

Multi-Species Poultry Production on Kingbird Farm

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- Poultry is an integral part of our diverse farm.
- In a typical year we raise a small amount of several poultry species.
 - 500 Rhode Island X White Rock laying hens
 - 200 Mixed breed pullets for resale
 - 600 CornishX broilers
 - 100 Slow growing roaster chickens (Barred Silver or Freedom Ranger)
 - 150 Pekin ducks
 - 50 Large White turkeys
 - 15 Embden geese
 - 15 Mixed Breed farm ducks for eggs*
 - 10 Silkie bantam breeding stock*
 - 1 Peacock*

*Resident birds breeding on farm (except the lonely peacock)
- The keys to successfully raising a variety of poultry are being prepared, staying flexible, and integrating the birds into the whole farm ecosystem.
- Buying Chicks
 - Hatching chicks on even a small scale is very challenging and the equipment is expensive.
 - Chicks and other young birds are relatively inexpensive and safe to ship.
 - Shop around, prices and shipping vary substantially.
 - Order well in advance.
 - Have brooder facilities ready and waiting
- Brooder Facilities
 - Choose a space large enough to brood the birds for at least two weeks.
 - Ducklings and goslings grow much faster than chicks and poults.
 - Facility must be rat safe!
 - Natural light, dry bedding, an overhead heat source, and easy access to feed and water are essential.
 - A small amount of molasses and apple cider vinegar in the first water is beneficial.
 - Begin giving small amounts of sod and chickweed at two days and slowly increase until they go out to pasture.
 - Duckling and gosling drinkers should be put on plate or lids to prevent water from soaking the bedding.
 - Don't allow waterfowl access to bathing water until they are at least two weeks old and no swimming water until fully feathered.
 - Make sure turkey drinkers are very obvious and easily accessible.
 - Gradually decrease brooder warmth so they are completely off lights before going out to pasture.
- Feed from Starter to Layer
 - Line up a reliable source of feed before birds arrive.
 - Plan ahead for feed needs (ie. Approx 15 lbs/broiler for 8 wks)
 - Young birds really start consuming food at about four weeks.

- A 25% starter ration is fine for starting chicks, ducklings, and goslings, but additional fish meal may be needed for poult.
- We move to an 18% grower ration at two weeks and use until the end for meat birds—layers move to a 16% layer ration at 18 weeks.
- Having age-appropriate grit available really helps birds process forage.
- High production hens on fenced pasture should receive a full ration year round, but loose hens may be able to do with scratch grains in the summer.
- Controlling access to feed for broilers, ducks, and goslings encourages them to consume forage.
- If turkeys become too large before Thanksgiving cutting the feed with corn and oats reduces growth but keeps them fat.
- Housing Options
 - Brooders weve used:
 - Wooden structures with outdoor patios
 - Retrofitted Salatin style pasture pens
 - Barn stalls
 - Kiddie pools in the house
 - Stock tanks in the greenhouse
 - Hoophouses
 - Calf hutches
 - Horse trailers
 - Brooder selection is based on season, poultry type, convience, safely, and predator pressure
 - Poultry Housing weve used;
 - Salatin style pasture pens 10'X 12'
 - Portable hoophouses
 - Stationary hoophouses
 - Greenhouses
 - Sheds
 - Calf hutches/hog huts
 - Portable housing is typically directly on the ground while stationary housing has a deep litter pack.
 - Adult turkeys, ducks, and geese need very little shelter.
 - Winter housing for layers or breeding stock should be draft free and convient.
- Equipment
 - The most critical piece of equipment for patured poultry is a good, hot fence.
 - The fence is not only keeping the birds in, but the predators out.
 - Nets with small holes are important for starting young birds.
 - Watch ducklings and goslings since they are bullet-shaped and can start through a net but get stuck.
 - Poultry nets are good for flighty young hens, but unecceassrily tall for broilers or waterfowl and impossible to step over.
 - Shorter nets are convient, but must be kept taught and hot!
 - Mow a perimeter prior to setting up nets and be sure to use a good ground.
 - Feeders
 - Metal feed troughs are very sturdy and last years
 - PVC half pipes can be strung together on runners for easy moving
 - Rubber tubs or troughs work for waterfowl

- Hungry birds can be fed directly on hard ground
 - Move feeders daily to encourage use of the pasture
- Drinkers
 - Automatic Plasson drinkers are best for permanent housing
 - Metal and plastic founts must be kept full.
 - Tubs and troughs are best for waterfowl since they eat and drink at the same time.
- Processing and Packaging
 - Approximate times for processing:
 - Broilers 6-8 weeks
 - Slow roasters 10-12 weeks
 - Ducks 8-10 weeks
 - Geese 10-12 weeks
 - Turkeys 15-20 weeks
 - Chickens must be crated and moved the night before processing, but ducks, geese, and turkeys can be herded to the slaughter facility as needed.
 - Handle birds gently to prevent stress and bruising.
 - Try to keep the kill area out of site of the birds.
 - Broilers, stew hens, and turkeys can be scalded and plucked normally, but waterfowl requires dry plucking or waxing.
 - Chickens and ducks use the same type of bag, but geese and turkeys will require much larger bags.
 - Geese and turkeys cool slowly and should be fully chilled before refrigerating or freezing.
 - Cryovacing will greatly extend the quality of the bird.
- Sales
 - Our current prices.
 - Broilers sell quickly and regularly. They are “normal.”
 - Ducks and geese are slower to sell and fill a specialty niche.
 - Turkeys are planned for fresh sales at Thanks giving only as they take up an enormous amount of room in the freezer.
 - Customers who like duck or goose *want* fat; make these bird plump.
 - Set real prices, free-range poultry is still too cheap.