



## Care & Comfort for Baby Chicks

**PEN:** Before the chicks are to arrive, thoroughly clean and disinfect the pen well with poultry house disinfectant.

**LITTER:** Use softwood chip shavings (preferred), chopped straw or peat moss. Make sure the litter is clean, dry, free of mold, and has not been contaminated by dust from other livestock areas. The litter should be at least 4" deep and level. Increase the depth of litter if the floor of the pen is cold or damp to prevent crooked toes and leg problems.

**BROODING AREA:** This is the area where the chicks are started. To keep the chicks from wandering and to block any cold drafts, create a circle using cardboard chick guard, straw bales, etc. This guard or ring should be 18" high and should be enlarged as the chicks grow. Remove the ring when the chicks start to fly over it at about 2 weeks of age. Always keep the corners of the pen banked high with litter, to prevent the chicks from crowding into a corner and smothering if they should become cold or frightened.

**HINT:** We have found that covering the litter (shavings) in the brooding area with a few layers of newspaper, cloth or towel and then spreading feed all over the paper makes it easier for the chicks to find their feed, and keeps them from accidentally eating litter. Each day you can remove one layer of paper, making it easy to keep the pen clean. By the time all the paper is removed, the chicks should be eating from the feeders.

**Caution:** Make sure you spread out lots of feed or the newspaper will be too slippery, and do NOT start turkeys on newspaper, as they may injure their legs.

**HEAT SOURCE:** Maintaining proper temperatures in the brooding area is critically important. Chicks, especially meat chicks, that are exposed to low brooding temperatures for even a short period of time (less than one hour) cannot maintain core body temperature, which can lead to increased mortality and a much lower than expected live weight. Whether you use electric heat lamps, radiant tube heaters, propane brooders, or any other type of heat, make sure your equipment works properly. The most common source of heat is the heat lamp (250-watt infrared bulb). It should be hung at approximately 18" from the floor. The temperature should be 90-92° F (32-33° C) at 2" from the floor. Check the temperature at this level using a thermometer. One heat lamp should be sufficient for 50 to 100 chicks, depending on the weather and the time of year, but we highly recommend using two lamps in case one fails. The temperature should be lowered 5° F (2-3° C) per week until it reaches 70° F (21° C) at six weeks. Heat lamps can be raised or lowered to adjust temperature levels. Comfort is the key! When the birds are older, you can eliminate supplemental heat during the day, and finally eliminate it altogether.

**LIGHTING:** Light is another very important component of the chick's environment. Too much light may contribute to cannibalism and depress the chick's immune system, making it more susceptible to disease. In chicks being raised for eggs, too much light may cause premature sexual maturity, poor egg production, and health problems. And in meat birds, too much light may cause too rapid growth (because the



## Care & Comfort for Baby Chicks

birds eat more) and result in leg and heart problems. Start baby chicks with continuous light for 4 days, and then introduce them to a day and night routine. Never turn off the heat lamps during the dark period unless you have a heat source other than heat lamps and the room is at the appropriate temperature. After the brooding period, starting at about 7 weeks, egg-laying pullets should be raised in constant 8 to 10 hour days. Never increase the amount of light on a growing bird (7 to 19 weeks). When birds have reached proper weight, usually at about 19 weeks, gradually increase the hours of light per day to a maximum of 16 hours (each week add 1 hour of light per day – ½ hour in the morning and ½ hour in the evening). Maturity and weight, not age, are the determining factors in deciding when to stimulate egg production by increasing light.

**DRINKERS:** It is best to use one-gallon plastic or glass chick drinkers (two for each 100 chicks). Place the drinkers at floor level on a thin board so the chicks can easily drink from them. Put lukewarm water in the drinkers when the chicks arrive, and dip each chick's beak into the water. This gives the chick a drink and lets it know where the water is. Never allow the water to run out, and supply fresh water daily. As the chicks grow, the waterers should be raised to the height of the middle of the chick's back. This will keep the chicks from scratching litter into the waterers. Clean the waterers daily to avoid contamination from dust, feather follicles and litter. When the chicks get a little older, you can use larger capacity drinkers or auto drinkers.

You can also add Poly-tonine A Complex (multivitamins) to the water to get baby chicks and turkeys off to a good start. In older chicks and turkeys only, vitamin and electrolyte packages may be added to water during periods of stress (such as hot or cold weather). It is especially good for the White Rock chickens as they can get added vitamins and minerals through the water, which their bodies absorb easier than nutrients in their feed. This is also very good for laying hens in hot weather. Make sure you have adequate waterer space for all birds to have equal access.

**FEED:** We recommend good commercial chick starter crumbles. The feed should be at least 20% protein and fine crumbles. The chicks will be ready for feed when they arrive, and you must ensure that chicks are not more than 3 feet from feed and water at all times for the first 72 hours. Make sure the feeders are heaping full and feed is spread out all over the paper. Chick starter should be fed for 4 to 6 weeks, then gradually switched to chick grower. Check with your feed supplier for more specifics.

**FEEDERS:** During the entire growing period, the chicks should have enough feeder space so that all can eat at the same time. This will reduce the possibility of stunted growth in some chicks and result in a more uniform flock. Feeders should be raised in the same way as the waterers as the birds grow.

**SPACE:** Chicks grown for egg laying will require 2 square feet per bird by 20 weeks of age. Meat birds will require more space, as they perform better with ample growing room.