

Rearer reveals secrets to getting pullets off to a good start

Pullets are highly bred birds and getting their rearing right is fundamental to the success of the future laying flock. **Jon Riley** gets an insight on how rearers ensure the foundations of productive and robust hens

Modern hybrid hens are genetically sophisticated and achieving their productive potential will only be possible if the development period from chick to hen is carefully managed.

Attention to detail is critical if the birds are to develop into healthy, robust hens capable of achieving their genetic potential, says Charles Macleod, rearing director at Hampshire-based Humphrey Feed and Pullets.

Preparation begins after the departure of the previous flock, with all housing and equipment cleaned to ensure newly arrived chicks are not challenged before their immunity can fully develop.

All old litter is removed from the site and all surfaces washed and thoroughly disinfected.

As the chicks have limited ability to regulate their own body temperature for the first couple of weeks after hatching, their accommodation needs to be pre-warmed to 32-34C and the temperature then raised one to two days before arrival.

Chicks will lose heat through their feet very rapidly, so to avoid cold concrete floors, warming takes place even before the litter is introduced.

“Once the birds are fully feathered, we adjust the temperature to match the client

farm’s situation, and the time of year when they are restocking,” explains Mr Macleod.

Maintenance and test runs

It is a false economy to wait until the last minute to test ventilation fans and to leave feed lines dormant until the birds arrive.

Components of the feed belt or chains can rust after cleaning and may be jammed if they are left untested until the chicks are in place.

It is also important for ventilation, fans and inlet motors to be checked and functioning, especially in hot weather, Mr Macleod says.

Observation and record-keeping

From day one of the chicks’ arrival, and right the way through the rearing programme, regular observation and record-keeping are essential.

An even spread of chicks feeding, playing and resting is a good indication of a contented flock. Listening to the chicks can also provide an indication of how happy they are with their environment.

If chicks are tightly huddled, rather than evenly spread, they may be too cold, or perhaps in a draught. Panting, spreading wings out and seeking out cooler areas of the rearing house is a sign of overheating.

A certain level of mortality during the rearing period is to be expected, though chick suppliers anticipate these losses and provide additional chicks with every delivery to compensate. Water and feed use is monitored closely to make sure the birds are thriving.

Feed and water

The chicks start off on crumbs, placed on lines of biodegradable paper and, once they are feeding well and have achieved their target weight, they change to the first of five mash rations, formulated to meet the nutritional requirements of each development stage.

Each flock of pullets is weighed weekly and >

DID YOU KNOW..?
Over 16 weeks, a pullet will eat between 5.5kg and 6.5kg of feed, across five or more different rations

Nipples should ideally have a drop of water present when birds are placed, to encourage early drinking



FEED PROGRAMME		
Age (days)	Bird weight (g)	Ration
0-21	170	Starter Crumb + Actigen
22-33	297	Starter Mash 1 + Actigen
34-45	447	Starter Mash 2 + Actigen
46-78	954	Grower
79-98	1,220	Developer
99-105	1,300	Developer + Flubenvet
106-112	1,380	Pre-lay

ONLINE 

Visit our Poultry page for more insights, as well as case studies and expert advice on getting the most from your flock. www.fwi.co.uk/poultry



AVIAN INFLUENZA INSURANCE



Do you have protection against the cost of infection?

The cost of an Avian Influenza (AI) outbreak could be catastrophic. That's why we've partnered with Markel, the Lloyd's of London Syndicate to provide an exclusive policy that gives AI cover for your birds and clean-up costs in the event of an outbreak on your farm.

Contact your **local Agent** or search:
NFU Mutual Avian Influenza



NFU Mutual
FARM INSURANCE

< assessed against breed standards. The evenness of the flock is also recorded and provides a crucial overview of the pullets' progress

During the 16-week rearing phase, each pullet will consume between 5.5kg and 6.25kg of feed across five or more rations.

As for water, supplementary pans are placed at a rate of one for every 300 chicks, while increasing the water pressure in the nipple lines to ensure there is a drop of water on each nipple at the optimum height will attract the chick's naturally inquisitive attention.

The chicks will then peck at it and quickly learn where the water comes from.

Feeling the contents of the chicks' crops indicate whether feed and water is being easily accessed, says Mr Macleod.

Bird training

Pullets need to be acclimatised to the plethora of housing systems that are available to free-range producers. Multi-tier housing systems are fast becoming the norm, so pullet rearers need to make sure the flocks are equipped to thrive in these systems.

Developing pullets are therefore encouraged to explore multiple levels of platforms and perching, with drinker lines and feed tracks strategically placed to encourage use of these elevated areas. >

Weighing birds regularly and checking against breed standards is the best way to track their progress



HUMPHREY FEED AND PULLETS

THE NUMBERS

16

The number of individual vaccinations required over birds' rearing period

32-34C

The temperature that sheds need to be before the chicks arrive, to give them the best start

H M P H R E Y
FEEDS & PULLETS

THE POTENTIAL OF YOUR FLOCK IS IN THIS CHICK

With Humphrey Feeds & Pullets our farmers receive:

- ✓ Robust pullets ready for production
- ✓ Flocks trained to be mobile
- ✓ Weekly rearing reports
- ✓ Stress-free delivery at optimum body weights

"Thanks to the team at Humphrey Feeds & Pullets the birds arrived calm and settled quickly which is important as a smooth unloading process always leads to better production."

- Susie Macmillan of The Mac's Farm



Advancing Poultry Performance
since 1932

ENQUIRIES: 01962 764 555

www.humphreyfeedsandpullets.co.uk



pullets@hfandp.co.uk

feeds@hfandp.co.uk



Supplementary water pans ensure no bird is without easy access to drink

Training the pullets in this way helps them find food more quickly, to better equip them for life in a multi-tier house, minimising stress and growth setbacks when they arrive.

Vaccination programme

Comprehensive vaccination commencing in the hatchery and completed during the rearing phase is another cornerstone of today's poultry industry.

Programmes that provide the hens with a "standard" level of protection will often require the administration of 16 individual vaccines.

"We liaise with clients to establish exactly what is required based on the history of their unit and work with the farm's vet," says Mr MacLeod.

"If the producer has not consulted a vet, or the farm is a new build, we will look at the unit and consult our own veterinary team to devise a programme that protects the birds in their new environment," he adds.

Establish lighting

Bright, even lighting when the chicks are placed encourages activity and feeding, and providing the chicks do not look tired, they may initially only experience a four-hour dark period.

As rearing progresses, the light duration and intensity is stepped down, following a programme agreed with the customer.

"We establish what type of lighting – LED, tungsten or fluorescent – is in place on the layer farm," says Mr MacLeod. "It is important

that not just the duration and intensity of the lighting is discussed, but also the schedule of change."

Breed companies have for some time provided lighting schedules that, if followed both

during the rearing phase and at the onset of lay, can influence the maturity of the hen, with a consequential effect on egg size profile.

With the increase in demand for larger eggs, requests for lighting schedules that are at the extremes of breeders' recommendations have become more common. "In our opinion, this change in production needs to be monitored carefully and judged against long-term health, welfare and productivity."

TYPICAL VACCINATION PROGRAMME

Protection provided	Days old
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Mareks' ● Beak treatment ● Coccidiosis control ● Infectious bronchitis 	1
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Salmonella E&T 	7
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Infectious bursal disease ● Infectious bronchitis 	18
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Infectious bursal disease 	28
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Newcastle disease ● Infectious bronchitis 	35
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Newcastle disease ● Salmonella E&T 	42
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Infectious laryngotracheitis 	49
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Avian metapneumovirus 	63
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Avian encephalomyelitis 	77
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Salmonella E&T 	84
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Infectious bronchitis 	91
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Infectious bronchitis ● Newcastle disease ● Egg drop syndrome 	Loading

Transition to the laying house

Egg producers are actively encouraged to visit their future flocks as they are growing and to be engaged throughout the rearing period.

"We send weekly rearing reports detailing the flock's progress and work together to ensure the flock is loaded, transported and housed in an organised, efficient manner, with the welfare and well-being of the pullets the primary consideration," says Humphrey Feed and Pullets sales director, Martin Humphrey.

Flocks are provided with electrolytes via their drinking water prior to transport and can be supplied for addition to the customer's water supply, to assist the pullets in acclimatising to their new environment.

Flocks are usually loaded in the late afternoon, having had opportunity during the day to feed and drink normally.

They then travel overnight to the laying unit, at a time when they are used to resting and sleeping, and are introduced to their new home as early as possible, giving them a full day to acclimatise and find feed and water. ■