



Poultry- Raising Chicks

Raising Chicks on the Homestead or Small Farm

Improving chick survival is important for improving chicken production on small farms or homesteads.

Why is Careful Management of Chicks so Important?

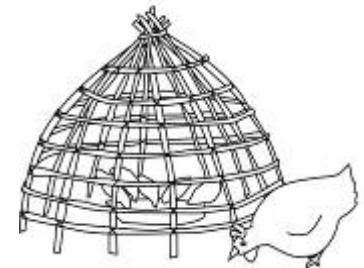
The lack of chicks - due to poor egg hatch and high chick mortality - often limits village chicken production. Thus, improving egg hatch and providing good care for chicks is an opportunity to improve both production and incomes.



How to Improve Chick Management?

Chicks require special care during the first 4-5 weeks.

1. **Clean.** Before the chicks arrive, clean (and if possible disinfect) the brooding area (where the chicks will be raised), and exclude all other birds.
2. **Temperatures.** Keep chicks in a clean, warm brooding area (about 35°C the first week and 3°C less each week until room temperature). Cold temperatures and high humidity can stress chicks leading to illness or death. If the temperature is appropriate, the chicks will spread out evenly. If they are cold, they will huddle near any heat source (e.g. charcoal pot or low-hanging incandescent bulb). If they are too hot they move away from any heat source.
3. **Extra Food.** In addition to letting the chicks scavenge with the hen during the day (for free-ranging birds), ensure that each day, chicks receive extra feed such as: food scraps, maize meal, cereals, green leaves, worms, termites and other insects and their larvae. Grains (like rice, wheat and maize) should be crushed to improve the ability of the chick to digest the feed. Set up a feeding cage of bamboo or branches to allow chicks to feed without interference from grown chickens (See illustration at right).
4. **Clean Water.** Always provide clean water for all chicks and chickens. The water must be provided in a shallow trough that a chick cannot drown in. Stones may be put in the trough to prevent the birds from falling in.
5. **Protection.** Protect chicks from accidents and predators. Chicks can drown in open bowls or buckets of water, or get wet and die from cold.
6. **Prevent Disease.** Protect chicks against disease by keeping their area clean (e.g. clean up droppings) and by vaccinating and treatment. Vaccinating for Newcastle disease is critical to prevent high mortality. Regularly check chicks for external parasites (See Chapter 11.6 of the ACIAR manual referenced below).
7. **Isolate.** If practical, keep the hen and chicks separate from other birds during the first 4-5 weeks to prevent exposure to diseases. In a free range setting this may not be practical, unless there is some kind of fenced area to isolate the hen and chicks.



References: 1) ACIAR, 2009. Improving village chicken production: A manual for field workers and trainers. www.aciar.gov.au. 2) Sonaiya, E.B. and S. E. J. Swan. 2004. Small-scale Poultry Production Technical Guide. FAO Animal Health and Production Manual.

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