate for 50 chicks. Plans for various homemade brooders are available at your local Extension office.

### *Points to consider when brooding chicks:*

1. The brooder is best located outside the house due to odor and dust.
2. Brooder area should be cleaned and disinfected.
3. Ventilate freely but avoid drafts.
4. Shavings, chopped straw and peat moss (dried) make good litter. Sawdust can be eaten by small chicks and is not recommended as a litter source.
5. Start chicks at 95°F (temperature at 2 inches off of the floor). Drop the temperature 5 to 7 degrees each week. Discontinue heat at the end of the fifth week.

## Feeding Broilers

Feed is the largest cost item in broiler production, representing 60 to 75 percent of the total cost. A reasonable goal is to produce a 4-pound broiler on 9 to 10 pounds of feed. Some producers are able to achieve a feed conversion of 2.2 pounds of feed = 1 pound of gain.

Broilers should have a complete feed available at all times. A chick starter is used to get chicks off to a good

start (about ¼ pound per chick) and should contain a coccidiostat. A commercial broiler feed (grower) is recommended for use up to five weeks (approximately 2¾ pounds in addition to the special feed) and a finisher feed from five to eight weeks (about 5 to 6 pounds). Some growers use only broiler feed from chick stage to eight weeks with good results. Feed may be purchased as mash, crumbles or pellets. Crumbles or pellets usually give a better feed conversion, but may aggravate cannibalism problems. It is not recommended to mix your own feed for broiler production.

Some growers like to produce larger birds called roasters. These birds are usually fed to three to five months of age. These birds require considerable amounts of feed, and the conversion rate drops as the birds grow older.

### **Housing and Equipment — Points to Consider**

1. Most growers in Alaska buy chicks in the spring and grow the birds during warm weather. Some have even produced two flocks in a season. During summer, the housing requirements are minimal. A fenced area that has a shelter from

rain and wind is all that is needed. The fence should be built to keep the birds in and the predators out. Some growers have portable pens that can be moved around the homestead, thus eliminating the need for litter. Broilers need 1 square foot of space per bird.

2. If birds are kept in a broiler house they will need 4 to 6 inches of litter. Additional litter is added as needed. Shavings, peat moss and chopped straw all make satisfactory litter. Sawdust is not recommended. Clean out and replace litter after each group of birds.
3. Broilers need 1 linear inch of feeder space up to two weeks of age; 2 linear inches from two to six weeks; and 3 linear inches after six weeks. A hanging tube feeder is adequate for 25 to 30 birds. To reduce feed waste, raise the feeder level with the birds' backs.
4. Broilers need a 1-gallon capacity waterer up to two weeks of age for 50 birds and a 1-gallon capacity waterer at two to 10 weeks of age for 16 birds. Growing birds need fresh water at least twice each day.

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