



NATIONAL CENTER FOR  
APPROPRIATE TECHNOLOGY

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# Raising Pastured Poultry in Texas

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# About Me

- NCAT Poultry Specialist
- San Antonio, TX
- Raising Poultry for 17 years
- IOIA Accredited Organic Livestock Inspector
- B.S. Poultry Science-Texas A&M University
  - Research
  - Judging
  - Extension



# About ATTRA

- The National Sustainable Agriculture Information Service
- Free technical assistance for farmers and ranchers
  - 1-800-346-9140
  - [ATTRA.NCAT.org](http://ATTRA.NCAT.org)



**ATTRA**  
SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE

A PROGRAM OF THE NATIONAL CENTER FOR APPROPRIATE TECHNOLOGY



# Why Pastured Poultry?

- Start-up costs
- Time Frame
- Demand
- Diversification
- Enhanced Animal Welfare
- Fertilization benefits



# Getting Started

- Choose an enterprise
- Choose a breed
- Brooding
- Build Shelter
- Feeding
- Processing
- Marketing





# Laying Hens

- Want: light body breed that will do well in heat.
- Rhode Island Reds, Gold Sex Link, Hy-Line Brown
  - Brown eggs
  - Good on pasture
  - Good production
- Leghorn, California White
  - White eggs
  - Best egg layer
  - Can be very flighty, other behavioral problems



# Meat Chickens

- Cornish/Plymouth Rock Cross
  - Industry Standard
  - Rapid, consistent weight gain
  - Not very good foragers
  - Health problems
- “Freedom Rangers”
  - Smaller carcass
    - Different body
  - Slower growth
- 6-8 Weeks to grow out
  - Up to 10 for heritage breeds



# Turkeys

- Longer grow out than broilers
  - 18-22 weeks
- Seasonal
  - 1 cycle per year
- Very good foragers
  - Surprisingly tough on pasture
- Very good potential profit
- Heritage breeds
  - Taste differences





# Picking a Hatchery

- Order chicks in advance to ensure that the hatchery has the breed you want in stock.
- Make sure that they are NPIP approved
- Inquire about vaccinations
- For laying hens, order day-old chicks rather than pullets.



# Brooding

- Poultry often arrive as day old chicks.
- Need a controlled, warm environment to begin development.
  - 2-4 Weeks



# Brooder Needs

- Space
  - Rounded corners
- Heat source
  - Heat lamps
  - Space heaters
- Temperature
  - Start 90-95°
  - Bring down 5° each week until reaching ambient temperature.



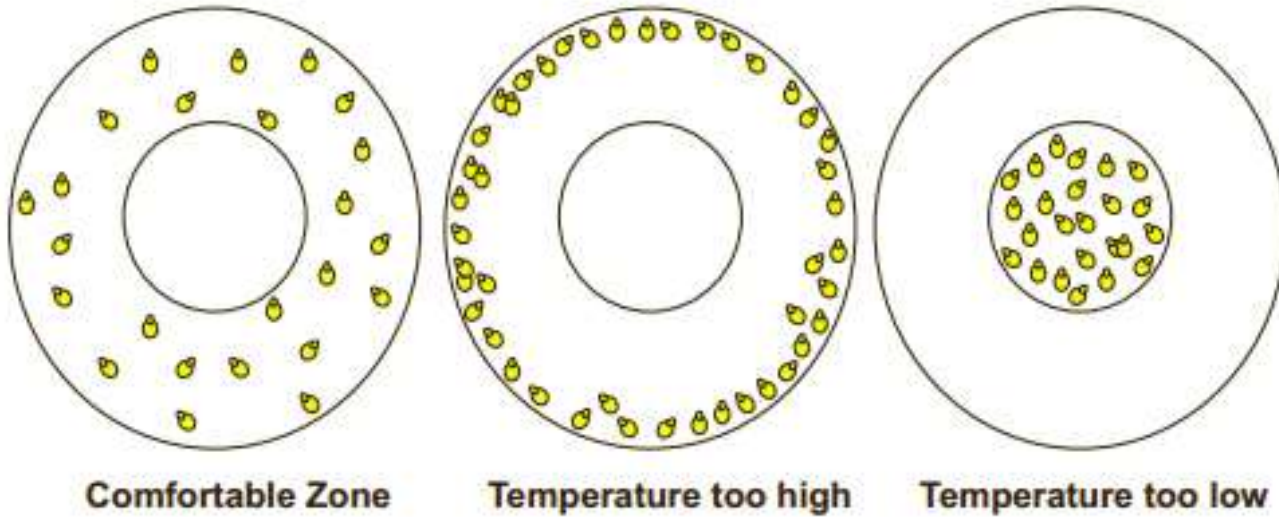
# Brooder Needs

- Waterers
  - Need consistent source of cool clean water
  - Tray or nipple
- Feeders
  - Trays
- Bedding
  - Pine shavings
  - Watch for leg problems





# Bird Distribution in Brooder





# Move to Pasture

- Flock can be introduced when:
  - Brooder temperature matches outdoor temperature.
  - Birds are mostly feathered out.
- Introduce grass clippings into brooder (optional)
- Pasture based brooder
  - Open up for short time each day to allow flock to explore the outdoors



# Housing

- Fixed and Mobile
- Depends on:
  - Flock needs
  - Available land
  - Personal preference
  - Price or availability of materials



# Housing

- Needs to provide consistent:
  - Cover from elements (sun, rain)
  - Shade
  - Airflow or ventilation
  - Security from predators
  - Access to pasture





# Mobile Broiler Houses





# “Eggmobile”





# Laying Hen Needs

- *Both* a place to roost at night, and a secure place to lay eggs.
  - Do not allow birds to sleep in nest boxes
    - Dirty eggs
    - Promotes broodiness
  - Need roosts that allow for the bird to sit comfortably
    - Rounded corners
    - 8-14 inches per bird



# Fixed Housing



# Predation

- Predators will almost always be around. (Everything likes to eat chicken!)
  - Prevention helps keep predators intact as a functioning part of a local ecosystem
  - Break bad habits early.



# Predator Prevention

- Biggest predators in Texas:
  - Hawks and owls
  - Coyotes
  - Skunks and raccoons
- Be aware of your area
  - Ask neighbors for sightings
  - Look for tracks
  - Identify close by water sources
- Look for perches within 100 feet
- Remove deceased birds immediately and dispose properly



# Preventing Predation

- Use “scare-offs”
- Provide cover for birds to run under during attack.
- Make sure that coops are fully secure.
  - Stake down hoop houses that might be easily lifted or burrowed under.
  - Close pop holes or doors to egg mobiles or layer houses.





# Livestock Guardians

- Dogs
  - Large breeds such as great pyrenees or old english sheep dog work well
  - Monitor the introduction to the flock
  - Factor the costs of raising the dog into production
- Roosters
  - Can help with hawks
  - Will reduce overall feed efficiency, may be hard to manage.



# Fencing

- Permanent Fence
  - 2 Wire
  - Tall fences 5 ½ to 6 foot (squares of less than 6"x3")
- Electro-netting fence is popular among poultry producers.
  - Can control the charge
  - Mobile
  - Expensive



# Nutrition-Pasture

- Poultry can get 5-15% nutritional needs from pasture
  - Need a ration year round
- Prefer pasture that is 6-12 inches tall
- Favorable Forages
  - Clover
  - Alfalfa
  - Ryegrass
  - Clover
- Provide grit



# Nutrition- Supplemental Feed

- Fresh feed is essential.
  - Stores for 1-2 months
  - Most expensive cost is production
- Broilers will eat 11-12 lbs. each
- Hens will eat approximately 1.5 lbs./week
- Need a balanced ration
  - Protein
  - Methionine and Lysine





# Water

- Absolutely critical in warmer climates
- Prefer cool water
  - 60°-80°F
- Electrolytes can be added to help with heat stress
- Use a consistent style of waterer



# Biosecurity

- Practice “All in, all out”
- Don’t mix chickens and turkeys
- Wash any used equipment
  - Use equipment that can be easily disinfected
- Reduce feed spillage
  - Reduces pests
- Avoid standing water/muddy areas



# Selling Eggs in Texas

- Exempt from inspection given:
  - Less than 3,000 bird flock
  - No more than 30 cartons per sale
- Cartons should have:
  - Name of farm
  - Address
  - “UNGRADED”
- License required for wholesale



# On-Farm Processing in Texas

- Texas Department of Health and Human Services: Meat Safety Assurance Unit
  - [Meat.regulatory@dshs.state.tx.us](mailto:Meat.regulatory@dshs.state.tx.us)
  - (512) 834-6760
- For on farm processing: must obtain a “Grant of Poultry Exemption”
  - May raise and slaughter up to 10,000 birds per year
- Products must be labeled with the following
  - Producer’s name
  - Farm address
  - “Exempted P.L. 90-492”





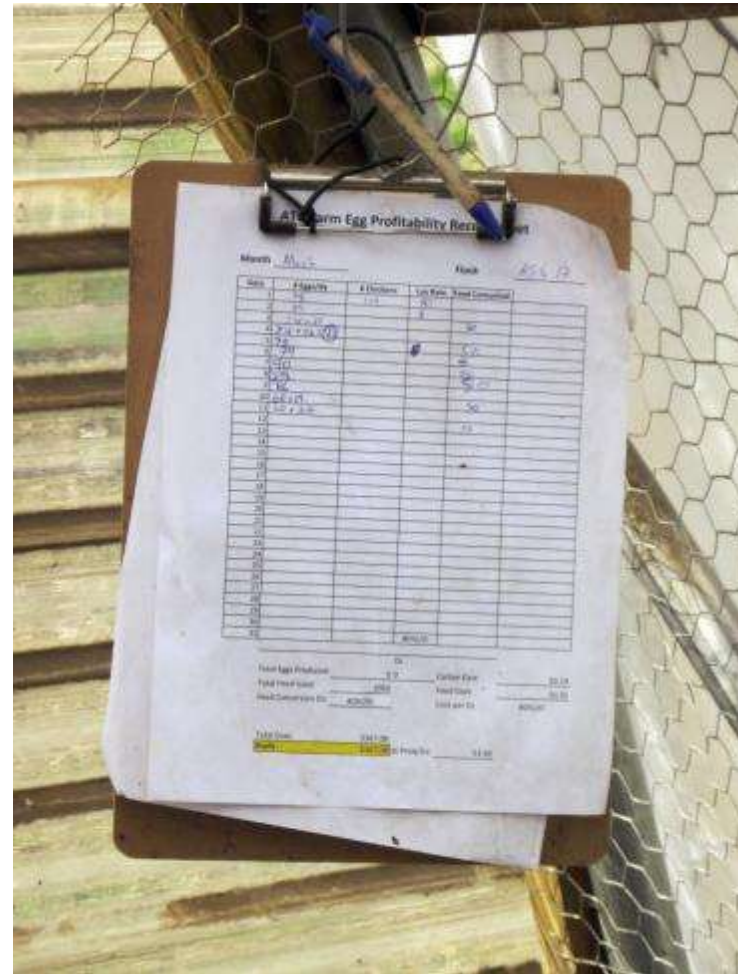
# Processing in Central Texas

- ATTRA Poultry Processing Plants and Services Database
  - [https://attra.ncat.org/attra-pub/poultry\\_processors/](https://attra.ncat.org/attra-pub/poultry_processors/)
- Dewberry Hills Farm
  - Lexington, TX
  - USDA Inspected
  - Certified Organic
  - (512) 308-7706
- JE Ferguson Processing
  - Johnson City, TX
  - State inspected
  - (512) 308-7706



# Record Keeping

- Vital to both meat and egg operations
- Track:
  - Mortality
  - Feed Use (Calculate Feed Conversion)
  - Eggs (Both sold and loss)
  - Dressed Weight
- Look for patterns and make adjustments
  - Management
  - Pricing
  - Sourcing



# Marketing

- Demand for “Pastured Poultry” is growing
  - Especially for eggs
- Communicate production practices clearly.
  - Transparency is key
  - Third party animal welfare audits



# Other Great Resources

- Niche Meat Processor Assistance Network
  - <http://www.nichemeatprocessing.org/>
- American Pastured Poultry Producers Association
  - <http://www.apppa.org/>
- The Livestock Conservancy
  - <https://livestockconservancy.org/>





# Questions?



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