

KSU Poultry 2021 Newsletter

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asi.ksu.edu/poultrynewsletter

Welcome to the Poultry Newsletter

This is the first issue of our new poultry newsletter, geared to all things about Kansas Poultry. The number of small flock poultry owners in Kansas has been on a steep increase since the last recession and bird numbers skyrocketed to even greater heights at the start of the 2020 Covid-19 Pandemic. Victory gardens and pandemic poultry were big changes in 2020 that were not anticipated. City, suburban and rural areas have all experienced an increase of small flocks, mostly by people interested in producing local food during times that have been unpredictable.

We hope to address all the many questions that poultry owners have whether they are first time owners or long timers who have kept poultry flocks for many years. We will bring you information on new products, management issues, housing, regulations, welfare, and health care plus lots of other related information. If you have a question – ask!

You can go to our poultry pages at Kansas State University and subscribe to our newsletter at: asi.ksu.edu/poultrynewsletter. Hope to see you down the road!

Protect your Flocks from Avian Influenza

A potentially harmful virus called avian influenza has been detected in many states this spring, including Kansas and surrounding states. The virus has been confirmed in wild birds in Kansas, and at least one small poultry flock. The virus has been isolated in waterfowl, wild birds, small farms, and commercial operations. Data indicates that the virus is probably moving with the aid of the spring migration of waterfowl as the weather begins to warm. To protect your birds, now is the time to keep as much distance as possible from migrating ducks and geese.

This current outbreak is in a form that is more concerning than many. It is being referred to as highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI). This term means it is highly contagious and can infect chickens, turkeys, gamebirds, and other birds and can cause severe illness and/or sudden death.

As widespread as it now is across the nation, poultry owners should assume the virus is likely present all around and begin an immediate biosecurity program. Backyard flocks are susceptible to this virus as well. There is no licensed and approved vaccine for use against avian influenzas in poultry in the US. The best way to protect your birds is to practice good biosecurity.

Monitor your birds for symptoms including sneezing or wheezing, coughing, nasal discharge, facial swellings, and other signs of respiratory struggle, like gasping for air. Look for a lack of energy, movement, and reduced appetite. Infected layers may suddenly lay fewer eggs that are misshapen. The birds may appear to have incoordination and diarrhea. Be on the lookout for sudden death in birds even if they aren't showing other symptoms.

If you are able, while birds are migrating through, keep your flock indoors or undercover. The biggest risk to a small farm is waterfowl and wild birds that stop by to steal feed or water and mix with your birds while feeding. You must keep waterfowl far from your birds. The virus can also spread from passing waterfowl to local birds that do not migrate.

If you have a pond that is attracting the migrating birds, then stay away, and keep your pets away as well. Expect the pressure to seek water from your property to be stronger in the Midwest and West this year as moisture levels have been low.

Eliminate roosting birds like starlings and pigeons if you have them. Now is the time to stop attracting wild birds with feeders. There is data that suggests that the well-intended feeding of wild birds could lead to a concentration of birds that allows rapid spread of diseases during an outbreak. Wild birds are starting to build spring nests, and these should be removed from coops and barns. Wear gloves and a mask to reduce your exposure to mites and other diseases these nests may harbor. Never place a bird house near your poultry. Light anti-bird netting can be used to keep the birds from building nests, and nets over pens can keep wild birds from entering your coop.

Many small flocks leave feeders full of grain all day and night in the coop. This is never a good idea because many rodents and small mammals visit at night to steal a meal and spread droppings that may contain diseases. A good way to feed birds is to determine how much they will clean up during the day, and feed only this amount every morning. By roosting time, the feeders should be empty. It is even better to pull up the feeder and store it in a rodent proof tub overnight.

Good biosecurity includes other important prevention strategies. You can make an emergency footbath by using a half cup of bleach in a gallon of water, then placing this in a shallow container to step in when entering your bird coop. Don't visit other flocks. Auctions, shows and swaps will be at risk during this time. Purchase chicks from only a tested source. Though most mail order hatcheries are monitored, there is still a small risk of infection. Stop purchase of hatching eggs and chicks from small internet sellers of stock that are not monitored. Some offers will say that their birds are tested, but this likely refers to *Salmonella pullorum* because most small flocks are not required to be tested for avian influenzas like commercial poultry.

Gamebird operations should be alert as well. Netted flight pens are subject to pressure from wild birds and waterfowl the same as small poultry farms. Commercial gamebird farms should not be located near water sources where waterfowl stop. Any method of keeping the waterfowl away from the flight pens should be implemented immediately. If an ATV is used on the farm, it should be decontaminated by washing and applying disinfectant before getting it close to the pens. It is still early spring, so most pheasant operations have not released started chicks to the flight pens. If you are able, try to hold the chicks back in the brooder house as long as possible to give yourself more time for the migrating birds to clear.

Now is the time to be neighbor friendly and stay away from other poultry farms. Commercial poultry farms are highly invested in poultry production so being a good neighbor by staying off their premises during this time is helpful. Many producers enjoy giving educational tours of their farm, but all tours should stop until this threat subsides. Most commercial farms never welcome visitors because this is part of their biosecurity programs.

Even the best prevention plan will not prevent all cases of avian influenza. The Kansas Department of Agriculture is a good source of current testing results and contacts for potential problems. If your birds have symptoms of HPAI, contact your veterinarian or call KDA toll-free at 833-765-2006, or contact them via email at KDA.HPAI@ks.gov.

The 2022 Baby Chick Catalogs are ready!

There are two catalogs I look forward to getting after the December holidays – seed catalogs and baby chick catalogs. Maybe it's because both mean that longer, warmer days are coming soon, even though the cold Kansas wind is blowing hard with occasional snow flurries.

Order Early. In some catalogs, I already see the effect of the pandemic on 2021. Many varieties of seeds are sold out, as well as several varieties of baby chicks. The pandemic caused many growers to run short of chicks in spring 2020 and this seems to be lingering through spring 2021. With so many unknowns caused by COVID-19, hatcheries have struggled to predict what the effect will be on 2021. Chick numbers must be predicted at least a year in advance, so there is likely to still be a squeeze on the supply side.

Choosing a breed or variety. There are three general categories of baby chicks to consider: egg-type, meat-type, or dual-purpose breeds. If there is a need to fill the freezer for the year, choose the Cornish-Rock cross chicks. These birds are usually only grown for 8-12 weeks and should be finished during the cooler parts of the spring before temperatures get to hot since meat chicks are prone to high temperatures.

The egg-type breeds are generally the best layers and will probably remain light weight most of their life. This is good for the high summer temperatures we get in Kansas, and this also keeps feed costs down. The roosters in this category are generally poor meat producers since they, too, carry the low weight genetics of the hens.

Dual purpose breeds were developed as workhorses, meant to lay eggs for a season, then be processed into meat the first winter. The problem is that few of these lines have been evaluated and selected consistently to be efficient eggs layers or meat makers. But most dual-purpose breeds make good yard birds.

Brown egg or white egg? Most breeds of chickens lay brown-shelled eggs. There are few that lay eggs with various tints. The white-shelled eggs are easiest to candle at home. Brown eggs tend to sell for more in the market so if you plan to sell extra eggs, then focus on brown shells. White-egg-layer types tend to lay a few more eggs with a bit less feed and will produce a little longer. The shell color or tint has little to do with taste or nutritional value, so its more of a matter of preference.

Interpreting the breed descriptions. Both seed and baby chick catalogs have one thing in common: both tend to “talk up” the best attributes of the varieties. Of course, performance will depend on the feed you buy, your management decisions, and many, many other things. So, if you read “this breed holds the world record for eggs laid during the summer”, you probably shouldn't count on the description and “count your eggs before they hatch!”

Select vaccinated chicks if offered. Most hatcheries offer vaccination. This generally means Marek's Vaccine. This is a disease that occurs in all states. Marek's Vaccine is one that is most successful if administered as soon as the chicks hatch, so having the hatchery do it for you is a good choice. There are numerous other vaccines and boosters for poultry, but most cannot be given at hatch.

Pullets, cockerels, or straight run? At hatch, the sex of a chick can be determined by an experienced handler. Pullets will be all female, so if you want eggs, then you should choose pullets. Straight run means that the chicks have not been examined so you get a mix of males and females. Remember that it's not always 50/50! If you place a small order of 10 chicks, you could easily get seven pullets and three cockerels, or you may even get seven rooster cockerels and just three pullets! If the goal is eggs, then mathematically it pays to buy the pullets in almost all cases. For meat, the Cornish-Rock cockerels tend to grow a faster with slightly less feed, but the sex difference overall is usually not worth paying for sexed makes compared to simply buying straight run.

Selecting a shipping date. Many hatcheries will offer a choice of shipping dates. If you are like me, you can't wait to get started. I can't tell you how many times I've had a late frost burn my tomato transplants! Remember that chicks will need a breeze-free area with a heat source of up to 90 degrees F. You could probably start even in January, but why go to all the hassle? The longer you wait in spring, then less it will cost to heat the chicks during the growing phase. Just remember to place your order early for reservations. For meat birds, they are best grown in the spring or fall since they tend to not be heat tolerant. So time your shipment so that the birds are heaviest during cooler part of the season.

NPIP Testing is Back

For the past two years, testing birds for the National Poultry Improvement Program (NPIP) was suspended due to the shortage of testing agent. For years, cost and availability of the testing agent were unpredictable due to manufacturing issues. However, these issues have hopefully been resolved, so the Federal program will require the Division of Animal Health in the Kansas Department of Agriculture to require all poultry to show a negative *Salmonella pullorum* test at shows, sales, and swap meets anywhere and at anytime in the state of Kansas.

If you plan to participate in poultry events, then it's time to review the testing requirements, order supplies, and be sure that your license is up to date. To check your NPIP license status, contact: <https://agriculture.ks.gov/divisions-programs/division-of-animal-health/animal-diseases/poultry-npip>

To find out more information about the program and to become a certified NPIP testing agent through Kansas State University, contact: <https://www.asi.k-state.edu/research-and-extension/poultry/npip-testing-program/index.html>

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