

Management Requirements for Meat Bird Flocks

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Best Breeds To Raise: Meat-type crosses (Rock-Cornish) or commercial hybrid broilers are the most efficient birds available. Purebred poultry most commonly raised for meat are Cornish, Plymouth Rocks and White Jersey Giants. Purebreds are less efficient and take up to 14 weeks to develop a desirable carcass. When considering birds for meat production, select birds with light colored plumage. Dark feathered birds are less desirable because of their dark pin feathers left after slaughtering.

Floor Space: At least 1.5 square feet per bird, however, 2 square feet recommended.

Litter: Wet and compacted litter is of special concern with meat-type birds. These conditions cause breast sores and leg weaknesses and give the carcasses an undesirable appearance. Never brood chicks on slippery surfaces. Meat birds need traction and leg support. Pine shavings or straw work best.

Feed: Feed a completely balanced ration. For fryers and broilers, feed a starter mash or crumble pellets containing 20-23% protein until slaughtered. For roasters, feed a 20% protein starter for the first 6 weeks then switch to a 18% protein grower feed. Many people just "dilute" the starter by feeding 90% starter mash with 10% corn from 6 to 10 weeks and feeding 80% starter mash and 20% corn after 10 weeks of age.

Feeders: Three (3) inches of feeder space per bird. The lip of the feeder should be level with the birds back height to prevent feed wastage. Only fill trough feeder 1/3 or 1/2 full to prevent wastage. Keep feed in front of birds at all times.

Waterers: At least 6 gallons of water per 100 birds daily. Clean the waterers and provide fresh water daily. Place the waterers so that the lip is level with the birds back. One inch (1") of water space/bird.

Lights: Constant light is recommended. Provide one 25-40 watt bulb per 100 sq. feet.

Roosts: Do not use roosts for meat-type chickens. Roosts cause breast blisters, crooked keels, bruises and lameness in heavy meat birds.

Nests: Do not use nests. Birds should be slaughtered before they reach production age. Meat-type birds make poor layers. If you raise dual purpose birds, put nests in place after you slaughter the culls and males.

Yards: Not necessary, but if desired, confine the birds to an exercise area which provides between 5 and 10 sq. feet per bird.

When To Slaughter: Two (2) to three (3) lbs. fryers should be slaughtered at 4 to 5 weeks of age, 4 to 5

lb. broilers slaughtered at 6 to 9 weeks of age and roasters at 9 to 14 weeks of age. Remember, as the birds get older and larger they become less efficient and they eat a larger amount of feed for each pound of weight gained. Older birds produce more fat, so slaughter the birds as close to the desired weight as possible.

Reviewed by Audrey McElroy, associate professor, Animal and Poultry Sciences