

How we raise our pastured chicken

Fresh air, green grass & bugs - just what the doctor ordered

Have you ever wondered what is the story behind the chicken you pick up on market day? Perhaps how old it is, where it came from, or exactly how we care for it?

The story begins 12 weeks before market day, when our supplier in Quakertown orders a batch of eggs from a breeder in Arkansas.

After 21 days in the hatchery's incubator, your chick taps its way into the world. It is promptly placed into a perforated, partitioned box along with its fellow hatchlings, ready for its one-day trip to the Orangeville post office.

Post office: THEY'RE HERE!

The call usually comes around 7 am. We run straight to Orangeville to pick them up.

On the way home we sometimes wish we had a pair of earplugs; but noisy peeps are what we want - living, healthy chicks that survive their trip from the hatchery.

Back home we load the chicks into the brooder, counting as we go. This 10 x 15 foot shelter is outfitted with several 250-watt heat lamps, feeders, waterers, and pine shavings for the chicks to scratch in.

We provide room service to the brooder twice a day, supplying feed, grit and fresh water, and adding fresh bedding if necessary. Soiled bedding is removed and added to our compost pile.

The chicks spend 2-3 weeks in the brooder, until they are big enough to withstand the nightly temperatures they'll encounter once we put them out on pasture. We supply them with green grass and clover every day in anticipation of the pasture lifestyle they are working towards.

Out to pasture at 3 weeks

At about 3 weeks of age we crate up all the chicks in the batch and move them out to our 10 x 12 foot movable pasture shelters. One by one we place about 80 chicks in each pen. They

immediately begin to scurry about ripping off grass blades and gobbling up insects - just what the doctor ordered.

From this point on they make a conspicuous site from the road, with their newly developed white feathers and hanging red waterers out on the green grass.

We move the pens twice a day, one pen length at a time. We do this by slipping a 4-foot wide dolly under one end and pulling with a handle at the other. These daily moves mean our chickens always have access to fresh grass and clean surroundings while spreading their fertilizing manure evenly across the field.

When we hit rough ground, we place boards in the gaps under the shelters to keep out raccoons, foxes, opossums and weasels that would like nothing better than a pastured chicken dinner. If you drive by during one of our heavy summer downpours, you'll find us putting straw inside the pens to get the chicks up out of the water. Wet is one of the big killers of pastured chickens. Other actions we take to prevent stress and promote health

for our chickens include building shelters that protect them from weather extremes and carefully monitoring their water and feed consumption.

Processing day- a special time

Processing day arrives when the chicks are about 8 weeks old. At dawn we head out to the pasture, pop the lids on the shelters and carefully load the sleepy chickens into crates. We begin processing around 8 am. Our "staff" of 6-10 people, which includes some of our customers who like to help out, can process 200 birds by noon. We are all quite motivated as one of Todd's tremendous lunches awaits us all. We have a great time with much conversation and joking around. It is a special time on our farm.

After lunch we remove the chickens from their chill tanks and weigh, bag and tag them in anticipation of the market day to follow. All the while, the story of your next chicken has already begun.

Pastured Chicken Facts

Breed

White Rock/Cornish cross

Feed consumed

18 lbs of organic feed over 8 week lifespan

Dressed weight

4.5-7.5 lbs at 8 weeks (70 % of live weight); males weigh more

chickens sold 2003
2,000

NUTRITION

Pastured vs standard whole chicken

- 17% fewer calories
- 9% less cholesterol
- 22% less total fat
- 29% less saturated fat
- 100% more Omega-3s
- Omega-6:Omega-3: 9:1 (16:1 for standard)
- 50% more Vitamin A



This food is preventive medicine

Test results of our own chicken, eggs, turkey & beef corroborate research showing pasture-raised foods are the best we can eat. Jo Robinson, author of *Pasture Perfect*, stays current with the latest research on the nutritional benefits of grass-fed meats at her website

eatwild.com

Grass-Fed No Drugs

We grow our pasture foods with absolutely no pesticides, hormones, or antibiotics.

All pasture-raised foods, including chicken, eggs, turkey, beef, pork and lamb are much higher in omega-3s as well as beta-carotenes, and Vitamin A. They are all much lower in fat and cholesterol.