



## Pasturing Poultry for Meat Production

To meet the demand for local meat and eggs, an increasing number of farmers and ranchers are raising poultry on pasture. Some producers are integrating the birds into their other livestock or crop operations. This issue of *ATTRAnews* looks at the benefits and challenges of raising pastured poultry for meat production.

## Why Raise Poultry on Pasture?

By Terrell Spencer, NCAT Poultry Specialist

For many beginning farmers, poultry may be the most logical livestock choice. Birds have several advantages — their small size, quick return on investment, and low cost of start-up, to name a few. Poultry can be the “gateway” animal to raising larger stock like sheep, goats, hogs, or cattle.

Poultry are raised on the farm for many reasons – egg and meat production, insect and weed control, selling stock, and more. Due to the great variety of sizes, diets, foraging behaviors, and hardiness among poultry species, poultry can be advantageously incorporated into almost any existing livestock or horticultural enterprise.

The addition of poultry can diversify the farm’s offerings to customers through meat and egg production. Poultry can provide insect and weed control, increase soil fertility, and serve as a marketing and educational tool for families.

### Healthy Pastures, Healthy Flocks

Many producers are shocked to see just how much green forage the birds, especially chickens and turkeys, will eat when given the opportunity. Depending on its quality, pasture may replace up to 25% of the feed consumed.

Birds raised on pasture are typically quite healthy. Their immune systems are generally strong because they are exposed to sunlight, fresh air, and frequent fresh pasture in a naturally sanitary environment. The use of antibiotics and other medications is rare in pastured poultry production.

When poultry graze on healthy pastures, gobbling insects and plants, the birds produce flavorful meat. The yolks of pastured eggs are usually dark orange and the fat deposited in the meat is often yellow, evidence of the elevated



*NCAT Poultry Specialist Terrell Spencer owns Across the Creek Farm in Northwest Arkansas. He and his family are raising 3,000 broilers and about 200 laying hens on pasture. Photo: NCAT*

vitamin, mineral, and Omega-3 content of the meat. Many customers appreciate the humane practices of farmers who raise their chickens on pasture. All these factors mean that the pastured poultry farmer can charge a premium price.

It’s not all a bed of roses with pastured poultry production. Hurdles include predators, processing, marketing, complex regulations, pasture seasonality, severe weather, product storage, and transportation.

Once you get past the learning curve, though, pasturing poultry can be a great system. With a virtually untapped market and a tremendously popular product, farmers who are able to meet the challenges can profit from the emerging pastured-poultry industry. See page 2 for a list of ATTRAnews’s extensive resources on poultry and pastures.

### Is drought impacting your life and work this summer?

Check out ATTRAnews’s great publications, PowerPoints, and other resources on how to manage water for crops and livestock:

<http://bit.ly/qTpHL5>

## Resources for Raising Poultry on Pasture

- **American Pastured Poultry Producers' Association** (APPPA) is a nonprofit educational and networking organization. <http://apppa.org>
- **Center for Integrated Agricultural Systems** at the University of Wisconsin offers many studies showing that pastured poultry systems can work well on small and mid-size farms in the region. [www.cias.wisc.edu/category/crops-and-livestock/poultry](http://www.cias.wisc.edu/category/crops-and-livestock/poultry)
- **Eat Wild** website provides information on pasture-based farming, including lists of farms that sell direct to the public. [www.eatwild.com](http://www.eatwild.com)
- **How to Raise Free-Range Chickens** is the easy-to-understand, information-packed website of Oregon chicken farmer/author Robert Plamondon. [www.plamondon.com/freerange.html](http://www.plamondon.com/freerange.html)
- **Pastured Poultry Yahoo group** is an active online network. <http://tech.groups.yahoo.com/group/PasturePoultry>
- **Profitable Poultry: Raising Birds on Pasture** is a 16-page publication from USDA's Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program. <http://mysare.sare.org/publications/poultry/poultry.pdf>

### New and Updated Publications from ATTRA

- Energía Renovable: Oportunidades en Su Predio Agrícola SP304 (Spanish translation of ATTRA's Renewable Energy Opportunities on the Farm)
- Llamas and Alpacas on the Farm IP430
- Peaches: Organic and Low-Spray Production IP047
- Organic Standards for Crop Production: Excerpts of USDA's National Organic Program Regulations IP332
- Organic Standards for Handling: Excerpts of USDA's National Organic Program Regulations IP333

## References about the Federal Regulations on Processing and Selling Poultry Meat

- 1. Federal, state and local meat processing and handling regulations.** See the Code of Federal Regulations, <http://ecfr.gpoaccess.gov/cgi/t/text/text-idx?c=ecfr&tpl=%2Findex.tpl>, specifically Title 9 Animals and Animal Products, Part 303 Exemptions, and Part 381 Poultry Products Inspection Regulations.
- 2. Guidance for determining whether a poultry slaughter or processing operation is exempt from inspection requirements** of the Poultry Products Inspection Act, United States Department of Agriculture Food Safety and Inspection Service Inspection & Enforcement Initiatives Staff, Revision 1, April 2006. [www.fsis.usda.gov/oppde/rdad/FSISNotices/Poultry\\_slaughter\\_exemption\\_0406.pdf](http://www.fsis.usda.gov/oppde/rdad/FSISNotices/Poultry_slaughter_exemption_0406.pdf)  
Additional links to regulations and related topics: [www.fsis.usda.gov](http://www.fsis.usda.gov)
- 3. Food Safety and Inspection Service Directive: Custom Exempt Review Process.** [www.fsis.usda.gov/OPPDE/rdad/FSISDirectives/5930.1Rev4.pdf](http://www.fsis.usda.gov/OPPDE/rdad/FSISDirectives/5930.1Rev4.pdf)

## ATTRA Resources for Pastured Poultry Producers

The following ATTRA publications and resources include useful information for producers who raise poultry on pasture. These and many more can be found in the poultry section of ATTRA's website, [www.attra.ncat.org/attra-pub/poultry](http://www.attra.ncat.org/attra-pub/poultry). Call 800-346-9140 for a printed copy. Prices vary and many resources are free.

- Alternative Poultry Production Systems and Outdoor Access IP300
- Growing Your Range Poultry Business: An Entrepreneur's Toolbox IP211
- Label Rouge: Pasture-Based Poultry Production in France IP202
- Legal Issues for Small-Scale Poultry Processors IP199
- Enterprise Meat Chicken Breeds for Pastured Production IP256
- Organic Poultry Production in the United States IP331
- Parasite Management for Natural and Organic Poultry: Blackhead in Turkeys IP372
- Parasite Management for Natural and Organic Poultry: Coccidiosis IP245

- Pastured Poultry Budgets: Slow Growing Broiler and Organic Comparisons IP361
- Pastured Poultry: A Heifer Project International Case Study Booklet IP161
- Pastured-Raised Poultry Nutrition IP227
- Poultry House Management for Alternative Production IP308
- Poultry: Equipment for Alternative Production IP295
- Range Poultry Housing CT125
- Small-Scale Egg Handling IP348
- Small-Scale Poultry Processing IP231

### Publications on Pastures and Grazing

- Rotational Grazing IP086
- Pastures: Sustainable Management IP284
- Pastures: Going Organic IP297
- Pasture, Rangeland, and Grazing Management IP306
- Paddock Design, Fencing, and Water Systems for Controlled Grazing IP152
- Nutrient Cycling in Pastures IP136
- Multispecies Grazing CT147
- Dung Beetle Benefits in the Pasture Ecosystem CT155



- Managed Grazing in Riparian Areas IP223
- Converting Cropland to Perennial Grassland IP244
- Assessing the Pasture Soil Resource IP128
- A Brief Overview of Nutrient Cycling in Pastures IP221

### Poultry Publications in Spanish

- El Manejo de Gallineros para la Producción Alternativa SP308
- Nutrición para Aves de Pastura SP227
- Procesamiento de Aves a Pequeña Escala SP231
- Sistemas Avícolas Alternativos con Acceso a Pastura SP300

### ATTRA Online Directories

- Organic Livestock Feed Suppliers
- Small Poultry Processing Plants and Services

# Regulations for Processing and Selling Poultry Meat

By NCAT Program Specialist Ann Baier

Poultry producers may process their animals legally through a federally inspected plant or, if the producers qualify for a federal exemption, through other facilities. All poultry processing operations must comply with all federal, state, and local (county, municipality, certified farmers market) regulations for poultry production, processing, sales, zoning, permits, licenses, labeling, business activities, environmental health, retail food laws, and waste/wastewater management.

## Federal Inspection

If poultry is processed at a federally inspected plant, an unlimited number of poultry may be sold to any type of customer, within the state or across state lines. These facilities operate with daily inspection by the United States Department of Agriculture's Food Safety and Inspection Service (USDA-FSIS), as mandated by the Poultry Products Inspection Act. The facilities receive live birds, and process (slaughter, eviscerate, and cool), package, and label them, if they qualify, as "USDA inspected and passed" according to regulations and farmer specifications. To locate a processor, search ATTRA's database of processors: [https://attra.ncat.org/attra-pub/poultry\\_processors](https://attra.ncat.org/attra-pub/poultry_processors).

## Exemptions from Federal Inspection

Any poultry that are not federally inspected must meet the criteria for one of the exemptions from federal inspection. While an operation may be exempt from federal inspection, it still must comply with all other federal requirements for poultry processing. Processors who claim a federal exemption must conduct the slaughter and processing in a manner that ensures that poultry products are wholesome, sound, clean, and fit for human food (not adulterated). They must slaughter only healthy birds. They must follow regulations on basic sanitary standards and practices for facilities, lavatories, toilets, dressing rooms, operating conditions, grounds maintenance, pest control, water supply, inedible material control, sewage and waste disposal, and the reuse of water, ice, and solutions.

Poultry exempt from federal inspection may be sold only within the state, territory, or District of Columbia where it was produced, not across state lines. Shipping containers must bear the producer's name and address and the statement "Exempt P.L. 90-492" or the equivalent state law. Packaging must fulfill all applicable labeling requirements, including a responsibility statement.

## Federal Poultry Inspection Exemptions

These descriptions are highly simplified. Their acceptance may vary by state. Producers must consult the full USDA regulations to learn whether they qualify for an exemption. And they must meet all state and local regulations.

**I. Personal Use Exemption.** There is no limit on the number of privately owned birds that may be processed for the private use of one's household and non-paying guests. Poultry may not be sold or donated for use as human food.

**II. Custom Slaughter/Processing Exemption.** A custom poultry slaughterer provides the service of slaughtering and processing poultry belonging to someone else for that person's own use. These poultry products may not be bought or sold for use as human food. There is no limit on the number of birds that may be processed.

**III. Producer/Grower – 1,000 Birds Per Year Limit.** Producers/growers may sell,

as human food, no more than 1,000 birds they themselves raise, slaughter and process on their premises. Slaughter and sales records must be kept.

**IV. Producer/Grower – 20,000 Birds Per Year Limit.** Producers/growers may slaughter, process, and sell no more than 20,000 birds they themselves raise for distribution as human food, including resale to a distributor, hotel, restaurant, retail store, institution, or small enterprise. The slaughter facility and processing equipment may not be used for another person's poultry unless an FSIS exemption is granted.

**V. Producer/Grower or Other Person (PGOP) Exemption – 20,000 Birds Per Year Limit.** The PGOP is a single entity, either a poultry grower who raises poultry for sale or a person who purchases poultry live from a grower. The PGOP may slaughter and process no more than 20,000 birds per year for sale to households, restaurants, hotels, or boarding houses—the locations

where it will be consumed. The PGOP may not slaughter or process poultry owned by another person, and may not sell products to a retail store or other producer/grower.

**VI. Small Business Enterprise Exemption — 20,000 Birds Per Year Limit.** Processing under this exemption is limited to the cutting up or boning of no more than 20,000 carcasses per year for use as human food. The small business may be a poultry producer/grower, or a business that purchases live poultry that it slaughters and dresses, or a business that purchases dressed poultry for distribution.

**VII. Retail Exemption.** The retail exemption for a store, dealer, or restaurant has several restrictions on the type of processing, weight, or dollar limit of poultry products that may be sold. Please refer to Criteria and Notes in the Guidance document (Reference #2 on page 2, opposite).

**See References on page 2 for details.**

Questions about processing compliance with federal regulations may be directed to your regional USDA Office. To find an office near you, see [www.fsis.usda.gov/Contact\\_Us/Office\\_Locations\\_&Phone\\_Numbers/index.asp](http://www.fsis.usda.gov/Contact_Us/Office_Locations_&Phone_Numbers/index.asp)



Return Service Requested

Return Service Requested

Non Profit Org  
US Postage  
PAID  
Permit No. 381  
Butte, MT 59701

## Grazing Multiple Species on Your Farm by Linda Coffey, NCAT Livestock Specialist

Grazing more than one livestock species on your farm will help you use more of the forages, improve the health and growth of your animals, and keep weeds (most of them, anyway) from taking over your farm.

Each species of livestock can improve the bottom line as you spread out cash flow. Poultry offers a fast return on investment and a steady income from batches of broilers or dozens of eggs. Larger livestock will convert low-cost forages into meat and can be raised and marketed with less daily labor.

### Fencing Is Key

There are many benefits from grazing multiple species, but almost an equal number of challenges. The first is fencing. Keeping pastured poultry in pens means there is not (much) need for a good fence around the entire pasture.

The pens serve as the fence. You will need a good fence if you are raising larger livestock. Sheep and goats need a hot electric fence, with at least three well-spaced strands. More is better.

Cattle are easier to fence but do not offer the weed control benefits of small ruminants unless they are taught (see [www.livestockforlandscapes.org](http://www.livestockforlandscapes.org)). Woven wire works well for sheep and goats; barbed wire does not. Existing fences can be modified to work for any animal, and if the existing fence is good, no modifications may be needed.

It is helpful to show your fence to someone who raises the livestock you want to raise and get their assessment of any changes needed.

Cattle and sheep and goats may all “play” with poultry pens. Having livestock in the pasture with the pens may add difficulty to chore time since the larger livestock are curious and will often get in the way as you service the pens. Some producers like to keep bulk feed handy in the pasture with the poultry pens. That would be risky if larger livestock is present because they may break in to the feed and overeat, with fatal consequences.

For all these reasons, it may be best to graze the ruminants in the pasture ahead of the poultry and follow with the poultry. The ruminants will graze the pasture down, removing tall forage so the pens are easier to move and poultry can graze the shorter, more tender forage.

Poultry will also scratch through manure pats, exposing internal parasite larvae to the drying effects of sunlight and heat and consuming some of them. Poultry will fertilize the pasture so that regrowth will be more nutritious for the ruminants when they return to graze. In this way, the ruminants prepare the pasture for the poultry and the poultry improve the pasture for the ruminants.

Free-range chickens are even easier to manage. Remember to protect their feed from the ruminants. Chickens will clean up any spilled feed and scratch through old hay piles, lessening waste on the farm.

Grazing multiple species of animals on your farm will help you control weed and grass growth, increase fertility on your pastures, and offer more products to improve your income.

## ATTRAnews

Carl Little, Project Manager  
Karen Van Epen, Editor

August 2012 • [www.attra.ncat.org](http://www.attra.ncat.org)

ATTRAnews is the newsletter of the **National Sustainable Agriculture Information Service**. The newsletter is distributed free throughout the United States to farmers, ranchers, Cooperative Extension agents, educators, and others interested in sustainable agriculture. ATTRA is funded through the USDA Rural Business-Cooperative Service and is a project of the National Center for Appropriate Technology (NCAT), a private, nonprofit organization that since 1976 has helped people by championing small-scale, local, and sustainable solutions to reduce poverty, promote healthy communities, and protect natural resources.



Printed on recycled paper