



A worker replaces layer's feeds.

How to raise layers for profits

To start a commercial poultry farm, Dr Ismail Nsubuga, the director, Confeed International advises prospective farmers to observe proper practices, writes Beatrice Nakibuuka

Raising egg laying birds for commercial egg production is one of the commonest business poultry farmers in Uganda have engaged in.

The birds start laying eggs commercially from 18-19 weeks of age and continue until they are about 72-78 weeks old.

Not all hens lay an equal number of eggs but depending on how you feed them and the breed you have, some hens may lay eggs for about a year and six months to two years.

It is therefore advisable that you always purchase healthy chicks from a reliable hatchery.

Male Ssebuliba, a resident of Kawempe Mbogo, has been a poultry farmer for 15 years and today he keeps 2,000 birds.

He buys day old chicks from a trusted hatchery and keeps refilling every six months so that he is never out of season and off market for eggs.

Due to scarcity, there is a projected market for eggs because in the past three years, a tray of eggs was about Shs6,000 but now it is about Shs9,000 to Shs10,000.

Keeping chicks

The layer birds are such a special species of hens which need to be raised from the time when they are one-day-old. When you bring the layer chicks into the shelter at day one, they need maximum care and attention. They need a brooder, where they will stay for about two months getting enough warmth that you must improvise into the shelter.

Ssebuliba however warns that farmers should guard against providing extreme heat for the chicks because they may suffocate and die.

"The farmer should just be observant. Whenever the chicks do not go near the source of heat and just scatter around the

brooder, it is an indicator that there is too much heat. They just need average heat," says Ssebuliba.

During the first weeks after birth, many chicks do not want to drink water and are not good at eating so you must make adequate water drinking systems in their brooder house, and train them to drink water. "I therefore add Glucovit to their drinking water to boost their energy and increase their appetite. The vaccination programme is a must for these chicks to keep them free from all types of diseases. Timely vaccination gives disease resistance power to the chicks while they grow and will reduce their mortality," Ssebuliba adds.

10,000

CURRENT MARKET VALUE OF A TRAY OF EGGS

According to Dr Ismail Nsubuga, the director, Confeed International, farmers must give layers which are 0-6 weeks, chick mash starter.

"Anyone can make the feeds for young chicks. All you need is 100 kilogrammes of maize bran, 12 kilogrammes of silver fish, 10 kilogrammes of sunflower, 10 kilogrammes of cotton and four of shells," says Dr Nsubuga.

The chicks should only stay in the brooder for a month and thereafter taken to another shelter and their feeding changed to growers mash.

Ssebuliba says, "De-beaking the birds is very important because this will stop the feather-pecking, egg-eating habits and also reduces the waste of food. This therefore requires the farmer to cut off the curved part of the bird's beak, both the upper and lower beak at the age of about 15 weeks."

Egg production

Egg production from a commercial layer farm depends on the care and farm management. If you take good care of your birds and manage them properly, then the production and profit will be high.

About four and half months, your birds may start laying eggs and here, Ssebuliba warns that the farmer should continue feeding them on growers mash because not all birds start laying eggs at the same time. Some of them usually need more of the growers mash to grow.

After they have laid about 30 per cent, then they can be started on the layers mash.

Because of this, egg laying rate and size of eggs increases gradually. The hens grow until they are 40 weeks and their weight and size of eggs increases till their 50 weeks of age.

"The colour of the egg yolk depends on how you feed your birds. The local birds usually lay eggs with a yellow yolk because they move freely and are able to eat a lot of greens. Feeding your layer birds with fresh green vegetables will make the egg yolk yellow," Nsubuga says.

Feeding

There are various places where you can buy animal feeds which are already mixed but mixing for yourself is usually better because you may not be sure how much of a particular feed they may have mixed.

Make sure that the feeds you bought are enriched with essential food value by having one particular trusted supplier.

Protein and mineral are very important for laying hens.

According to Dr Nsubuga, chicken health is very much dependent on the supply of pure, clean and fresh drinking water.

You have to provide adequate water according to the demand of your laying hens.

In accordance with the age and species of chickens, food providing can control the weights of chicken.

Use sufficient calcium, phosphorus, vitamins, amino acid and other mineral substance in their food.

"When the birds are laying eggs consistently, Ssebuliba remarks, the meat booster in the feeds is removed to prevent them from gaining unnecessary weight which would make fats blocking the reproductive system. The egg boosters are then introduced in the feed to help them lay big and hard eggs that do not break easily."

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