



It's spring and the eggs are hatching...

This is the season when pastured poultry producers are starting their flocks and constructing portable range housing. In the early 1990s, when noted Virginia farmer Joel Salatin published *Pastured Poultry Profits*, it was all new territory. Now producers are able to profit from the generous advice of experienced farmers in networks like the American Pastured Poultry Producers Association.

In this issue of *ATTRAnews*, we look at ways to make this a successful poultry year. Farmers and ranchers can turn to ATTRA's array of free sustainable poultry production publications, highlighted on page 3, as well as NCAT's recently launched sustainable poultry Web site at www.sustainablepoultry.ncat.org. This new Web site offers these publications and provides links to a large number of relevant organizations, all with plenty of practical tips for new and experienced poultry producers.



All the family (top photo) is proud of Ben the Rooster at the Laura and Ralph Rogers farm in Kentucky. Above, a basket of beautiful eggs is the work of free-range hens at the Luke Elliot farm in Arkansas.

Pastured poultry: A grassroots, family farm enterprise

By Anne Fanatico
NCAT Agriculture Specialist

Pastured poultry production is a grassroots movement that focuses on farm-scale production and direct marketing. It has been developed from the ground up by hundreds of family farms, and is driven by consumers seeking an alternative to conventional poultry. This enterprise can provide supplemental income in rural areas. Small farmers raise poultry in free-range or pasture-based systems that are part of a diversified farm. They keep the chickens in field pens that are frequently moved to fresh pastures.

Producers buy day-old chicks, usually through mail-order, from independent hatcheries. The farmers

generally use the same broiler genetics developed for the conventional poultry industry, but employ a wider range of layer genetics, including many heritage breeds. Most producers raise poultry seasonally, though some larger-scale growers pursue year-round production. Some producers use commercial sources of non-medicated feed, but most work with a local feed mill to have custom rations made from natural feed ingredients. Broilers are usually grown for eight weeks.

Farmers sell directly to customers, from the farm or at other locales such as farmers' markets, and report more demand than they can supply.

(Source: ATTRA's *Sustainable Poultry: Production Overview*)

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Mobile houses: Be aware of a chicken's homing instinct

By Robert Plamondon
Poultry Farmer & Author

Chickens return to the same place to sleep night after night. This is called a "homing instinct." What happens if you move their house? Do they "home in" on their house, or on the spot where it stood? Free-range chickens are often not fenced tightly enough to be forced into making the right decision.

It turns out that you can move their houses a short distance without confusing them. But if you move a house too far, the chickens will sleep on the ground where the house used to be. When this happens, you will have to catch the chickens after dark and put them into the houses. And again the next night. It can take several nights before they all start sleeping in the houses again.

Here is my method of moving hen house. When dealing with an inexperienced group of hens, I try to move their houses very short distances at first, little more than the width of the house. Scraping or shoveling the manure from the old house site, or sprinkling it with lime, will help prevent the chickens from recognizing it. After their house has been moved a couple of times, I can cover 50 feet or more per move without confusing the



hens. It is best to move the house early in the day, to give the chickens more time to get used to its new position. Moving it just before dark is a bad idea.

There are two alternative methods for moving chicken houses. One is to move the house with the chickens inside, and to move it a long way, so the chickens can't find their way back to where they were yesterday. In this case, their chicken house is the only thing in the neigh-

There are many types of mobile poultry houses, ranging from tents and yurts to wooden structures on moveable skids like the one pictured here.

borhood that looks like home, so they will go inside at night without any trouble. Some producers lock the birds in temporarily.

The other method is to have a portable net fence that moves when the houses move, so the

hens are physically prevented from going back to their previous home.

*(Editor's note: Robert Plamondon is the author of several books on poultry production, including the recently published *Success with Baby Chicks* that is available from Norton Creek Press, 36475 Norton Creek Road, Blodgett, Oregon 97326, 541-453-5841, www.plamondon.com/nortoncreekpress.html. This article is excerpted from the ATTRA publication *Range Poultry Housing*.)*

Resources for pastured poultry producers

American Pastured Poultry Producers Association

APPPA was founded to help producers around the country exchange ideas and information. They publish *Grit!*—a quarterly newsletter that includes information on chicken feed, on-farm poultry processing, marketing, referrals, and sources of chicks. Their Web site offers a comprehensive set of links to products and news that will interest poultry producers and aficionados all over the country.

APPPA, P.O. Box 1024, Chippewa Falls, WI 54729
715-667-5501, 715-667-3044 FAX
grit@apppa.org
www.apppa.org

Poultry Enterprise Budget

The University of Wisconsin's Center for Integrated Agricultural Systems (CIAS) has developed a spreadsheet to help farmers make financial and management decisions about new or existing poultry enterprises. While the budget was developed for a CIAS pastured poultry project, it is applicable to most kinds and sizes of poultry enterprises. Visit the CIAS Web site at:
www.wisc.edu/cias/pubs/poultbud.html.

Heifer International

This private nonprofit organization has helped limited resource farmers try out pastured poultry enterprises and has improved infrastructure for those expanding their operations. HI, P.O. Box 8058, Little Rock, AR 72203
800-422-0474, www.heifer.org

American Livestock Breeds Conservancy

The American Livestock Breeds Conservancy protects genetic diversity in livestock through the conservation and promotion of endangered breeds of poultry as well as other livestock. ALBC, Box 477, Pittsboro, NC 27312
919-542-5704, 919-545-0022 FAX, www.albc-usa.org

Poultry Web Sites

- ◆ <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/PasturePoultry/> — Nearly 21,000 searchable e-mail messages are posted about raising poultry on pasture for meat and egg production.
- ◆ www.poultryconnection.com—The Poultry Connection, with supplies, books, resources, and on-line forum.
- ◆ www.eatwild.com—A clearinghouse for information about pasture-based farming, with extensive e-mail lists.

French poultry farmers reclaim flavor & profits

In the 1960s a group of concerned French farmers decided to try to regain the quality of French traditional chicken. Resolving to keep only slow-growing breeds in free-range rearing conditions, they



wanted to turn the tide against the negative effects of the intensive poultry industry. The farmers' enthusiasm and efforts paid off. As the movement gathered momentum, the French Ministry of Agriculture recognized and formalized the Label Rouge quality assurance system. Forty years later—according to researchers at the University of Illinois, who have been ground-

breakers in introducing Label Rouge concepts to the US—30% of the poultry in France is raised on range in the Label Rouge program.

Label Rouge birds are slaughtered between the ages of 81 and 110 days. The chickens are reared in small, bright buildings (maximum 400m²) with natural light, with a maximum of eleven birds per square meter. As soon as their feathers are fully developed, the chickens have access to a large, grassy, shaded field (minimum 2m² per bird—about one hectare, or 2.5 acres, per building). Label Rouge farmers also raise eggs, turkeys, quail, guinea fowl, and ducks.



NCAT agriculture specialists Holly Born (second from left) and Anne Fanatico (right) visit with French officials during a 2001 tour of Label Rouge poultry facilities near Villecresnes France. Below, Label Rouge birds before and after processing.



The national organization for Label Rouge poultry (SYNALAF) was founded in 1967. This association represents the regional poultry production groups that have joined together to defend their interests and promote the concept of Label Rouge traditional free-range poultry. They market their poultry on a national, European, and international level in collaboration with the French government and farm and consumer associations.
Contact: SYNALAF (Syndicat National des Labels Avicoles de France)
31 bis, Av. du Maréchal de Lattre de Tassigny
F-94 440 Villecresnes, France
www.synalaf.com (Web site is in English)

Five Principles of France's Label Rouge Poultry Production

- 1. The poultry must come from special breeds**, selected for their low growth rate, high meat quality, and good skin.
- 2. The poultry must be reared in the open air.** Small groups of birds live on open, grassy, shaded land.
- 3. The poultry enjoys natural cereal-based feed**—where cereals constitute at least 70 to 80% of the feed (depending on the breed), with vegetable proteins (soya, rapeseed, sunflowers). No animal matter or growth stimulants are ever used.
- 4. The poultry has a considerably longer growing period**—approximately twice as long as that of most standard poultry, which gives Label Rouge poultry a leaner, longer physique and stronger bones.
- 5. The poultry comes with a guarantee** of freshness and food safety, following rigorous hygiene inspections. The label specifies where the bird was raised and slaughtered.

ATTRA offers an array of Poultry Publications

Most of the publications listed below are available on NCAT's new Sustainable Poultry Web page—www.sustainablepoultry.ncat.org—which also features links to important groups and resources for poultry producers. Readers can also request hard copies of the publications by calling ATTRA at 1-800-346-9140.

Production

- Sustainable Poultry: Production Overview
- Range Poultry Housing
- Pastured Poultry Nutrition*
- What Bird Shall I Raise?*
- Pastured Poultry: A Heifer Project International Case Study Booklet
- Profitable Poultry: Raising Birds on Pasture (a SAN publication)
- Organic Livestock Workbook: A Guide to Allowed Practices
- Organic Livestock Feed Suppliers

Marketing and Entrepreneurship

- Label Rouge: Pasture-Based Poultry Production in France
- Growing Your Range Poultry Business: An Entrepreneur's Toolbox
- Legal Issues for Small-Scale Poultry Processors*

Processing

- Small-Scale Poultry Processing
- Poultry Processing Facilities Available for Use by Independent Producers in the Southern Region*

*Heifer International publications distributed by ATTRA



Brand new from ATTRA

◆◆◆ On-line database helps farmers find interns ◆◆◆

Since 1989, NCAT's ATTRA project has compiled a directory of on-the-job learning opportunities in sustainable and organic agriculture. The directory is now available as an easy-to-search, on-line database, accessible through the National Sustainable Agriculture Information Service Web site at www.attra.ncat.org. The new format will also allow farmers to use an on-line form to submit changes to their listings.

The database contains descriptions of the farms offering positions, as well as details on the internships themselves, such as the type of work to be done, hours of work expected per week, stipend or other compensation, housing arrangements, and specific educational opportunities. The database is available for use at <http://attra.ncat.org/attra-pub/intern.html>.

◆◆◆ Instructional materials teach underserved farmers the skills of 'risk management' ◆◆◆

New risk management materials are now available in Spanish and English on the ATTRA Web site and on CD by request. These documents support instruction to underserved farmer populations about marketing, managing money (individual cash-flow budgeting), planting for multiple markets, and contracts and regulations. The materials—which include both a user-friendly trainers' manual (English only) and a participants' workbook (Spanish and English)—can be used to help farmers identify and achieve their goals.

The workbooks offer detailed information on marketing through produce terminals, food service jobbers, independent and small grocery stores, restaurants, farmers' markets, roadside stands, and community supported agriculture. The course also provides the *Golden Rules of Marketing*, *Ten Questions To Ask Before Signing a Contract*, and customizable cash-flow budget spreadsheets. The Web site provides links to the various documents as well as an explanation of the their contents. The materials are available on the ATTRA Web site at http://attra.ncat.org/risk_management/rmgateway.html.

New & Updated ATTRA Publications

- ◆ Organic Livestock Workbook
- ◆ Lavender Production, Products, Markets & Entertainment Farms

ATTRAnews

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