

Spring 2021

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# Chicken Whisperer™

magazine

Featuring Andy Schneider



Poultry Advancements Today

## **BROODER BASICS BUILD CHICK HEALTH**

### **Back Story**

What's involved in poultry show judging?

### **Feed for Thought**

New, natural additives fight coccidiosis

### **Hands-On Help**

How to change local chicken-keeping laws

### **Real Reviews**

Stromberg's Feed Saver Feeder



## 12 HANDS-ON HELP

Some of the newest poultry-keepers live in town. Would you know how to change poultry laws where you live in order to keep chickens? Here's some help.



## 24 POULTRY ADVANCEMENTS TODAY

When you have new chicks it will pay to start them right, from the moment they enter the brooder. We offer up a here's-how.



## 37 PLAIN TALK

Learn all about Alabama's Golden Egg Contest, open to state 4-H groups.



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# REAL REVIEWS

Stromberg's 50-pound chicken feeder





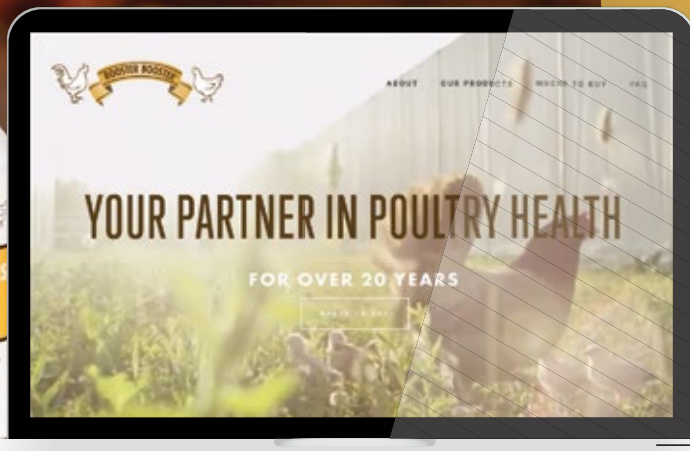
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## Choices in life, choices in feed



**Andy G. Schneider,**  
aka The Chicken Whisperer

I would like to share with you how Tucker Milling, LLC became my feed of choice for all the animals on my homestead.

Over the past twelve years, I have had several major feed sponsors, all of whom approached me for sponsorship. During those sponsorships, I of course used their product to feed the many animals on my homestead. Most recently, I had a feed sponsor in Ohio, and I considered their feed to be a superior, top of the line feed—it was easily my favorite of all the previous feeds I had tried.

Well, the logistics of getting their product to my homestead in Georgia from their feed mill in Ohio was becoming a challenge. Often times the product would arrive late, or it was not enough product to get me through the entire month, so I ended up having to use other brands that were available from my local feed stores. This process lasted for about two years, and I saw the good, bad, and ugly with several different feeds that I fed my animals.

As I said, I really liked the feed from my Ohio sponsor, but all that changed last year.



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## Results count

After seeing the results of all the different feed brands I tried, one feed in particular was really performing well. In fact, it was the only feed I tried over that two-year period which had positive results, and did not cause any negative issues.

It was the only feed that I considered equal to or greater than what I was feeding from my current sponsor. But this new feed was literally \$4.00 less per 50-lb. bag of 16% layer pellets, and I was getting equal if not better results from my laying hens!

***I usually purchase an entire pallet of feed every month, so saving \$4.00 per bag would save me \$160.00.***

What could possibly be better than this? Well, the feed mill where this feed was being produced was for the most part local to my homestead—Tucker Milling is located less than four-hours away in Guntersville, Ala. That also meant I was getting quality feed, for less money, the same week it was being produced!

So, I reached out to Tucker Milling, LLC explaining to them in detail the past two-years of my feed sponsor challenges, and requested a meeting. After visiting and touring their feed mill, and meeting their staff, and talking with the owner himself, there was no doubt in my mind I wanted Tucker Milling to be Chicken Whisperer's new premier feed sponsor.

After a full day of meetings, touring, lunch, and negotiations, I left the Tucker Milling feed mill with a full pallet of feed in the back of my truck, and a new premier feed sponsor.

## Personal choice, zero complaints

Almost one-year later, I could not be happier with my feed choice. We have used their cow, rabbit, goat, chicken, swine, dog, and even their deer feed products, and have zero complaints.

Unfortunately, the pandemic eliminated the ability for us to schedule any educational events at the Tucker Milling, LLC dealers around the southeast, but we hope to have a handful of events this year, including attending some poultry shows.

Personally, the best take away from this story is the fact that Tucker Milling, LLC is the feed I personally choose to feed all of the animals on my homestead. I chose to reach out to them based on two-years of positive results from using their product.

If you live in the southeast U.S., including Florida, Georgia, Alabama, Tennessee, Kentucky, South Carolina, or Mississippi, I encourage you to try their products. I really think you will be pleased with the quality of their feeds, and the results you will get. Not to mention save a few bucks as well.

In fact, I was just in my local farm supply store, and the 16% Tucker Milling layer pellets were \$2.00 cheaper than the basic house brand.

Until next time,

*Power to the Poultry!*

*Andy G Schneider*



**POWER to the POULTRY**





# Andy wants to hear about you!

Please take a moment to fill out our survey



SPRING 2021

**Number of acres owned**

- Less than 1 acre (768)
- If more than 1 acre: \_\_\_\_\_ acres

**You are**

- Female (769)  Male (770)

**Your age**

- Under 30 (762)
- 30 to 39 (763)
- 40 to 49 (764)
- 50 to 59 (765)
- 60 to 69 (766)
- 70 or better (767)

**I live in the**

- City (771)
- Suburbs (772)
- Country (773)
- Wilderness (774)

**Number of mature birds are in your flock:**

\_\_\_\_\_ hens \_\_\_\_\_ roosters

**I primarily raise chickens for**

*(ONE ANSWER, PLEASE)*

- Eggs (775)
- Meat (776)
- Entertainment (777)
- Education (778)
- Tradition (779)
- Profit (780)

**What do you do with most of your eggs?**

*(ONE ANSWER, PLEASE)*

- Eat them (781)
- Give the away (782)
- Market them (783)

**What poultry-related articles are most valuable to you?**

*(CHECK ALL THAT APPLY)*

- Advanced care topics (784)
- Animal health, detailed (785)
- Animal health, simplified (786)
- Animal welfare (787)
- Breeding (788)
- Insight into breeds (789)
- Heritage breeds (790)
- Marketing eggs, meat (791)
- Personal experiences (792)
- Poultry care fundamentals (793)
- Problem solving (794)
- Production tips (795)
- Products, new products (796)
- Recipes, cooking (797)

First name \_\_\_\_\_

Last name \_\_\_\_\_

Mailing address \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Email address \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone number: \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_

**Which the following is on your property?**

*(CHECK ALL THAT APPLY)*

- Cable TV (727)
- Grazing land (736)
- Market livestock (cattle, horses, sheep, etc) (726)
- Non-standard livestock (llamas, goats, ostriches, etc.) (798)
- Pets (dogs, cats, etc) (733)
- Pickup truck (732)
- Pond (734)
- Satellite dish (728)
- Tablet device (like iPad) (729)
- Tractor – compact or smaller (730)
- Tractor – full-size (731)
- Woods, timber (735)

**You can find me on** *(CHECK ALL THAT APPLY)*

- Facebook (799)
- Flickr (800)
- Foursquare (801)
- LinkedIn (802)
- MySpace (803)
- Pinterist (804)
- Tumblr (805)
- Twitter (806)

**Who lives in your household besides you?**

*(CHECK ALL THAT APPLY)*

- Spouse or partner (807)
- Children under 18 (808)
- Children older than 18 (809)
- Parents or in-laws (810)
- Grandparents (811)
- Grandchildren (812)

**Your annual household income**

- Less than \$25,000 (813)
- Between \$25,000 and \$50,000 (814)
- Between \$50,000 and \$80,000 (815)
- Between \$80,000 and \$120,000 (816)
- More than \$120,000 (817)

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**What types of articles would you like to see covered in Chicken Whisperer Magazine?**

*(PLEASE PROVIDE DETAIL)*

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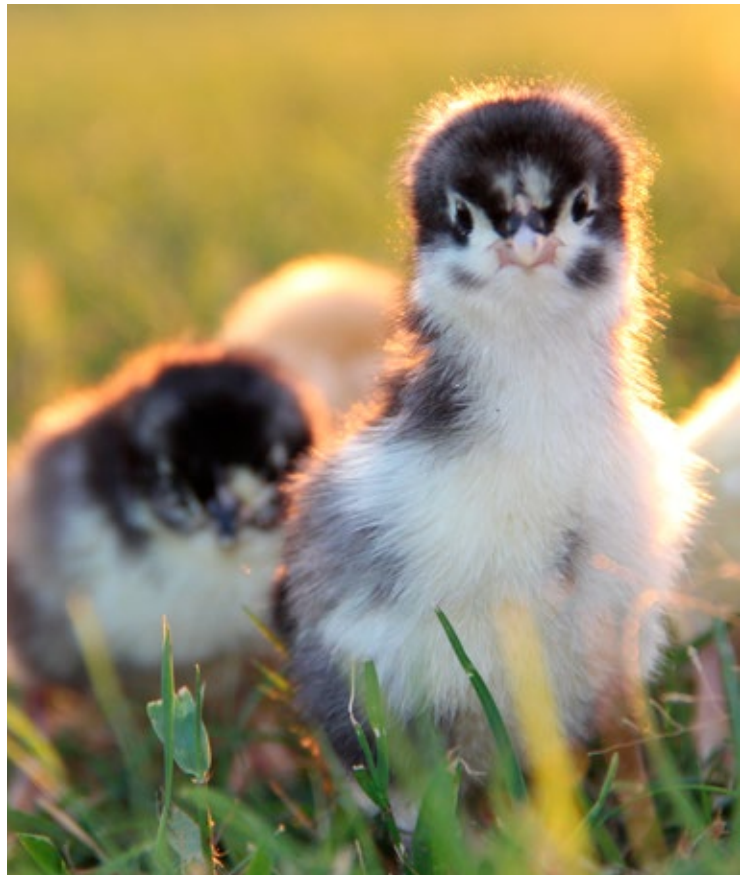
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Description \_\_\_\_\_

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# Home Rule

Urban poultry and changing laws

By Dr. Zac Williams

**R**aising and owning backyard poultry for a hobby or for food has exploded in the past few years. Unfortunately, there is an extensive “knowledge gap” among owners. Problems with feeding, disease, housing, hot and cold weather can plague new owners.

One area often overlooked (and that can get you and your flock into serious trouble) is local laws and ordinances. Many towns, cities, and counties have laws prohibiting live poultry altogether, as well as limiting the number, species, and sex that you can own. Many have nuisance noise ordinances that specifically call out poultry.



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### Don't run a-fowl of the law

Before you buy some chickens, it is imperative that you look into the local laws to determine what you can own so not to run afoul of the law. (Sorry about that.) You could find yourself in court, with angry neighbors, and possibly even legal fees.

Your town will more than likely have one of three types of laws regarding owning of poultry; not allowed, allowed but limitations, or no laws.

Of those three types mentioned, the "allowed but with limitations" version means the town has already outlined what you can own and probably other items such as housing and care. Follow those laws and you'll probably be okay.



### But I'm a responsible poultry keeper!

Oh, you'd like no laws about owning poultry? This could become the proverbial slippery slope.

For example, say you have 4 hens, a nice place to keep them, and they do not make a lot of noise. If somebody down the road has 3 hens and 3 roosters that roam other backyards besides their own and crow all day starting around 5:00 a.m. guess what's going to happen when someone complains? Your chickens stand a good chance of getting lumped in with the troublemakers; soon, no one gets to have chickens.

People will get heated when you tell them they can't have something on their own property, but remember you cannot encroach on someone else's health, wellbeing, or happiness. If someone claims your rooster's crowing is giving them headaches, most likely you're going to lose.

Consequently, the number one rule when owning urban poultry (besides following the law) is to **be a good neighbor** and this cannot be emphasized enough. This is the same for large farms with thousands of chickens to someone who only owns a few.

***Being a good neighbor and chicken owner will go a long way to keeping everyone around you happy, and therefore keeping your chickens.***

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## Laws should set guidelines

In all likelihood, any chicken ordinance or law will have to go before the city council or maybe to vote for all the citizens, depending on locality. Let's examine what should those laws look like and what should be included and not included.

First and foremost, the number and sex of chickens allowed per residence should be spelled out. The best advice here is keep the number small, fewer than 5 or 6 and no roosters.

Let's repeat that: no roosters.

It does not matter that they are pretty or you like the crowing, no roosters. In small backyard flocks they serve absolutely no purpose. So, fewer than 5 or 6 hens seems like a small number, but for most families that should be more than adequate to serve their needs—raising hens for eggs means 4 to 5 eggs a day should be adequate for most families.

A smaller flock size also keeps your profile lower and makes the chickens less noticeable. They are still not animals traditionally associated like dogs and cats with urban settings, so keeping fewer is best.

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### **Make their housing sound**

Housing requirements should be addressed in the law, providing some standards for housing construction. This requirement need not be for an elaborate hen palace, but some standards for general construction.

Examples of what to include would be minimum square inches per bird inside the coop and in the outside run, if present. For most backyard poultry, 1 to 2 square feet of inside coop space per hen is adequate. Outside runs should be attached to the coop and could be less than 10' by 10', providing plenty of room for 6 hens.

Housing should also include requirements for roof materials (leaky roofs lead to wet litter which leads to bad odors). The final integral part on housing is coop location. Check local zoning for "setback," the minimum distance the coop should be from the property line and other residential dwellings. A typical distance is 10 feet from a property line and at least 20 feet from a neighboring residence.

***I would also recommend having some sort of registration for all flock owners. The primary purpose for this is during a disease outbreak.***

During a major disease outbreak, officials will have to go door-to-door to see who has chickens so that the birds can be tested if need be. A mandatory flock registration simply speeds up this process and eases the burden on local, state, and federal authorities.

If requiring a permit or registration, fees should be none or as low as possible.

### **What a waste**

Owners will also have to consider pest and waste management, and this means chicken waste as well as carcasses from any chickens that died (many states or towns will not allow you to bury animals). In most towns, bagging carcasses and disposing in trash is the preferred method of carcass disposal.

Requirements can creatively address manure management—compost bin construction and operation for example, or maybe a collective compost of several nearby flock owners. The goal is to minimize odor, flies, and pests. Manure left piled up will attract all of these and make for some unhappy neighbors.

This ties well into pest management. Chickens, manure, eggs, and feed all attract unwanted pests or predators. Some sort of mandatory pest control plan should be in place for all backyard flocks.

This could be as simple as requiring all feed to be stored in a sealed container (i.e. garbage can with

lid). Fly strips could be required and made to change on a specific schedule. Pests also carry disease, so keeping these controlled in all flocks will help everyone.

### Legislating care, regulating traffic

Other laws to consider are laws for daily feeding and watering. Yes, this seems unnecessary, but some flock owners may not feed and water them for whatever reason. Remember, there are no kennels to take chickens to when you go out of town for the weekend. Some wording that chickens must be cared for every day should be written into the ordinance.

My final suggestion is to not allow the sale of eggs from the

home. Selling eggs from your backyard flock in town is going to attract a lot of traffic to your house, potentially upsetting neighbors.

***Remember, it only takes one upset neighbor and your chickens could be gone.***

In the end, these chickens are for your own personal use or consumption, not as a business.

I know this sounds like a lot, but aren't these the things good flock owners should be doing already? All putting them into the law does is set a reasonable standard for everyone. 🐔

### About the author

**Zac Williams** is the poultry extension specialist at Michigan State University since June 2018. He also teaches several undergraduate courses. Previously, he taught at Tennessee Technological University, providing poultry-related classes and outreach for poultry farmers throughout the state. Currently at MSU he is researching ways to improve mass mortality composting.



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# The Need for Feed Choices

Replacing in-feed drugs with bioactive plant-based botanicals

By Curran Gehring, Ph.D.

Almost every retail feed manufacturer offers a medicated chick starter with the coccidiostat drug amprolium—it is one of the only FDA-approved prophylactic drugs for egg layers, it has some effectiveness, and it is relatively safe. But there are several reasons that medicated feed might not be the best choice for your family's birds. These include potentially limited efficacy, drug residues in meat and eggs, and the development of drug resistance.



### What exactly is coccidiosis?

Coccidiosis is a potentially devastating parasitic disease caused by protozoa of the genus *Eimeria*. Clinical infection is marked by extensive damage to the intestines, bloody droppings, visibly sick birds and eventually death.

Nine *Eimeria* species are known to infect chickens, with three responsible for most clinical infections (*Eimeria acervulina* being the most common): *E. acervulina*, *E. maxima*, and *E. tenella*.

### Potentially limited efficacy

A study conducted at the University of Georgia demonstrated that amprolium was effective against *E. tenella*, "but only partly effective against *E. acervulina*."

Let that sink in—only partly effective against the most common cause of disease. Additionally, researchers from the UK's Central Veterinary Laboratory, Weybridge, determined that "Chicks infected with *Eimeria maxima* and *Eimeria acervulina* were not protected by normal levels of amprolium."

Effectiveness can be further limited by excess dietary thiamine. Amprolium is a thiamine antagonist which means it acts on *Eimeria* by blocking thiamine uptake which interferes with carbohydrate metabolism.

### **Too much thiamine reduces amprolium effectiveness, and too much amprolium inhibits thiamine uptake by the bird.**

### Drug residues in meat and eggs

Amprolium is absorbed from the intestine and can eventually make its way into meat and eggs. When added to feed at an approved level, amprolium residues are minor enough that the FDA says there is no withdrawal time necessary. But the number is not zero and many people may not want to consume food that contains pharmaceutical residues.

### Development of drug resistance

Commercial poultry operations almost never feed a single drug like amprolium repeatedly. Instead, shuttle and rotation programs are used—*Eimeria* are notorious for developing resistance to just about every coccidiostat we throw at them. If we attack *Eimeria* with different drugs that have unique modes of action it is much more difficult to defend against.

A shuttle program uses two or more drugs during the grow-out of a single flock. Shuttles may even be part of a rotation in which different classes of cocci drugs or shuttles are rotated one after another.

Medicated feed is more expensive, but we are also likely continuing to feed a drug that interferes with thiamine absorption, and may not be highly effective against the most common cause of coccidiosis. Plus, drug resistance may have developed over years of feeding the same drug continuously.

### What about other tools?

Botanical extracts and essential oils are some of the best tools that we have to support gut health and wellness in poultry.

Extracts and essential oils are comprised of dozens of bioactive constituents or phytonutrients. (For a more in-depth explanation take a look at the article written by Dr. Jessica Fox in the Winter 2019 issue of *Chicken Whisperer Magazine*, "Oregano, Essential Oils, and Phytonutrients... OH MY—Understanding plant-based additives and their use".)

Oregano essential oil has been extensively researched. Oregano exhibits direct anticoccidial properties—it disrupts intracellular metabolism, causing cell leakage. Two major phytonutrient constituents, carvacrol and thymol indirectly support the chick's immune and antioxidant defense systems.

One theory holds that intestinal lesions arise in part due to generating free radicals (unstable atoms). Oregano (and other herbal essential oils or extracts)

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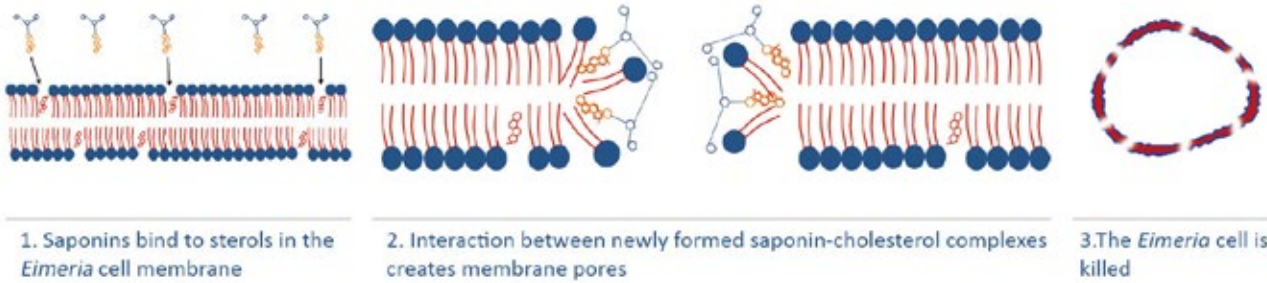
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may minimize the negative effects of coccidiosis.

Several other phytonutrient-containing botanicals such as garlic, ginger, and citrus peel have been shown to be effective against coccidiosis, primarily by increasing cell membrane permeability and relieving oxidative stress—in short, they scavenge free radicals.

### Saponins: a unique class

In addition to molecules like carvacrol and thymol found in oregano, saponins represent another diverse class of phytonutrients with anticoccidial properties. Saponins were originally used in soap-making due to their foaming properties—hence, saponin-containing plants like

soapbark, soapwort, and soaproot.)

The French company Nor-Feed evaluated more than 2,000 saponin-containing plants, focusing eventually on fenugreek and yucca. Fenugreek contains 11 distinct saponins and *Yucca schidigera* contains 15 that are particularly effective against protozoa.

This diversity of saponins is what prevents adaptation by *Eimeria* species and helps to avoid the development of resistance.

Rather than disrupting cellular metabolism like oregano, these saponins rip apart the *Eimeria* cell membrane (see figure above).

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**Instead of one molecule to adapt to or defend against, the parasite faces an onslaught of over 25 different active constituents. It's nearly impossible for *Eimeria* species to develop resistance against so many assailants at once.**

In fact, yucca and fenugreek saponins are as effective as coccidiostat drugs in improving livability and maintaining feed intake and growth. Plus, due to their unique mode of action, they don't replace oregano and other botanicals; they are complimentary.

**Phytonutrient standardization is key**

In her 2019 article, Dr. Fox mentioned that an essential oil can differ in its phytonutrient profile from one product to another, depending on where the plant was grown, the weather that the plant was subjected to, or the distillation or extraction process employed.

For consistent results, look for those that are standardized in the levels of key phytonutrients. For example, an oregano product may be standardized to

contain a minimum guaranteed level of carvacrol or a garlic product may be standardized in allicin.

When you read an ingredient list, it's important to ask your feed company if their botanical feed additives and essential oils are standardized and if they are backed by research.

Ask questions: Investigate the ingredient list to make sure each item is there for a reason and not just "window dressing".

**What about vaccination?**

If you're comfortable with vaccines and can have your chicks vaccinated at the hatchery, go for it—cost is minimal and proven to be effective.

All vaccines stress the bird's immune system to some extent, making it important to lay the foundation of good gut health, immunity, and overall health for your birds to overcome any challenge.

Will vaccination be compatible with other coccidiosis control measures? A study at North Carolina State University determined that a blend of essential oils did not interfere with the effectiveness of cocci vaccine in young broilers. The products evaluated didn't improve



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performance, but that's not to say that they wouldn't have provided measurable benefits in the face of other challenges such as those caused by pathogenic bacteria or heat stress.

### Are we talking antibiotic replacement?

This article is not bashing veterinary drugs. No program is 100% effective—medicated or not—and we will always require veterinary medicine from time to time.

Let's work towards a foundation of good health and prevention and only treat a problem when necessary. Poultry producers have shown this is possible on a global scale, particularly Europe. The percentage of NAE or "No Antibiotics Ever" feed in U.S. poultry industry is growing rapidly.



Nutritionists and veterinarians know how to use natural alternatives effectively. A growing body of research supports the use of botanicals, essential oils, and plant extracts in poultry diets to improve health, livability, and performance.

Science says it's a better way for you, your family, and your birds. 🐔

### About the author

*Dr. Curran Gehring* is the Nutritionist at Tucker Milling LLC in Guntersville, Ala. For more than eight years, he has formulated diets and develops products for all species, including time as the consulting nutritionist for a Vital Farms pasture-raised poultry partner. He has been at Tucker Milling for five years and has a passion for creating the best poultry and livestock feed on the market.



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# Successful Tips for Starting Chicks

Building a solid  
foundation for  
a healthy flock

By Jessica Fox, DVM

**B**ringing home or hatching new chicks is an exciting time for new and seasoned small flock poultry owners. Chicks are especially vulnerable during their first few weeks of life. Starting them off right, with extra care during this time is essential for survival as well as proper growth, health, and egg production later in life.





### Provide quality housing

There are many considerations to take into account when designing the right brooder for your chicks. There are key elements essential to protect chicks from threats, including weather and temperature changes, predators, and disease.

Plus, remember that brooder housing is temporary. As soon as your birds are fully feathered, around 4 to 6 weeks of age, they can be moved into the main coop.

### Key elements

- Protect against weather changes and drafts
- Proper ventilation—ensure adequate air flow without chilling the chicks
- Adequate space for growth—2 square feet of floor space per chick
- Deep enough to prevent escape, or covered with netting or wire
- Keep dry—dampness can encourage bacterial growth and cause chicks to get chilled
- Appropriate bedding. Avoid cedar wood shavings, as the oils can damage the chick's lungs and cause respiratory issues

Natural litter treatments designed for poultry can safely reduce odor, moisture, and bacteria to improve chicks living conditions. Certain products can also extend litter life and improve the quality of compost. Coop Recuperate is designed specifically for poultry and contains organic eucalyptus and lemongrass essential oils and diatomaceous earth, a natural fly repellent.


### Keep chicks warm

For the first few weeks of life, chicks are unable to regulate their own body temperature. Keeping the appropriate temperature for each week of the chick's life will support them through this sensitive stage.

Keep a thermometer in the brooder to keep the temperature where you expect it.

### SET THE RIGHT TEMPERATURE

	BROODER TEMP
WEEK 1	95°
WEEK 2	90°
WEEK 3	85°
WEEK 4	80°
WEEK 5	75°



Select an appropriate heat source to ensure safety and prevent fires. Do your homework and find the heat source most appropriate for your brooder and follow instructions.

Your birds need to have room to move to cooler spaces if they get too warm, but that all birds can comfortably sit under the heat source. If using a heat lamp, consider a red bulb that will provide enough light for the young chicks to see their food and water but is not so bright to keep them awake.

Look for these tell-tale signs temperature is right:




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### **Provide appropriate feed and water**

It is extremely important to get new chicks eating as soon as possible. Chicks do not have much energy reserves stored in their little bodies, so they need to eat continuously to stay healthy.

Birds need a complete balanced diet, specially formulated for the type of bird being fed and stage of life. For example, the particle size and composition of layer diets are not appropriate for young, growing chicks.

Choose a reliable source that contains the appropriate nutrients, and remember to read the label as different feeds are used for different types of chickens at different stages of life. Store the feed in a cool dry place to prevent mold and bacterial growth and preserve the feed's nutrient value. Check and adhere to expiration dates, as important vitamins naturally break down over time.

Keeping your chicks hydrated is essential for appropriate growth, development, and digestion. They must always have adequate access to clean water to encourage drinking.

Chicks experience stress when being transferred to their brooder and quickly get dehydrated and exhausted during transportation. As they are placed

in their brooder, direct them to the water source. If they may have been chilled, ensure this first access to water is warm but after a couple of days they can have clean cool water.

Natural feed additives designed specifically for chicks are safe ways to encourage baby chicks to get eating and provide a boost to early digestive health. First Peep is a natural, non-medicated feed supplement option containing sea kelp, essential oils, and prebiotics that encourages chicks to eat and supports early digestive health.

### **Ensure feed and water availability**

Purchase feeders and waterers designed especially for chicks. This will help prevent birds from jumping in the feed and making a mess and contaminating the feed by defecating in it. This also means the feeders are at the appropriate height.

Keep the feeders and waterers clean and remove any bedding or feces. Depending on the number of chicks and brooder size, you may need multiple sources of both feed and water two more aggressive chicks don't outcompete the others.



Do not let feed or water run out, as this is extremely stressful to birds.

Natural water additives designed specifically for chicks are safe ways to encourage baby chicks drinking. Chick E-Lixir is a natural, non-medicated water supplement option, containing organic essential oils, prebiotics, electrolytes and essential vitamins and minerals (including calcium) that encourages chicks to drink, supports immunity, promotes digestive health and supports bone development.

**Establish digestive health**

When chicks hatch, their guts are basically sterile and need to be populated with a good mix of healthy bacteria and other small microbes including viruses, fungi, and protozoans—this population is known as the microbiome.

A healthy microbiome is essential for proper maturation of a baby chicks' intestinal tract as well as appropriate establishment and maturation of the bird's immune system. The chick's microbiome is closely interconnected with the chicks developing immune system and developing intestinal wall.

Unlike mammals that nurse and receive colostrum,



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freshly hatched chicks unfortunately do not receive this protection. (They do acquire some maternal protection through the yolk, but these quickly disappear after hatching.) Young chicks do not begin to develop their own disease defense mechanisms until a few days post-hatch, making them quite vulnerable in their first few days.

The majority (over 70%) of the bird's immune system is located in the intestinal tract, this is why getting a bird's digestive tract and microbiome healthy from the start leads to healthier immune system development. This is also why maintaining a healthy intestinal tract throughout the bird's life leads to healthier birds that are more resilient to disease and other stressful challenges.

### Develop a disease prevention plan

Starting chicks off right means implementing a good health program focused on disease prevention. Diseases can be prevented with an appropriate vaccination, health, and biosecurity program that you design with your veterinarian. These programs will prevent and support them through disease challenges that your birds are at risk for.

This program may also include a vaccination plan, medications, natural supplements, and protocols to protect your flock.

With a proper environment, appropriate feed, water, supplements, and disease prevention plan that includes a focus on maintaining digestive health, your chicks will thrive and develop into a happy healthy flock. 🐣

### About the author

*Dr. Jessica Fox* is Director of Veterinary Services & Biosecurity at Ralco (getstronganimals.com) in Marshall, Minn. She works in research and development, with particular focus on improving gut health through natural solutions, and is passionate about disease prevention through biosecurity.



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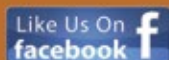
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# Judging Poultry

## What is it all about?

By Paul Kroll – APA-ABA General Licensed Judge

**Y**ou've observed poultry being judged at a show or fair. What is the judge looking for, and why? As you watch, you will begin to understand what the process involves.

Each judge has individual methods to follow in judging their assigned classes. Although each one's preferences prevail, most judges follow something like this:

Each class (cock, hen, cockerel, pullet, old trio, young trio) is caged in a row. The clerk tells the judge exactly how many birds are entered in each class: e.g. four cocks, five hens, seven cockerels, nine pullets, two old trios and three young trios. This number varies with each variety within each breed. The American Poultry Association's *Standard of Perfection* provides a full listing of all breeds and all varieties within each breed.

Most judges look over each class, walking back and forth perusing the birds involved: the entire breed, variety or section. The first glance gives a general assessment of the birds while they are reasonably calm. Once the judge begins handling each bird, those nearby will begin to tighten up and or get nervous, disturbing their natural stance.





**Judging the breed**

The natural stance or pose of the bird we call “type.” Type is difficult to describe, but it can be thought of as a silhouette, with each breed having its own silhouette.

Judges memorize the silhouette of each breed. They scrutinize each entry as to how it compares to that standard outline: body shape, tail angle, depth of body, shape of neck, comb and other head points, etc. The judge makes an initial decision to rank the birds as first, second, third, etc.

That initial decision changes when the judge handles each bird. As the bird is caught and removed from its cage, the judge discerns its weight, overall condition of its body, girth, depth and general feel of each entry. Feather condition can be a factor. More on that later.

After the judge has handled all the birds, he or she marks the placing on the entry card on each cage. When all the birds in each variety are judged and placings assigned, the judge will choose a best of variety (BV) and a reserve of variety (RV). When all the birds in each breed are judged, the BVs are judged against each other, selecting the best of breed (BB) and reserve of breed (RB).



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**Judging the class**

When the entire class has been judged and placed, the judge decides on best in class and reserve in class.

Large fowl are classed according to their place of origin (American, Mediterranean, English, etc.) and bantams are grouped according to their comb type and clean or feather legged. A large fowl class would provide, for example, a Best American Class and a Reserve American Class.

A bantam class might provide a Best Single Comb Clean Legged and a reserve Single Comb Clean Legged. These class winners are displayed in the center of the show on Champion Row.

**Condition and cleanliness**

The judge also assesses other qualities. Condition means more than the cleanliness of the bird. It refers to the bird’s body: weight, size, and overall health and vigor. A bird that is not in good condition in all these respects is better left at home.

It is imperative that every bird entered be clean. A bird that has hardened manure balls on its toenails or dirty feet will be quickly bypassed.

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### **All birds should be washed and properly prepared for the show. Wash at least three days ahead of time so that the bird has time to dry and to preen its feathers.**

Clip long toenails and the upper mandible of the beak on cocks and hens. Cockerels and pullets rarely need their toenails clipped. Clipping young birds may mislead the judge that the bird is older than it actually is.

Don't spray your bird's feathers or rub goo on its facial features (comb, wattles, etc.) that make it look abnormal. Small amounts of baby oil, or some other recipe, can make the bird look its best. Sticky sprays on the feathers are a distraction and can make the birds' feathers gather dust.

A recipe that has always worked for me is half and half witch hazel and glycerin. Use it sparingly on the comb, wattles, ear lobes and even the shanks and toes.

#### **Color variety**

Each variety of a breed refers to the required color(s) of that variety. The APA Standard of Perfection illustrates a plethora of varieties within each breed. Some breeds have only one variety, such as Blue Andalusian, Australorp, and New Hampshire. Other breeds such as Old English Game have many varieties.

Written descriptions found in the Standard of Perfection must be read, studied, and consulted in order to maintain the proper color(s) required within each breed. The color descriptions vary from breed to breed as well. Barred

plumage, for instance, can take on various patterns depending upon the breed: Plymouth Rock, Campine, Dominique, etc.

#### **Size and weight**

Size and weight go hand in hand. Judges develop a "butcher's hand" when determining the weight of each specimen. It may not be 100 percent accurate, but suffices to assess whether the bird is within the required weight parameters.

Some birds may appear too large but not exceed their allotted weight. Cochon bantams, for instance, may appear huge, but when handled, are more feathers than body weight.

### **A bird that is not up to weight and overall vigor will not be considered for a prize.**

All these facets must be taken into consideration. Judging is not easy; it is hard work when approached with the proper time and skills necessary.

#### **Scale of Points**

The Scale of Points in the Standard of Perfection is a helpful tool for the fancier. It lists each section of the bird and the number of points allotted for each. Judges in the USA and Canada use comparison judging now rather than the historical point system. European shows still use points, but they also limit the maximum number of birds per judge.

One such show in Hanover, Germany puts a limit of eighty birds for each judge. In American shows, judges are sometimes assigned several hundred!

Judges now use the Scale of Points to assess the correct number of points to deduct for

each defect. That Scale of Points prevents deducting too many points for a defect.

#### **Show etiquette**

I have always been admonished to be a good sport and to congratulate the winner. We have all lost to birds seemingly inferior to our own and we have all won classes where we knew our entries were not as good as others. I have always enjoyed the compliments of a fellow breeder-exhibitor whom I respect.

It means far more to me to have a person like that compliment my entries than whether or not I win the class. Not all exhibitors share that opinion and are so highly competitive that words of congratulations choke in their throats rather than being spoken. Shame on them!

"There's a fine line between dedication and stupidity," some say. Those of us who schlep birds and all the necessary paraphernalia to show after show cross that line all too often! We have to breed, hatch, rear, and tend our flocks every day in order to have birds in proper condition to enter.

### **An honest win on a bird we bred and raised ourselves is indeed an achievement of which we can be proud.**

I find it enjoyable to observe the deliberation for class and show champions. The judges go together around Champion Row and scrutinize each Best bird, truly nit-picking at its finest!

As a judge, I welcome exhibitors who stand in the row behind where I am working, so long as they



do not talk. Once, a judge who finished his challenging and highly-competitive class walked away and said to observers, "Read 'em and weep; I did my best."

**Midst laurels bestowed**

As an exhibitor, I have always enjoyed friendly competition. I remember teasing fellow exhibitors after a good, hot class was placed, "Congratulations! Perhaps I'll get you next time!" That type of joshing is fun and meant in a friendly and

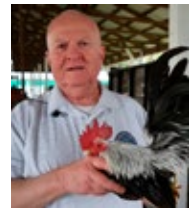
positive manner.

After all is said and done, do we not take pride in our birds, whether or not we won that day? Are we not inspired to go home, take stock of our breeding intentions and make a personal vow to get better next time? I always did just that.

Taking pride in one's honesty, integrity, and in one's entries are a "must" for anyone who exhibits. We must learn to be gracious losers, since we all do more losing than winning! 🐔

**About the author**

Early in life, Paul worked on a farm, developing his love of both chickens and African violets, and is now a general licensed judge for the APA, the ABA, and a master judge for the African Violet Society of America and the Gesneriad Society.



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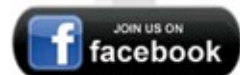


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# Can Your Hens Lay Golden Eggs?

## Alabama's 4-H Golden Egg Contest

By Brigid McCrea, PhD

**T**he 4-H Golden Egg Contest was in 2017 Alabama and involves gathering 4-H youths to test member's skills related to producing the best eggs from their hens. This year, because of COVID-19, members sent in their eggs for the contest.

Alabama 4-H members may enter up to three dozen eggs, but only one dozen per shell color: white-shelled eggs, brown-shelled eggs, and blue-green-shelled eggs are allowed. Members raising chicken breeds yielding all three shell colors have three shots at the state championship.

In 4-H, it is important to teach the next generation of chicken owners how to produce and select the highest quality eggs from their flock.

In preparation for the contest, a series of videos is sent out to help prepare members for what to expect. The nine videos address types of defects to avoid, but also cover uniformity and how to pack eggs for shipment or delivery to the contest. Type in "4-H Golden Egg Contest" into the YouTube search bar to find the videos.

A scoresheet was developed based on measurable quality standards and good management factors.





### Evaluating eggs inside and out

Eggs are evaluated on exterior quality, as well as how they are packed and sized. Eggs are evaluated on interior quality by opening three randomly-selected eggs from the dozen and checking the Haugh Unit and Roche color.

The Roche color is the “yellowness” or “orange-ness” of the egg yolk according to the Roche color fan. To achieve some of the darkest yolks, it takes strict attention to detail when it comes to managing and adjusting the diet. The darker the yolks, the higher the number assigned according to the fan.

Lastly, the opened egg shells are washed out and dried for 24 hours so judges can measure shell thickness. Shells that are too thin—producing “checks” or “leakers”—would never make it to market.

Members are rewarded for managing their flock so that the shells are thick enough to ensure that their eggs make it intact to customers, family, or friends.



### Learning to make the grade

When evaluating the interior and exterior quality of the egg, the 4-H Golden Egg Contest incorporates scientific and long-standing principles from a very similar contest: the 4-H Poultry Judging Contest. There is an entire section in 4-H Poultry Judging Contest devoted to eggs.

To make sure that the eggs selected from their flock are free from blood spots or meat spots, 4-H members need to candle their eggs, and learning how to candle eggs is definitely the highlight of many 4-H Poultry projects. The scoresheet deducts 5 points for small blood or meat spots and deducts 10 points for large ones, making it important to be diligent in the selection process.

**Judges want only the highest quality eggs, and by candling, the interior quality can be assessed.**

When opened, the interior quality of the egg is judged using tools and calculations to determine its Haugh Unit, a measurement of the egg white or albumen. The albumen quality deteriorates over time if the egg is temperature abused, lowering the egg grade.

Also, evaluating the outside of the egg means that members need to select eggs that are free from visible defects. Eggs shouldn't have ridges, thin

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spots, calcium deposits, stains and adhering foreign material. Adhering foreign material can be droppings, feathers, bedding, egg yolk or even egg white. This portion of the contest teaches that eggs need to be clean when they are selling, bartering, or even giving away eggs.

Stains on the shell are one problem that many 4-H members have, regardless of shell color. Members are encouraged to keep their nest boxes clean to help ensure that the eggs are clean when picked up, and collecting eggs 2-3 times a day will ensure they stay clean. Also, they should be cleaned prior to shipping or delivering to the contest.

The other main difficulty that members have is providing a dozen eggs that are uniform in both size and shell color, a challenging aspect. Members with larger flocks have more eggs to select from, and less pressure to get same size egg.

***A dozen uniform brown-shelled and blue-green-shelled eggs is harder to achieve due to natural variations between hens, but it is not impossible.***

### **Meet the 2020 winner**

The best dozen eggs by a 4-H member in Alabama came from a flock belonging to 14 year-old Kadie Allen Riley of Marengo County. Her very clean brown-shelled eggs were very uniform size and shell color.

Kadie is a member of a homeschool 4-H club, the Marengo Rangers. Her flock was obtained in April, 2020 from the local Tractor Supply Company store in Demopolis, Ala. She has five hens and two roosters. The roosters' names are Tom and Jerry and the

hens' names are Daisy, Violet, Pecky, Tigger, and Blue Betty.

Kadie and her dad built the coop together, taking several days, but she said it was a fun project for them to do together. It features a front porch with rocking chairs, a robin's egg blue dutch door, and décor for any holiday season.

In addition, Kadie and her father included porch rails and posts from a cedar tree in the yard that blew down in a storm.

In the future, she is interested in doing research in the future on the emotions of chickens. Being homeschooled, she can design, and complete, a science project with her chickens at her leisure.

Kadie says 4-H programs teach responsibility. She also wants everyone to know that chickens make great pets, and that that programs like this help her work with her family in new ways, taking them out of the routine.

Marengo County, Ala. is no stranger to winning this contest. They are the only county, so far, to have bring home the championship twice! The 4-H agent is Mrs. Elizabeth Yates who provides a variety of engaging and fun programs for 4-H members in her county. Mrs. Yates has even taken a 4-H Avian Bowl team to the National 4-H Poultry and Egg Contest in Louisville, Kentucky.

### **For more information**

Ask your county 4-H agent to see if a program like this one can be started for judging eggs. Or, visit the Alabama 4-H website and look through the information under the 4-H Golden Egg Contest.

If you are interested in learning more about this contest, then feel free to visit the Alabama 4-H website and look through the information listed under the 4-H Golden Egg Contest.

### **The prizes**

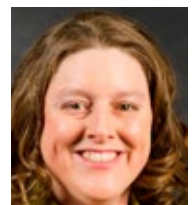
The winner of the Alabama 4-H Golden Egg Contest wins 500 pounds of feed donated by Nutrena. They have been generous from the inception of this contest and continue to encourage young poultry keepers.

Winners also receive an impressively large ribbon, a signed copy of the book "The Chicken Whisperer's Guide to Keeping Chickens," and will be a guest on the Chicken Whisperer Radio show.

The 4-H member receives a yard sign identifying them as the state champion, as does the 4-H agent for the front of the county's Cooperative Extension Office. 🐔

### **About the author**

*Dr. Brigid McCrea, PhD*, is a poultry scientist who has worked with small flock owners for over a decade. Her expertise is being utilized at Auburn University in the development of curriculum for 4-H Youth Development's Animal Programs.





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# First Aid for Chickens

Do you know what  
to do, and not to do?

By Maurice Pitesky—DVM, MPVM, Dipl ACVPM

**Y**ou don't have to be a chicken veterinarian to do some basic chicken first aid. For example, if something is bleeding you need to stop it from bleeding, right?

You can easily do the basics with a few pointers. However, if something is bleeding excessively or we're dealing with broken bones, puncture wounds from dogs and cats or similar emergency-type situations, that's when you need a veterinarian.

Be prepared and make sure you have found a veterinarian who treats poultry *before* the emergency happens.



### Examine the whole bird

When you do use first aid, look at the entire bird. For example, if there is a laceration from a dog bite, make sure you don't ignore the rest of the bird. Examine the entire bird by feeling for deformities and additional injuries.

Things to take notice of:

- The bird should hold its head high and even. "Wry neck" can be caused by infections involving the middle ear and by trauma.
- The comb should be red, upright comb and free of scabs. If it is pale, the bird could be anemic or could have lost a significant amount of blood.
- The head should be free of swelling; swelling around the eyes can occur from sinus infections and trauma.
- The eyes should not be cloudy with no discharge.
- The nostrils should be clear and free of any discharge, crust, and scratches

### On to first aid:

First things first—if you have a chicken that is bleeding, remove it from the flock because chickens are naturally attracted to blood and they will peck at the bleeding chicken, often making the wound worse.

By having a small sick-pen you can at least house the bird there temporarily until the wound is healed (Chickens don't like to live by themselves so long-term housing alone is not good either).

Begin with basic wound management. Clean and flush the wound to remove dirt with a 12cc or 20cc syringe. First flush with warm water and then wash and flush with either dilute soap or very dilute Betadine-style antiseptic (we are looking for a faint brown color from the Bedadine). Betadine in high concentrations can be caustic to the skin of chickens.

As far as dressings on top of the wound you have two general paths: Dressing with a bandage, or no dressing and bandage. This really comes down to personal preference, meaning that you can typically get the same results either way.

For a dressing you can either use Silver Sulfadiazine (SSD) or Manuka honey. Both are considered bacteriostatic (they prevent the growth of additional bacteria).

Don't use SSD near the eyes since it can be harmful to those tissues. If you use the SSD or Manuka honey, make sure you put a bandage on it since both SSD and Manuka honey are sticky and will attract dirt. For a bandage, use a non-adhesive bandage and change daily, if possible.

For non-adhesive bandages, I prefer Tegaderm which you can purchase over the counter at your local pharmacy. You can put some loosely wrapped vet wrap on after the Tegaderm. Alternatively, clean the wound two or three times a day and keep the wound area as clean and dry as possible.

The issue with bandages and dressings in general is that you can end up messing with them so much, hens often stop laying because from being overly stressed. So, from my perspective, unless it is absolutely necessary don't use ointments and bandages.

If the chicken is irritating the wound there are the equivalent of e-collars (the "cone of shame" of cartoon fame) which you can find on-line. A chicken with the e-collar is usually not too happy wearing it, but such is life sometimes.

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## What about antibiotics?

People tend to go overboard beyond what is described above and start to use antibiotics inappropriately.

If the wound looks infected or if you are dealing with a puncture wound, antibiotics may be necessary. In general, most antibiotic therapy will be selected based on culture and sensitivity of a sample taken from the wound site. In some cases, veterinarians have an informed guess about what type of antibiotics work best.

For the DIYers out there, access to over-the-counter antibiotics has been drastically restricted over the last few years. This is due to the inappropriate use of antibiotics in food animals, including chickens.

Recent FDA-Veterinary Feed Directive (VFD) rules have severely restricted access to antibiotics commonly sold by feed stores. Per the VFD, owners must now have a “relationship” with their veterinarian to get a prescription for antibiotics that are deemed medically important.

Why? When any drug is administered to a hen, the ovary, follicles, and oviduct are exposed to it, creating the potential for drug residues to be present in those tissues. More specifically, the yolk and egg white can serve as “storage sites” for drug residues within the egg.

This is why it is important to only use drugs and withdrawal times that are FDA and approved.

In the United States, there are currently eight drugs approved by the FDA for use in laying hens (amprolium, bacitracin, erythromycin, hygromycin B, nystatin, tylosin, nitarsone, and proparacaine hydrochloride).

***If you think your chicken has an infection, you will now need to have an established veterinarian-client-patient relationship in order to get a prescription these 8 antibiotics.***

Due to the recent revision of the VFD, all of the above listed drugs except for bacitracin and amprolium are not available over-the-counter.

## Reach out

When you have questions, feel free to reach out to your friendly extension veterinarian or hopefully if you have a relationship with your regular veterinarian you can also bounce questions off them.

Basic first aid is not too complicated and you can certainly do it. However, remember to be preventative and astute so you can catch small issues before they become big issues. 🐔

## About the author

**Maurice Pitesky** is a faculty member at University of California Cooperative Extension (UCCE) with an appointment in poultry health and food safety epidemiology. Pitesky earned his BS in biology from UCLA and his DVM and MPVM from UC Davis. Pitesky is also boarded in preventative veterinary medicine (DACVPM).



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# Strombergs Chicken Feeder

Durable,  
strong, and  
the right size

By Andy Schneider aka *The Chicken Whisperer*

Just over a year ago, I was attending the 2020 IPPE Expo with my good friend Dr. Brigid McCrea. It's the largest poultry expo in the world, and over 35,000 people from around the globe attend this awesome event. As I was walking the floor, I ran into my friend Eric Stromberg from Stromberg's Chickens and Poultry Supplies, a long-time Chicken Whisperer sponsor. We were catching up, and I mentioned I was looking for a large chicken feeder to replace the chicken feeders I was currently using on my homestead.

I was very unhappy with the metal chicken feeders I had been using over the years, and knew there had to be a better solution. He showed me a large plastic chicken feeder at the expo that he would be happy to send me to try out. Naturally, I asked for two.

After one year of use, I could not be happier.



### A thoughtful design

As soon as I received the two large plastic chicken feeders, I put them together and put them to work on the homestead. What do I like most about this chicken feeder? The darn thing holds a full 50-pound bag of laying pellets! In fact, to be accurate, it holds a little more than a full 50-pound bag. With 150 laying hens, this really reduces my time and labor of refilling feeders every single day. Now, I only have to fill feeders every third day.

The top opening is big, so when pouring the laying pellets into the feeder, spillage is kept to a minimum, if any at all. Speaking of spillage and waste, the feeder has a feed saver grill that helps prevent birds from shaking their heads from side to side and pushing feed out of the feeder.

The lid helps prevent chickens from roosting on the top of the feeder, but I opted to order the lids with an even steeper angle because I don't hang the feeders (which is an option) which would also discourage chickens from roosting on top of the feeder.

At just over 50 pounds, I'm not so sure I would trust the wooden truss in my coop to support it, however a contractor friend of mine says it would be fine.

The fact that it's crafted from hard molded plastic allows for an easy cleaning with just a spray from a garden hose. It's also easy to clean with a scrubber for those yearly deep cleanings.

### Durability-plus

Now, you already know these feeders are large and hold over 50-pounds of feed, and you can see how large they are in the pictures. Don't let the size fool you. They are molded plastic, which make them super light when they are empty, but they are actually super strong too.

***I've actually lost my balance a time or two, and dropped an entire 50-pound bag of feed on top of them with no ill effects. I've also stepped on them while cleaning the coop, and 225 pounds of southern fried Chicken Whisperer did not even leave a mark on these feeders.***



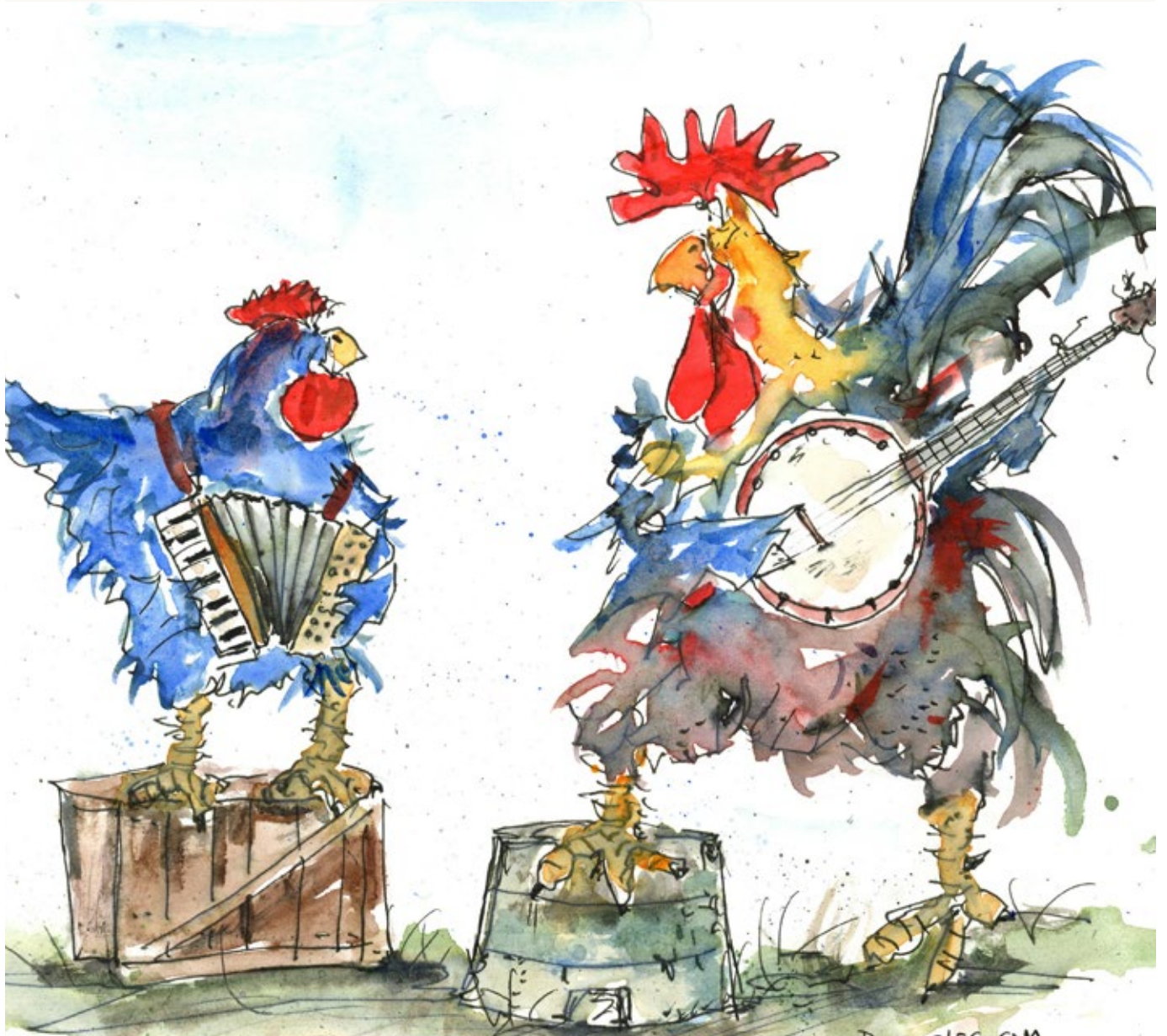
Finally, you are probably looking at the size of these large feeders and thinking they must cost an arm and a leg. Wrong you are! Currently, they are selling for just \$25.95 on the Stromberg's Chickens website. Actually, I had no idea what they cost until writing this review, and I'm quite surprised they are so affordable (so now I don't feel so bad asking for two of them during our initial conversation at IPPE.)

For just over a year now, I've used these two large feeders every day on my homestead feeding 150 laying hens, and I'm super-pleased with them. I know you will be pleased too! 🐔

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