



④ POULTRY NO. 13—REVISED 1974

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## Turkey Fryer-Roasters: Management

### Ordering Poults

Poults should be ordered from a hatchery stocking good disease-free breeder flocks from a national franchised breeder. Poults should be hatched from eggs dipped in antibiotics to control egg transmitted organisms. Day-old poult injection is another attempt to have clean disease-free poults delivered to your farm.

It is a real advantage to raise the hens and toms separately since their nutritional requirements differ and they will be marketed at different ages. It is easier to separate the sexes at the hatchery rather than later.

Toe clipping at the hatchery prevents back scratches when the birds climb over one another at the feeders and waterers or crowd during rearing and at loading. Toe clipping removes the inside and front toenail on each foot. To be sure that the toenail is completely removed requires the removal of the first joint of each toe.

Some growers like to have their toms desnooded. This is done at the hatchery by pinching the snood off with the thumb-nail and forefinger. Desnooding reduces the incidence of injury to fighting toms and may cut down the spread of erysipelas. Usually only toms going to range are desnooded.

### Brooding

Brooding should be done in a tight, well-insulated building with controlled ventilation. Before gas brooder stoves are started, all hoses and hose connections should be checked to make sure there are no gas leaks. The burners should be cleaned and adjusted to operate properly to give complete combustion.

Most turkey growers clean out their buildings thoroughly between each brood of turkeys. If you have experienced no disease problems in the brooder house you might just cover the old litter with some fresh litter without cleaning the building. If you plan to use old litter it should be stirred and dried between broods. Damp litter will give off ammonia when the brooder stoves warm up the building. The ammonia odor can become very strong and be harmful to the young poults. Good old litter has some nutritive value to the poult if it is eaten. It will not plug the digestive system like new shavings. Old litter will generate some heat that will help keep the top litter dry. Growers who use old litter must be very alert to detect possible outbreaks of coccidiosis or any similar problems in the new flock. It is usually advisable to start with a clean house and new litter. You should start out with enough litter to last the entire brooding period. Adding litter at a later date is more difficult. A good ventilation system properly operated should keep the litter dry.

After the litter is in place the stoves can be lowered, started, and final arrangements made for receiving the poults. Brooder guards should be placed around the stoves to confine the birds to the feed, water, and heat source. As many as four stoves can be enclosed within one ring. This arrangement is excellent for brooding but it does not give as good distribution of heat after the birds become older. It also tends to group waterers unless the automatic waterers used in brooding are moved to give better distribution later. The brooder guard should be placed so it makes a ring 10 feet in diameter if it goes around one stove or 20 feet if it goes around four stoves. Many growers make their rings too large and the poults wander away from the source of heat and get cold. A 15-watt bulb under the source of heat will help keep the day-old poults from piling at the brooder guards. For best results no more than 350 poults should be placed under each stove.

Feed and water should be placed at the edge of the comfort zone for the day-old poults. Paperboard egg flats work very well as feed holders the first few days. They are cheap and 6 to 8 flats should be used around each stove to get good feed distribution. Poults seem to learn to drink quicker out of a trough waterer than from jars. You may need both to obtain adequate water distribution the first few days. Automatic waterers should be used the first day. The fountain-type waterer requires too much labor to keep clean and filled. Water should be fresh when the poults arrive.

Poults should be taken out of the boxes beginning at the far end of the building. If boxes are to be removed from the building they should be taken out immediately. As the poults are placed under the stoves all traffic in that area should stop. If you start at the near end, then the traffic of carrying poults and returning boxes will be a constant distraction for the poults. Day-old poults should be given feed, water, a comfortable home, and then left alone. Too much attention will keep poults from finding the feed and water; they need to watch and learn from each other.

### Temperature

Day-old poults require a temperature of 95° F. at the start. They hatch in an incubator that is 98° to 100° F. In the hatchery they are held for 12 hours, and placed under the stress of sexing and toe clipping. They need a warm comfortable home. The room temperature should be 75° to 80° F., but 95° F. at poult level under the hover. This way poults can move in or out to choose the temperature they like best. The temperature can be lowered 5° per week until a temperature of 65° F. is reached. After the birds are 8 weeks old colder temperatures may be desirable to maintain ventilation—provided the birds are well feathered.

## **Pest and Parasite Control**

Rats can kill large numbers of day-old poults. Rats and mice will also eat a substantial amount of feed. Most brooder houses with dirt floors are not rodent proof so a good premise rodent control program is essential. Poison bait stations should be placed around the outside of the building and there should be no debris around to harbor rats. A dirt-floor building can be made rat proof by digging a trench 12 inches wide and 12- to 18 inches deep around the outside of the building. Fill this trench with ¾-inch rock. Rats will not dig through this rock barrier. Then of course all doors must be kept tightly shut.

Wild birds such as sparrows and starlings are disease carriers as well as feed consumers. They must be kept out. All openings should be covered with hardware cloth or fine wire mesh: this includes the air intakes as well as doors and windows.

Parasites such as lice, mites, and ticks are usually not a problem. But if you find external parasites be sure to use an approved pesticide and follow the label directions. If you use the wrong pesticide you may have residues in your turkeys and not be able to market them.

## **Daily Management**

A daily management schedule should be established in each building for the caretaker to follow. The most important chores should be first. His schedule should look like the following:

1. Check air condition as well as litter condition on entering the building.
2. Make necessary adjustments in ventilation and temperature.
3. Walk around entire building and pick up and record all dead birds and check bird conditions and comfort.
4. Properly dispose of dead birds and report daily losses to management.
5. Clean and disinfect all waterers.
6. Feed if necessary. All feeders should be checked.
7. Make all necessary repairs and adjust the height of feeders and waterers.
8. Remove or stir wet litter or excess accumulations of manure.
9. Clean entry way and prepare for the next day.

Good management allows a little extra time at the end of each day to get caught up and stay on schedule. A poor manager is always trying to catch up but never does and is always behind. Plan time to take care of the little things before they become major problems.

## **Light Management**

For best results turkeys should be raised in a windowless house with controlled lighting. Intermittent light with 2 hours of light and 4 hours of darkness around the clock gives the best growth. After the first week the light intensity can be reduced by only using 15-watt bulbs in the ceiling. This helps control cannibalism and reduces energy needs for lighting. Turkeys in some areas are raised essentially in the dark with good results. One problem with reduced lighting is that turkeys do not drive very well at time of loading. More time must be planned for loading because the turkeys will be very quiet and move very slowly.

## **Debeaking**

Debeaking controls feather picking and cannibalism. All confined birds and usually range birds are debeaked at about 10 days old. Remove the upper part of the beak halfway between the tip and the nostrils with an electric debeaker. Never remove more than this, especially when birds are to go to range. Feed and water levels should be at least ½ to ¾ inches deep for debeaked birds.

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