

PRODUCTION BASICS

HOW DO I RAISE POULTRY FOR MEAT?

Chuck Schuster

University of Maryland Extension

Central Maryland

cfs@umd.edu

Jessie Flores

University of Maryland Extension

Lower Eastern Shore Maryland

jflores@umd.edu

Getting Started

- Check the laws and zoning regulations where you live.
- Not all incorporated towns will allow poultry production.
- Make friends with your neighbors, let them know your plans before you start.

Why Raise Chickens for Meat?

- Affordable food
- Producing fresh, home grown eggs is one of the top reasons for having a small flock.
- Family involvement
 - *4-H project*
 - *Hatching and raising chicks*
- To have some chickens ...lifestyle.

Selecting the Right Variety

- Not all breeds are the same.
- Other speakers today will discuss the breed characteristics.

Meat Production Breeds

- Meat breeds are very poor layers
- These breeds will grow faster than most large fowl breeds but not nearly as fast as commercial broilers.
- Meat breeds are not as efficient at converting feed to muscle as broilers, making the cost of production higher than broilers.

Meat vs. Dual Purpose?

- Are you looking to have a flock that produces both egg and meat?
- There are many breeds of chickens that have been bred to do both.
- Dual purpose breeds produce a reasonable amount of eggs, while utilizing feed to produce meat well enough to produce a good meat bird.

Getting Started with Chicks

- When you first get your chicks, be sure to offer them five things right away:
 - *Warmth of about 100 degrees*
 - *Suitable floor covering*
 - *Cool, fresh water*
 - *Chick starter feed*
 - *Protection from predators*
 - *More is discussed on this topic later today...*

Getting Started with Chicks

- Measure the temperature inside enclosure at **their** shoulder level.
- If they regularly huddle together, they are not warm enough.

Starting with Chicks

- If you start with day-old stock, you will have to be prepared for your baby chicks.
- Set up an enclosed brooder which is free from:
 - *drafts*
 - *protects from rodents, cats, etc.*
 - *contains an absorbent litter such as wood shavings and,*
 - *a source of heat such as a 250-watt lamp or two.*

Feeding for Meat Production

- Space feeders to avoid overcrowding
- Offer continuous feed first week of life
- Use a good chick starter feed
- Size of feed for chicks is important!
- 70 % cost in raising birds is in the feed
 - *Chicks cannot consume larger sized feeds*
 - *Remember chicks don't chew!*
- Feed should be converted to a grower feed

- The waterer should be designed so that the chicks cannot wade into it and get wet.
- Should be set at the height of their back



Brooding Chicks

- Temperature should be maintained so that the chicks are neither huddling
 1. *Under the heat source, nor*
 2. *In a corner as far as possible from the heat.*
- If they are moving around the brooder, all is well.
- Frequent monitoring of the brooder is the key to success.

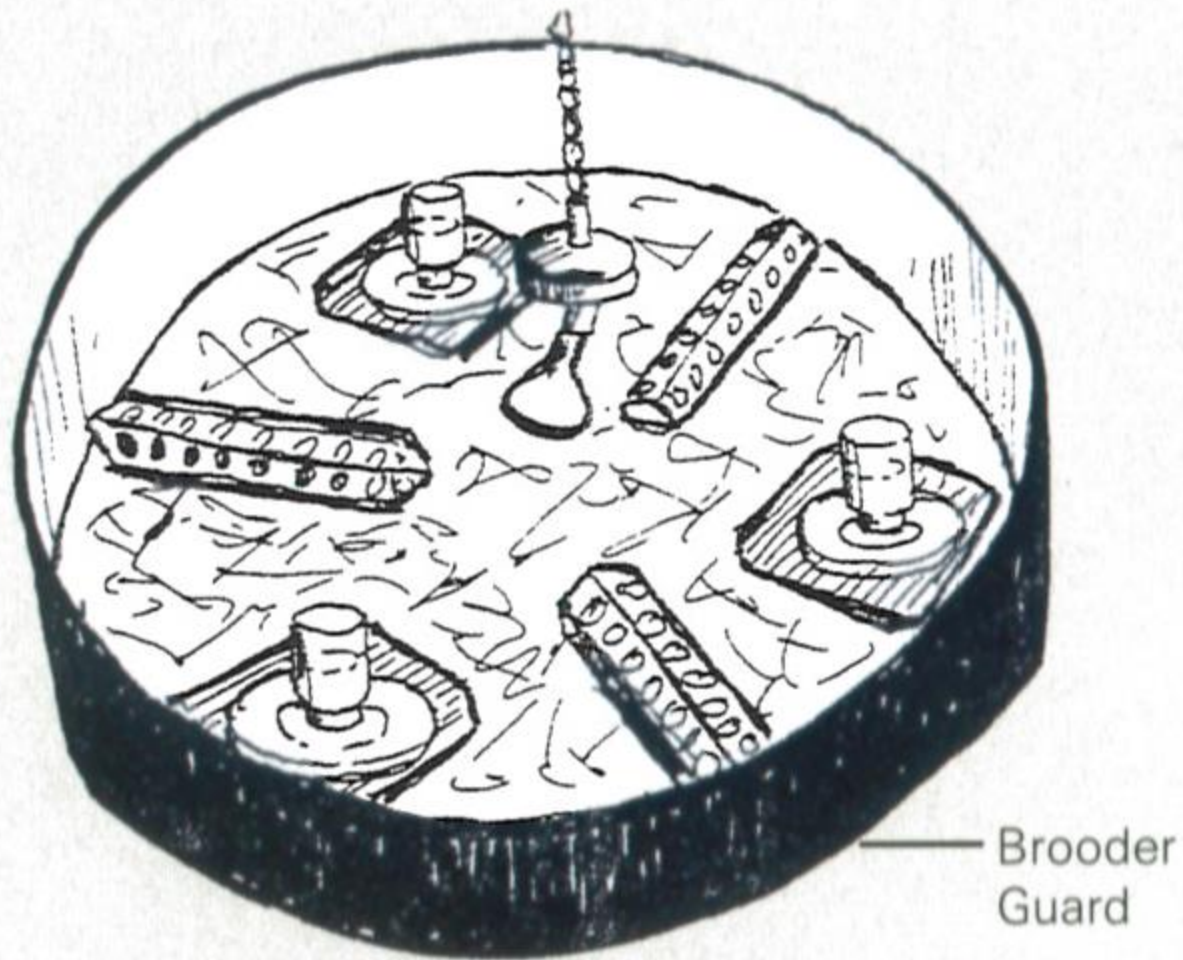


Figure A – Brooder set-up recommendation

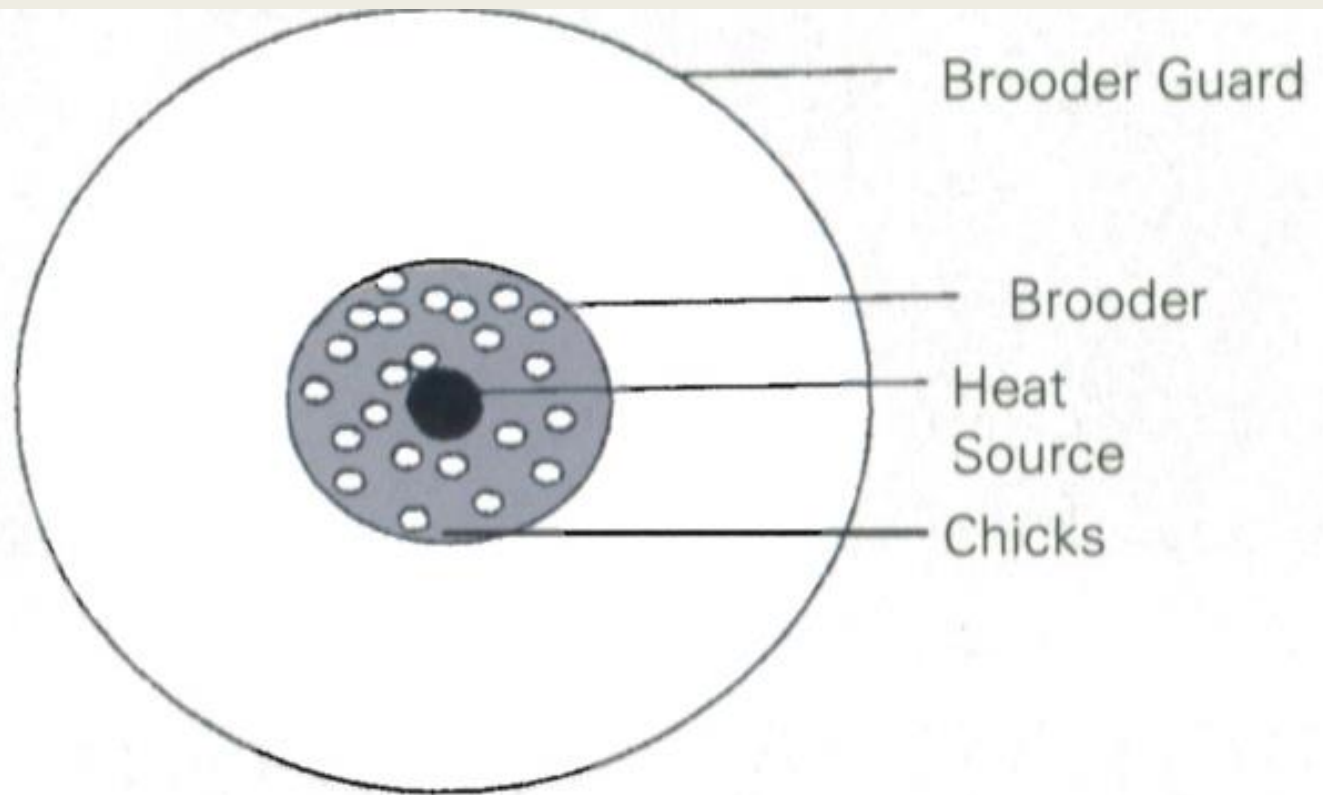


Figure B – Too cold

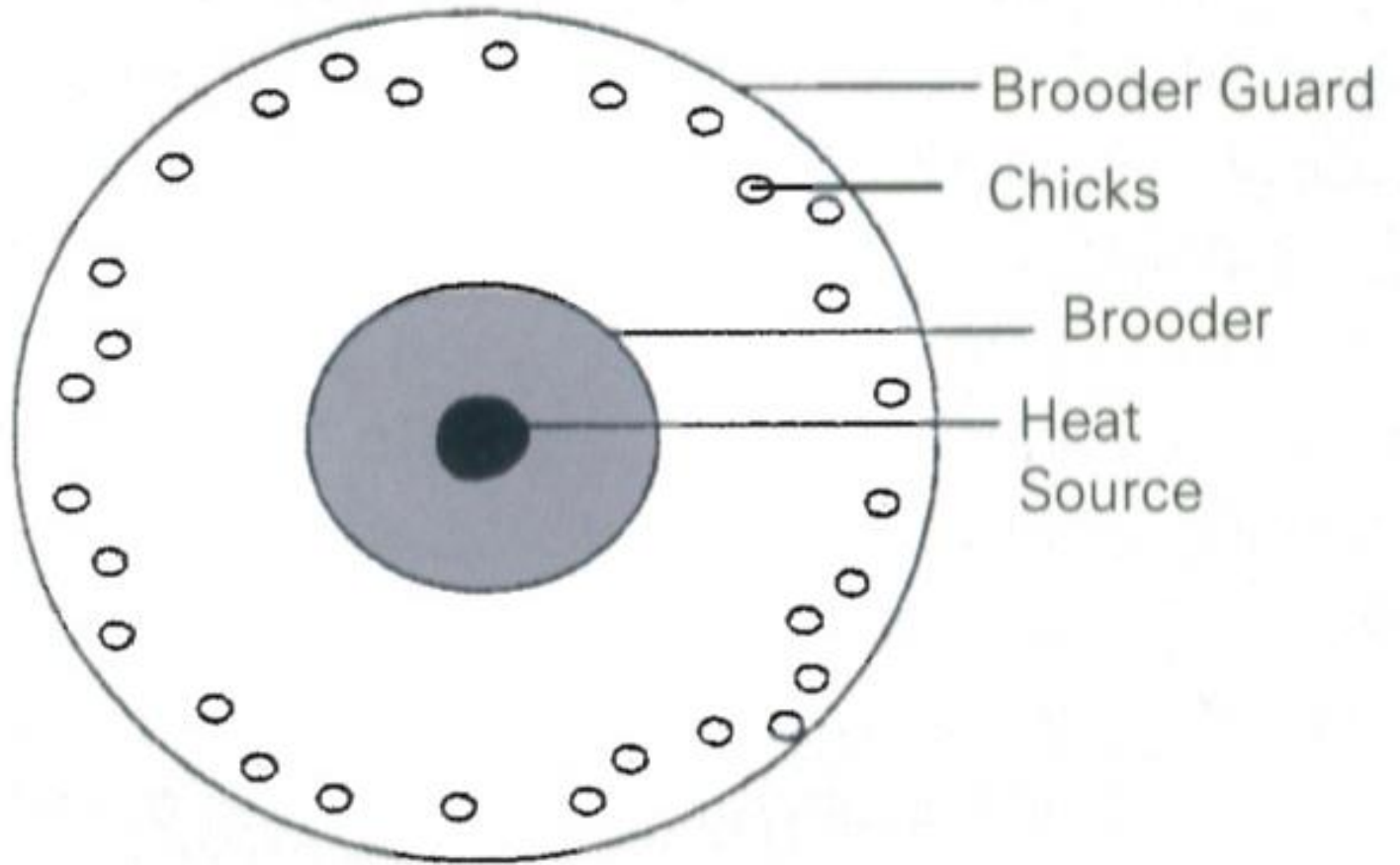


Figure C – Too hot

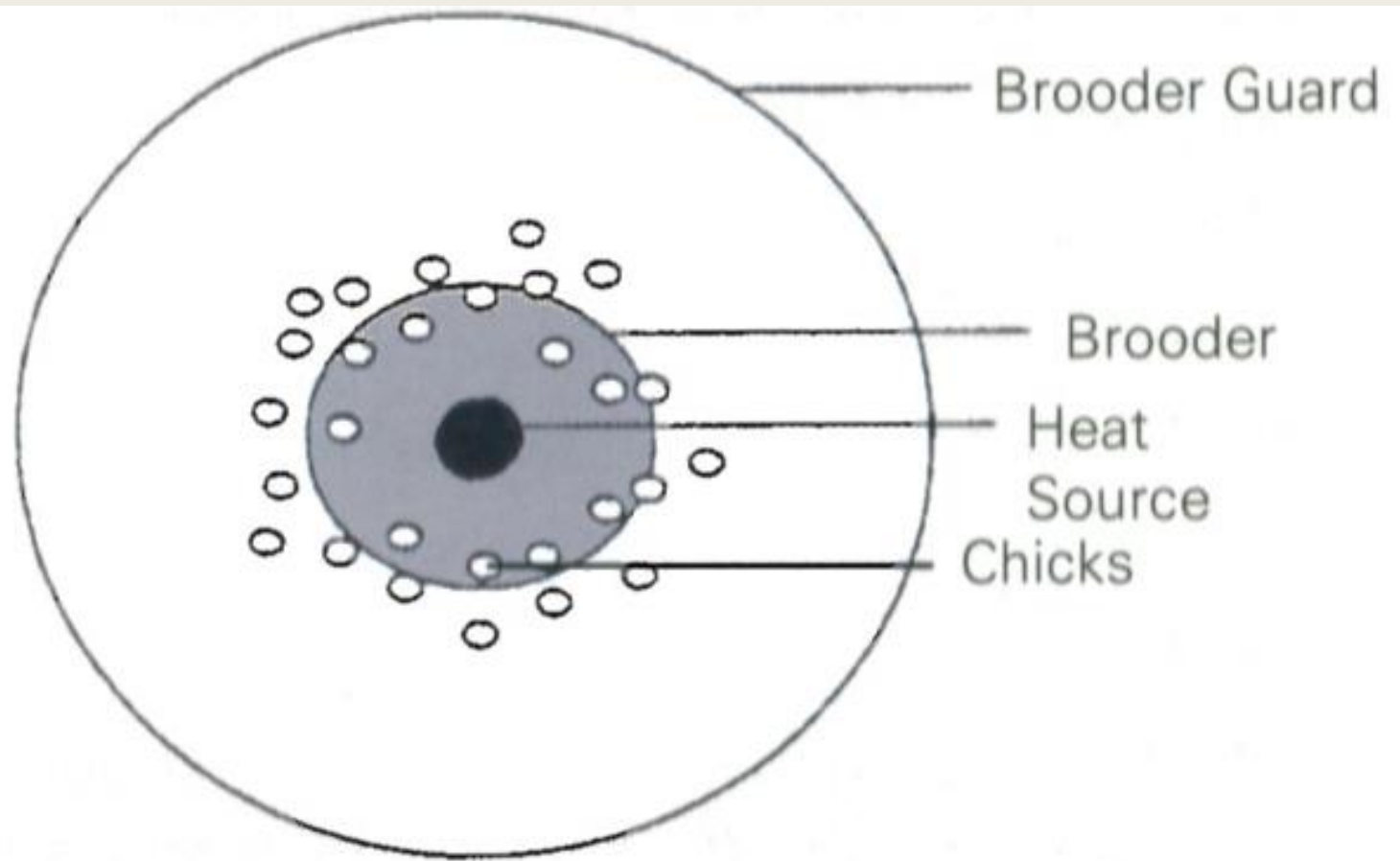


Figure D – Just right

Brooding Chicks

- Of course, if you have a mother hen who is raising your new chicks, you don't have to worry about any of this.
- When it comes to raising baby chickens, a mother hen is a lot smarter than you.

Production Basics

- Will you let your chickens roam your fields, or will you keep them confined in a coop and/or run?
- A combination of both is often used in small flocks.
- Caution should be used for broiler flocks - if your broilers are allowed a lot of space to roam, they will burn energy and convert less energy into growing; thus less meat produced

Production Basics

- Your space limitations may determine the answer to this question.
- If you live in an urban or suburban setting, you probably want to keep the birds confined - with a fenced run outside their coop for fresh air and sunshine.
- Be mindful of your non-bird neighbors!

Housing

- Housing for chickens can be extremely simple.
- The fundamental requirements are:
 - *Birds be protected from the wind or heavy drafts;*
 - *Birds have the ability to remain completely dry.*
- Chickens have a strong instinct to roost; so will be more content if furnished with some structure on which to roost.

Free Range, Confined or a Combination?

- Many home flocks are designed to allow the chickens to be on the ground.
- This can fit in with vegetable production to help control grubs and small insects in the soil
 - *Can also control insects and grubs around the yard lawn*
- To eat weeds and weed seeds.



Roosts



Different Housing/Coop Styles

“Chicken Tractors” are moveable and can be shifted to provide fresh forage around your property



Many are built on wheels so they can be moved by you pushing or pulling with a lawn tractor.

Different Housing/Coop Styles



Regardless of style, a coop should be easy to access in order to enter and collect eggs.



Coop Purpose

- The intended purpose of your flock helps determine many aspects of your production basics.
- Poultry housing protects the birds from the elements (weather), predators, injury and theft.
- Broilers may not require year round enclosures- dependent on the time of year you wish to be raising the birds.

Space Requirements

- Space for resting, feeding, watering and movement.
- Protection and escape from the weather and from predators.
- Adequate ventilation to avoid moisture buildup and stale air.
- If the flock has constant access to the outside, they will do fine with less space in their "sleeping quarters" inside.

Space Requirements

Type of Bird	Sq ft/ Inside Run	Sq ft/ Outside Run
Bantam Chickens	1	4
Laying Hens	1.5	8
Large Chickens	2	10
Quail	1	4
Pheasant	5	25
Ducks	3	15
Geese	6	18

Minimum Space Requirements of Various Bird Types (Clauer, 2009)



Protection Against Predators



Protection Against Predators



Protection Against Predators

- Design your housing with predator protection (especially at night) in mind.
- But don't anticipate threats like dogs, raccoons, and foxes only - a least weasel can get through any opening large enough for a rat!
- ½ inch hardware cloth works very well.
- Plan ahead - it is easier than having to purchase replacements.

Rodent Control

- Mice, rats, wild birds, varmints (raccoons, fox, etc), snakes
- Tight, well constructed house
- Cover openings with $\frac{1}{2}$ mesh hardware cloth
- Sanitation/housekeeping, clean up spills
- Keep grass cut and trimmed around house



- If the chicken shelter is tight and dry, it is not necessary to provide artificial heat; and it could be detrimental to do so.
- Chickens are very cold tolerant.



Meat Birds - Flock Health

- Many health problems can be avoided by following the following five steps
 - *Purchase healthy birds from healthy, clean source.*
 - *Keep coops clean.*
 - *Provide clean food and water. Clean equipment that holds food and water regularly.*
 - *Remove wet or damp bedding.*
 - *Keep vaccinations up to date.*

QUESTIONS?

