

Caring for Chickens

Chickens are not given hormones. In fact, hormone use for any type of poultry is illegal in Canada and has been since the 1960s. Chickens are like any other living creatures; they sometimes become sick. If this occurs, a prescription from a veterinarian is administered, and farmers must comply with the prescribed withdrawal period for any medications so that the birds go to market without any residues of medications in their bodies. As a part of the national Chicken Farmers of Canada's food safety program, these medications must be withdrawn long before the birds go to market. The farmer is responsible for documentation giving the first day of medication use and the last day of use, and he or she will sign a record stating that the correct withdrawal time has taken place and report this to the processor who may perform a residue test. Residue testing is under the oversight of the Canadian Food Inspection Agency.

Off to Market

When birds are ready for market they are loaded into special shipping containers and transported to the processing plant in specially equipped trucks to ensure swift and humane transportation. The trucks are covered with protective tarps. These tarps can be raised or lowered by a computer inside the cab of the truck to help control the climate for the birds.

The market for broiler chickens in Canada is supply-managed. This means that a quota system is in place to ensure a consistent supply of chicken for the marketplace and a steady, fair return to the farmer.



Facts & Figures About Canadian Chicken Industry

In General:

- Ontario is the largest producer and processor of chicken in the country, growing one-third of all the chicken produced in Canada.
- Ontario produces about 350 million kilograms of chicken meat annually.
- Chicken farmers are proud to offer a product that is safe, nutritious and competitively priced.
- Chicken is currently the least expensive lean protein; since 2013, the retail price of chicken has only risen by 5.2%, compared to 33.5% for beef and 17.9% for pork. At the same time, the farmer live price has gone down by 7.7%.
- Domestic consumption of chicken in 2016 was 32.5 kilograms per person.
- In 2016, Canada produced chicken products worth \$2.45 billion, contributing 4.1% of cash receipts to farming operations.
- In 2016, there were 2,817 regulated chicken farmers in Canada.
- In 2016, Canada produced 1.148 billion kilograms of chicken, 60% of which was produced in Quebec and Ontario.
- In 2016, retail purchases accounted for approximately 698 million kilograms representing 59% of Canada's total consumption. Fast food services consumed 280 million kilograms (24%), full service restaurants 135 million kilograms (12%), and hotels and institutions 64 million kilograms (6%).
- In 2016, more than 134 million kilograms of chicken meat and edible bi-products worth more than \$280 million, was exported to over 70 countries, with the largest recipients being United States, Philippines, Hong Kong and Haiti.

Facts courtesy of Chicken Farmers of Ontario and Chicken Farmers of Canada

About Chickens - Who to Call

National and Provincial Organizations:

Chicken Farmers of Canada
Visit www.chicken.ca

British Columbia Chicken Marketing Board
Visit www.bcchicken.ca

Alberta Chicken Producers
Visit www.chicken.ab.ca

Chicken Farmers of Saskatchewan
Visit www.saskatchewanchicken.ca

Manitoba Chicken Producers
Visit www.chicken.mb.ca

Chicken Farmers of Ontario
Visit www.cfo.on.ca

Les Éleveurs de volailles du Québec
Visit www.lepoulet.qc.ca/

Chicken Farmers of Nova Scotia
Visit www.nschicken.com

Chicken Farmers of Newfoundland and Labrador
Visit www.nlchicken.com

Prepared by:



Farm & Food Care Ontario
www.FarmFoodCareON.org
519-837-1326
info@farmfoodcare.org



You were asking about...Chickens

Housing: Where Do Chickens Live?

Chickens raised for meat are called "broiler" chickens (or "broilers"). They are not kept in cages and do not lay eggs. The birds are kept in climate-controlled barns to protect them against hot summers, cold winters, predators and disease.

In these barns, the broiler chicks roam free on a floor that is covered with a bed of straw or wood chips. They have access to food and water through automatic feed and water lines. As the chickens grow, the farmer will continually adjust the height of the lines to accommodate the height of the birds. This allows maximum comfort and access to feed and water at all times.

Farmers constantly monitor the barn environment. They will typically visit several times a day to make sure the equipment in their barns is working properly to control the temperature, humidity, light and ventilation at optimum levels for their birds. Many newer barns have computerized sensors so farmers can observe their barn systems remotely using the latest smart phone apps and technology.

A typical chicken barn houses an average of 30,000 birds at a time.

What is Biosecurity?

Biosecurity protocols are all part of a quality assurance program called the On-Farm Food Safety Assurance Program. The program dictates that farmers must continuously monitor their barns and control against the presence of any wild birds, rodents, insects or any other pest that could be a potential vector to spread any disease. Domestic animals are also prohibited from entering the barn as they pose the same risks. Even human visitors are limited: all visitors, including suppliers, must sign in and out to maintain records and control any possible spread of disease to the flock.

Chicken farmer regulations ensure that all chicken farmers provide ample floor space to raise their flocks comfortably throughout the production cycle. Poultry farmers use the most advanced husbandry practices in accordance with the guidelines set out in the Recommended Code of Practice, developed by farmers, government, animal protection groups, researchers, and processors. Copies may be found at www.livestockwelfare.com.



About the Life Cycle of Broiler Chickens...

Chickens that are raised for meat will travel through three specialized stages of production: broiler-breeder farms, hatcheries and broiler farms.

Broiler-breeder Farms

Certain breeds of chickens are selected for the characteristics that are favourable for meat production. Hens (mature females) are kept with roosters (mature males) to naturally fertilize the eggs. A breeder flock is kept for about one year and the males and females remain together the entire time.

It takes about 26 hours to lay each egg, and the broiler-breeder hen will produce about 300 eggs in her year of production. The eggs are collected, cleaned and carefully stored in incubators at a standard temperature of 100 degrees F.

Hatcheries

These fertilized eggs are shipped to a hatchery where the eggs are incubated. After 21 days the eggs hatch into pullets (young female chickens) and cockerels (young male chickens).

Within 24 hours of hatching trained professionals who work in the

Nutrition: What Do Chickens Eat?

Chickens are omnivores; in the natural state a chicken will dine on plants but it will also snack on bugs and slugs and other meat protein sources. In commercial production, the feed will mimic the composition of a natural diet as closely as possible while providing all of the essential nutrients for growth and good health. A typical feed is usually based on corn or wheat and a supplemental protein source such as soybean meal. The feed is nutritionally balanced with a government-approved mineral supplement.

The birds grow quickly. Their nutritional requirements are constantly changing as they grow, so farmers work closely with feed companies to develop diets that cater to the specific and changing needs of their birds. It takes approximately 1.9 kg of feed to grow one kg of chicken. The amount of water a chicken drinks varies, depending on the temperature of the weather and the age of the bird.

Breeds

Chickens produced for meat are not the same breed as those that are raised for their eggs. Typically, strains of a breed called White Rocks are used for meat, whereas White Leghorns (white eggs) and strains of reddish-brown feathered chickens such as Rhode Island Reds (brown eggs) are used in the egg industry.

For more information on breeds, visit: <http://www.ansi.okstate.edu/breeds/>



CHICKEN TRIVIA

Did You Know...

- Chickens raised for meat are not kept in cages and do not lay eggs.
- Chickens are not given any hormones. In fact, hormones are not even available in Canada and their use has been illegal since the 1960s.
- All chickens are grain fed. Their feed consists of grain and a protein source (about 88% corn, wheat and occasionally, barley. About 10% is mainly protein, consisting of soybean meal and occasionally canola. The remainder is vitamins and minerals to prevent nutrient deficiencies).
- The birds are kept in climate-controlled barns to protect them against hot summers, cold winters, predators and disease.
- Chickens are free to roam, but usually prefer to stay in one area. The birds have access to clean water and nutritious feed 24 hours a day.
- Chickens take about six to eight weeks to grow (broilers). Farmers produce five or six flocks per year.
- After each flock, Canadian chicken farmers thoroughly clean their barns. This gives them the distinction of having one of the highest cleanliness standards in the world.
- A clean bedding of soft straw or wood shavings is spread on the barn floor before the new, day-old chicks arrive.

Chick-tionary

- **Bedding:** Straw or wood chips, covering the floor of the barn.
- **Biosecurity:** The practice of ensuring that sickness and disease are kept out of chicken barns. It means that anyone visiting a chicken farm must say where they have been (in case they track a poultry disease from one farm to another), and follow proper sanitation practices.
- **Broiler:** A meat chicken raised to the weight of 2.65kg or under.
- **Chick:** A chicken (male or female) from hatching to about three weeks of age.
- **Chicken producer:** Farmers, the people that raise chickens.
- **Cleanout:** The complete removal of soiled bedding; done after each flock has been shipped to market.
- **Cockerel:** A young male chicken.
- **Cornish Hen:** A small meat chicken.
- **Crates:** Plastic cages used to transport chickens in an orderly fashion to processing plants on trucks.
- **Drinkers:** Automated water lines.
- **Feeders:** Automated feed pans which dispense chicken feed (they allow the birds 24-hour access to feed).
- **Flock:** A group of birds that is raised by the farmer. There are an average of 30,000 birds in a flock.
- **OFFSAP:** On-Farm Food Safety Assurance Program.
- **Pullet:** A young female chicken.
- **Roaster:** A larger meat chicken raised to the weight of over 2.65kg.
- **Supply Management:** The system under which the Canadian chicken industry runs. This quota system ensures that chicken farmers produce the required volume. Supply management balances supply with demand and prevents overproduction, flooded markets and depressed prices for farmers. It allows chicken production to remain a sustainable industry that is profitable for farmers.