

## Workshop Title: Pastured Poultry

Speaker(s) & their titles: Tarrah Young, Green Being Farm

Executive Summary : Tarrah raises pastured (chicken-tractor) chickens (300 total), turkeys (free-range), and laying hens (100) at her home base in Ontario. She recommends pasturing for the benefits of chicken manure fertility and allowing the birds to find up to forty percent of their food through forage. She also takes the time to talk about raising chicks, problems with curious turkeys, and good marketing strategies for your home-grown birds.

Detailed Notes:

**Green Being Farm** – allow animals to « be the animals they are meant to be ».

They raise meat birds, layers, dual purpose. Turkeys.

Regulations around raising poultry varies by province. In NS, supply managed (must purchase quota). There are small-number flock exemptions. See ThinkFarm (NSFA) for more info on raising numbers of birds.

**‘Storey’s guide to Raising Chickens’** – This is a go-to book for Tarrah. Good book for numbers regarding chickens. « Chicken Bible ».

### **Breed options :**

- For Meat birds :
- ‘White Rock/Cornish Rock’ – provide tender meat. « they’re really stupid ». Not strong bones or immune system, matures in 6 weeks. ‘Bonnie’s Reds’ another option, they have better instincts but still produce good meat; take longer to mature.

### **Brooders :**

- ‘Brooder’s are places to raise chicks to a point where they are hearty enough to go outside. Need heat. See slide for detailed numbers. Birds huddled together = too cold, birds far apart = too warm. Use your instincts in combination with technical information.
- Options for brooders : cardboard box, rubbermade tub, built environment. The container area needs to be clean, well-ventilated, warm. Outdoor brooder is considered the « Cadillac of brooders »
- Too much light makes chicks too active, but natural light is a good thing. Brings costs down for heating, but one must be aware of fluctuating temperatures.

### **What to use in brooder ?**

- Tarrah's fave - softwood shavings. Matted bedding leads to fungal growth which can lead to chicken diseases. Keep shavings fluffy.
- Bedding needs to be absorbant. Chicks need to keep legs together to avoid spraddle leg ; if bedding is slippery chicks can't keep legs together. Dropping boards are a clean option – droppings fall so that chicks are not standing on the droppings.

### **Brooder health :**

- If temperature fluctuates, chicks can develop « pasty bum » which doesn't allow them to excrete (diarrhea) .
- Chicks need active immunity. Can get this by reacting to pathogens in their local environment. Need to stimulate chicks' immune systems so that they develop strong immune systems. So, it's good to keep the area clean, but not TOO clean. Some people brood second batch of chicks on first batch of chicks' bedding to stimulate immune system growth.
- Birds born on-farm have a good immune system related to the farm already – and get a leg-up.

### **Monitoring Health :**

- Use your senses. Tarrah uses a guide-list posted as a sign on her henhouse door to train herself and her interns to be more observant. Too much ammonia – need more ventilation and more bedding.

### **Brooder complications :**

- BP – happens when there is no aeration in bedding.
- Cocc – some lethal strains, don't usually encounter it.
- Smothering – if too cold, chicks will pile up in a corner and smother each other.
- Spraddle leg – caused by slippery bedding.
- Manure balls – found on toes, hard as rocks, can cut off circulation to chicks' toes. Check toes before releasing to pasture.
- Predators – raccoons, skunks, wasels, mink, rats
- To keep a brooder clean – start chicks in small space with feed water heat. Gradually expand space as they grow. 3-prong hoe to aerate bedding daily to prevent « capping » (hard surface of bedding). Add new bedding daily.
- Sometimes chicks/turkeys eat bedding during first week – Tarrah uses paper towel under her turkeys to prevent this.

### **Natural Health :**

- Tarrah doesn't use these supplements a lot, only if there seems to be health problems. Can use human probiotics as well as ones made for animals. Organic feed usually has probiotics mixed in.

**Feed – protein requirements:**

- Important to monitor this with turkeys as they grow fast and support a large mass. It ensures reduction of protein.
- Layer hens good at balancing feed, more important to watch in meat birds. Tarrah buys from BioAg for the first few weeks, then uses a local product.
- Conventional breeds are difficult to raise without soy, even though customers demand no-soy feed. During a trial of GMO-free pellets and organic meal, Tarrah's chicks preferred organic meal.
- It's important to offer protein from a variety of sources.
- Some audience members believe pellets (conventional) to be more efficient.

**Estimating feed consumption in chickens :**

- Tarrah's chickens do not waste organic feed. To avoid wastage, do not fill feeder the whole way to prevent chickens choosing what they like and leaving the rest. See stats on slide.
- Most feed data is based on conventional data. Keep in mind that pastured chicks are more active (due to light, in part), but also eat more (bugs, grass).

**Heat :**

- Temperatures over 35 degrees can kill birds ! Especially heavy meat-birds.

**'White Rock' weights :**

- Can use this list to determine how long to raise birds for a certain market preference. Tarrah raises to nine weeks.
- Pelleted food can sometimes lead to « flip-over disease », where birds become too top-heavy (this has not been encountered with organic feed).

**Pasturing :**

- Put chickens in places which need most fertility on your land.
- Can lose chickens outdoors in large windstorms !
- You need more people to manage pastured chickens than when using conventional methods.

**Day range vs. Tractor :**

- Day range
  - o Larger area covered. More elaborate move than tractors
- Tractor
  - o Change every day.
  - o Even fertilization.
  - o Enclosed, but with shelter.
  - o Close to feed, water, shade (all that White Rocks chickens want).

**Chicken tractor models :**

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- PVC pipe – light, but not great on windy days.
- Should be light enough to move, but heavy enough to stay put in a windy day.
  
- NEED DOLLY ! Makes the tractor REALLY easy to move.
  - o Put all weight (eg, tin roof) to the side with the dolly. Flip up roof to watch birds to make sure they're not run over.
  - o To prevent squashed chickens, make sure tractor is light enough to keep control when moving. First few times moving, have someone shoo chickens as you're moving the tractor until the chickens « get » what's going on.
- For chicken wire, use ½ inch instead of conventional 1 inch.
- For shade, use tin roof. Attracts heat, which allows convection system to have cooler air circulating beneath roof.
- Uneven ground, things can get underneath. Try a rubber skirt, or find more even territory. Audience member suggests one strand of insulated electrical wire to prevent predators.
- Tarrah uses 100sq ft tractor w/ 40 birds.

**Feeder and drinkers :**

- Tarrah's favourite is automated and must be hooked up to a pressurized hose. Important to focus on efficiency, especially when working on one's own.

**Marketing :**

- In Ontario one can only direct-market chickens.
- Tarrah does five-chicken-minimum order. Always does pre-orders. Every chicken should be sold before it goes to slaughter. However, there is so much demand for pastured poultry that this isn't a problem.

**Turkeys :**

- Raised to 18 weeks.
- Enough time to go into brooder, and get out for Thanksgiving.
- Turkeys tend to be very curious, can translate into death wish. Makes sure you observe the birds closely.
- Do not sell turkeys before slaughter day, they may disappear !
- Friendly, funny birds, but troublesome.
- Keep feed and drinkers off of the ground.
- Smothering is a big issue !
- Turkeys need to roam, they are great foragers.
- Up to 40% of their diet can come from pasture.
- Great for encouraging diversity of their pastured land.
- Predators are a concern.
- About 70lbs of feed per bird, which can be enticing to predators, especially near harvest.

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- Turkeys like to roost, it's very important in making sure they don't get blisters on their breasts.
- Turkeys will roost as high as possible (eg, tops of buildings).
- Day range system with turkeys using electrified mesh (turkeys will walk through this, more to keep predators out than turkeys in. Chicks will walk right through this, also)
- Selling turkeys: turkey is a specialty meal. Don't sell all of them before slaughter. Expect more money because of holiday birds, and consumer's wish to eat well. Fresh birds are sold. Slaughter date is booked 11 months in advance (as opposed to 4 months with chickens). Tarrah doesn't do pre-pay for chickens and turkey, but does with larger animals.
- Sometimes keeping meat birds with turkeys can teach turkeys how to find things like food. Audience member does the same with putting heritage birds with meat birds to teach the chicks how to forage. Tarrah finds that chicks that look different (eg, heritage birds) can take abuse from turkeys, whereas meat birds do not.
- Performance Poultry (near Ottawa) sells sexed heritage breeds to avoid the rooster/hen ratio problem. Does mail order.
- Provide incentives to customers to switch them from meat kings to meat birds. Give cooking instructions, give free samples. Rely on word of mouth. Problem : difficult to raise meat kings on pasture, but difficult to sell customers on birds that do well with pasturing.
- To help with spraddle leg, use a bit of medical tape to pin legs back together.

**Layers :**

- Pick breed to meet needs. So many different varieties !
  - o Chanteclar is Canadian-developed. Small combs remove problems with frost-bite.
  - o Silkies are great for brooding.
  - o Cocoo maran, large, good moms, pretty eggs.
  - o Americana.
  - o Wellsommers, good for winter eggs.
  - o Rhode Island Red doesn't lay well in winter, same with Barred Rocks.
- Pullets – ready to lay breeds.
- Backyard hens – year old.

**Feed :**

- Same as other chickens. Great foragers. Supplement feed with pasture. Supplement calcium (eg, oyster shell). Minimal health problems. Predators can

