Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association

PO Box 170, Unity, Maine 04988-0170 • Phone: (207) 568-4142 Fax: (207) 568-4141 • Email: mofga@mofga.org • Web: www.mofga.org

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MOFGA FACT SHEET #14

Organic Chicken Basics

by Diane Schivera, MAT

MOFGA's Organic Livestock Specialist

Introduction

The basis for organic livestock production is the development of a harmonious relationship between land, plants, and livestock, and respect for the physiological and behavioral needs of livestock. This is achieved by:

- 1) Providing good quality organically grown feed.
- 2) Maintaining appropriate stocking rates.
- 3) Designing husbandry systems adapted to the species' needs.
- 4) Promoting animal health and welfare by:
 - · minimizing stress,
 - · maintaining animal health with sound management,
 - · emphasizing cleanliness,
 - moving away from the regular use of health care products.

Housing Space Per Bird

Replacements

- 1/3 ft² until 3 weeks, inside
- 1.5 ft² until 16 weeks
- After 4-6 weeks, depending on outside temperatures, birds are required to have access to the outdoors

Laying Hens

• 1.5 – 2 ft² inside, 8-10 ft² outside, 6-10 in. perch space.

Meat Birds

- The standard "Chicken Tractor" is 10 x 12 ft. for 75-90 birds. Needs to be moved daily or the birds will be too crowded.
- 3 ft² per bird. Another option is to use poultry netting and allow 15 ft² per bird for the season. Need some cover for weather protection

Clean bedding: added to the top or changed regularly.

Feeder Space Per Bird

Replacements: 1-2 in.

Layers: 2-3 in. Meat Birds: 6 in.

Feed Consumption Per Bird

Replacements: 15 lb. to 16 weeks

Layers: .2 -.25 lb./day, 1.5 - 1.75 lb./week, 6 -7.5 lb./month,

72-90 lb./yr

Meat Birds: 10-20 lb. to 8 weeks

Set feeder height so it is level with back of bird when standing and only fill half way to reduce feed waste.



A Chicken Tractor is a portable house for moving birds around on pasture.

Feed Ingredient Restrictions

- All feed must be organic, no feed/vegetable scraps that aren't organic.
- · Synthetic methionine is allowed until 2008.
- Fishmeal is allowed to supply methionine, if discussed with certifier

Water Space Per Bird

• .5 to 1.5 ft² as they grow.

Health care

- Birds must be managed organically from the 2nd day of life
- No non-permitted substances in feed, healthcare products or house structure.
- · Vaccinations are allowed.
- For specific treatments, see *Raising Organic Livestock in Maine: MOFGA Accepted Health Practices, Products and Ingredients* (available on www.mofga.org, or by calling the MOFGA office at (207)568-4142).

Processing/Marketing

Eggs

- Must be clean. Sand lightly or wash to sell.
- If not washed, there is no need to refrigerate if selling within 7 days.
- Washed eggs must be refrigerated immediately after drying at or below 45° F.

Meat

There are two options for legal poultry slaughter. A Commercial Food Processor license from the Maine State Dept of Ag (287-7517) is needed to do either:

- If you are slaughtering less than 1,000 birds per year, you can sell them from the farm gate.
- Grower/Producers ("G/P") --those slaughtering less than 5000 birds per year-- can sell anywhere. A state inspected facility is required.
- It is also possible to sell birds live and then transport them to a custom facility. A permit from the Dept. of Ag is required.

About the author: Diane Schivera is Organic Livestock Specialist for MOFGA. Call (207) 568-4142 or email dianes@mofaa.ora.