

Unit A: Introduction to Poultry Science

Lesson 6: Raising Chickens



- I. Chickens (*Gallus domesticus*) are domestic birds that cannot fly.
 - A. Although chickens are flightless birds, they do have a tendency to attempt flight.
 - 1. Chickens do this by running and flapping their wings.
 - 2. Unfortunately they are not capable of staying airbourne.
 - 3. Chickens sometimes can fly for very short distances such as over fences.
 - 4. Chickens will sometimes attempt flight simply to explore their surroundings, however, they will especially fly in an attempt to flee when they perceive danger or pursued by a predator.

- B. There are over 150 different breeds of chicken that come in various colors, patterns and sizes.
- C. The chicken is believed to have descended from the wild Indian and south-east Asian Red Junglefowl which is biologically classified as the same species.



- D. There are more chickens in the world than any other bird.
1. Chickens can be kept as pets, for breeding, egg laying and a food product.
 2. Chickens provide two sources of food frequently consumed by humans.
 - a. Their meat, also known as chicken.
 - b. Their eggs which they lay may be of a variety of colors depending upon the breed and the type of feed fed.



E. Chicken Terminology.

1. A female chicken is called a “hen”.
 - a. Hens lay eggs that range in color from white to pale brown and other pale colors depending on the breed.
2. A male chicken is called a “rooster”.
 - a. Roosters can usually be differentiated from hens by their striking plumage, marked by long flowing tails and bright pointed feathers on their necks.
 - b. The rooster is larger and more brightly colored than the hen.
 - c. They also have a larger comb on top of their head.
 - d. Roosters make a very loud crowing sound usually very early in the morning but they can crow anytime during the day.
 - e. Their loud shrill is a territorial sign to other roosters.
 - f. They can also be quite aggressive birds.



Rooster



Hen



3. Young chickens are called “chicks” or “poults”.



4. A group of chickens is called a “flock”.
 - a. Chickens are gregarious birds and live together as a flock.
 - b. Chickens have a communal approach to the incubation of eggs and raising of young.
 - c. Individual chickens in a flock will dominate others, establishing a ‘pecking order’, with dominant individuals having priority for access to food and nesting locations.
 - d. Removing hens or roosters from a flock causes a temporary disruption to this social order until a new pecking order is established.



Flock of Chickens

F. What do chickens eat?

1. Chickens have a varied diet.
 - a. Chickens are omnivores and will feed on small seeds, herbs, and leaves, grubs, insects and even small mammals like mice, if they can catch them.
 - b. Domestic chickens are typically fed commercially prepared feed that includes a protein source as well as grains.
 - c. Chickens often scratch at the soil to get at adult insects and larva or seed.
 - d. Chickens have a well-developed gizzard (a part of the stomach that contains tiny stones) that grinds up their food.

2. When a rooster finds food, he may call the other chickens to eat it first.
 - a. He does this by clucking in a high pitch as well as picking up and dropping the food.
 - b. This behavior can also be observed in mother hens, calling their chicks.
 - c. In some cases the rooster will drag the wing opposite the hen on the ground, while circling her.
 - i. This is part of chicken courting ritual and has been called a "dance".
 - ii. The dance triggers a response in the hen's brain, and when the hen responds to his "call", the rooster may mount the hen and proceed with the fertilization.







G. Chickens farmed for meat are called broiler chickens, whilst those farmed for eggs are called egg-laying hens.

Broiler Chickens



Egg Laying Hens



- H. Roosters crowing (a loud and sometimes shrill call) is a territorial signal to other roosters.
1. However, crowing may also result from sudden disturbances within their surroundings.
 2. Hens cluck loudly after laying an egg, and also to call their chicks.



- I. Hens can also be extremely stubborn about always laying in the same location.
 - 1. It is not unknown for two (or more) hens to try to share the same nest at the same time.
 - 2. If the nest is small, or one of the hens is particularly determined, this may result in chickens trying to lay on top of each other.



- J. Chickens are susceptible to several parasites, including lice, mites, ticks, fleas and intestinal worms, as well as other diseases.
 - 1. The life span of a chicken varies between 5-7 years although there have been cases of chickens living 20 years or so.

II. Chickens are the most popular poultry raised in Afghanistan.

A. The following breeds of chickens can be found in Afghanistan:

1. Local Breeds:

- a. Sabswary
- b. Kolangi
- c. Khask

2. Golden
 - a. Zarin
 - b. Minor
3. Leghorn
 - a. White
 - b. Black
 - c. Gray
4. Tillahee
5. Fayoumi
6. Pitry
7. Decorative Breeds

- B. Limited information has been found on the three local breeds but what is known is they are raised for both meat and eggs.
- C. The two varieties of the Golden breed of chicken were imported from Pakistan and are the most common breed of chicken found in Afghanistan.
 - 1. They are adaptable to the Afghanistan climate and resistant to the local diseases.
 - 2. Both are raised for egg and meat production.
 - 3. Approximately 80% of the eggs will have a dark shell.

- D. The Leghorn breed of chicken was imported from France.
1. Leghorns take their name from the city of Leghorn, Italy, where they are considered to have originated.
 2. The Leghorn has become the most important commercial egg producing breed in the world.
 3. They are good foragers and can often glean much of their diet from ranging over fields and compounds.

4. They are primarily used for egg production but they are also used for meat.
5. The three varieties raised in Afghanistan are:
 - a. White
 - b. Gray
 - c. Black
6. Although there are many color varieties of Leghorns, the White Leghorn, with its pure white plumage, is probably the most popular variety in the world.

- E. The Tillahee breed of chicken was imported from Iran.
 - 1. They are primarily raised for their egg production.
- F. The **Fayoumi** breed of chicken is an ancient breed and originated in Fayoum, Egypt.
 - 1. Their primary purpose is egg production.
 - 2. Fayoumi Chickens are hardy and very precocious in early maturing.
 - 3. They are excellent at flying and tend to escape captivity.
 - 4. Technically they are a pencilled breed coming in silver or gold.



Fayoumi Chicken

G. The Pitry breed of chicken was imported from France.

1. They were primarily raised for egg production and breeding.
2. However the breed has not adapted well to the Afghanistan climate and local diseases.

H. The Decorative breeds of chickens are noted for their beautiful colored feathers.

Review/Summary

- What are the names of the different breeds of chickens raised in Afghanistan?
- What are some of the special characteristics of the chickens raised in Afghanistan?
- What are some of the different methods used to feed chickens?
- Why are chickens important to Afghanistan?