

# Starting a profitable chicken farming

ARE you planning to start your own poultry business? If so, then you should enter the business well prepared by considering all of its aspects. Right from setting up some basic equipment to raising the birds and marketing your business, you have to take every step wisely.

Over the past few years, commercial poultry farming in Zimbabwe has created and still creating a profitable business opportunity for entrepreneurs and can provide a great employment source for job seekers. Most entrepreneurs prefer to produce day-old chicks and sell them to growers, as this option is easier and less risky. The choice, however, is up to you.

As a business owner, you need to get your business finances right from the onset if the venture is to be successful.

The following are business advice given freely in Zimbabwe by extension agents and/or day old chick and feed sellers. The first one is for layers and the second, for broilers. Our challenge is to raise chickens and recommend ideal conditions for low income farmers in our region.

## **Layers**

### **Land, Housing and Equipment**

- 1.Cheap and easily accessible land is a must (about 0.15 sq meters per layer).
- 2.Housing units must not be subject to temperature extremes.
- 3.Proper lighting and ventilation are also critical.
- 4.Equipment consideration should include layer rests (for laying eggs), feeders, drinkers, lighting and waste disposal systems.

## **Point of lay chickens/Layer chicks**

You have two options, purchasing day old chicks and feeding them to the point of lay (19 weeks) or buying point of lay chickens. The advantage of buying point of lay chickens is that they have already been vaccinated and reared to the point of production. In Zimbabwe, they average about US\$10 each.

## **Layer feeds**

It is recommended that producers use:

- 1.high quality feeds in the right quantities.
- 2.feeds which are sold by the company selling the point of lay chickens, and follow the instructions on the containers.

## **Labour and capital**

The amount of capital and labor will depend on the size of your operation. Do not skimp on capital or qualified hands (train if necessary) because this will ultimately affect your bottom line.

## **Market**

Do market research before you start your business! Do not end up with large inventory because you are producing in a saturated market or are too far from your markets. Eggs are currently selling for about US\$3 a crate in Zimbabwe and each layer can produce between 350 and 450 eggs a year in their first two years (this can be a lucrative business if the market is there).

## **What you need**

### **Land, Housing and Equipment**

- 1.Cheap and easily accessible land is a must (about 0.1 sq meters per layer).
- 2.Housing units must not be subject to temperature extremes.
- 3.Proper lighting and ventilation are also critical.

4. Equipment consideration should include layer rests (for laying eggs), feeders, drinkers, lighting and waste disposal systems.

### **Day old chicks**

Buy from reputable dealers to reduce mortality, disease and weight gain problems.

The average price of broiler day old chicks in Zimbabwe is between US\$0.7 and US\$0.80 per day old chick (often sold in groups of 100).

### **Stock feeds**

Profit is determined by reducing disease, death and increasing weight per unit feed.

Broiler diets are formulated to provide the protein, energy, vitamins and other nutrients essential for health and efficient broiler production. Do not skimp on production.

On average, by the time a bird reaches 6 weeks (the age at which they are sold at 2.2 to 2.4 kg), it should have consumed a total of 4 kg of broiler feeds. This means that 70% of your expenses go towards poultry feeding. Sometimes you will need medication and vaccines. You will also need proper vaccines and medications to prevent diseases and promote growth of your broilers.

You can also make your own feed, especially if you have access to maize. Just add the required broiler concentrates (much cheaper than normal feed).

### **Labour and capital**

The amount of capital and labor will depend on the size of your operation. Do not skimp on capital or qualified hands (train if necessary) because this will ultimately affect your bottom line.

## **Market**

Do market research before you start your business.

You can sell broilers between US\$5 and US\$6, depending on location.

The more you produce, the easier to sell to large scale operations who rely on a constant supply.

## **Cost of starting a poultry farming business**

Many new businesses require a large capital outlay, which is not within reach of most business owners. A typical startup business also takes a long time to produce a return on your investment. By contrast, a small-scale poultry business has a relatively low start-up cost and rapid returns.

You can begin with as little as US\$1 000 (which basically covers the cost of buying the day-old chicks and feeding them) and get a 100% return on your capital investment within six months.