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.

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@mofga.org.