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## TIPS FOR A HEALTHY CROP OF CHICKS

This time of year, many households are brooding a new batch of chicks. It is very important to get these chicks off to a good start before they are introduced to the old flock environment. It is best to start the new hatch in a separate barn area that can be sanitized and clean without contact with an older flock for at least one month. Once that new brood has a good start, they can be introduced to an older flock environment. It takes time for the young flock to build immunity to diseases and challenges that the older flock has already built their resistance to. The following management tips are suggested to help you start a healthy crop of chicks for 2009.

1. Provide a clean, sanitized, dry and warm environment for the new batch of chicks that is preferably in a separate space from your mature flock of chickens. Provide a brooding space that can be properly heated but still allow adequate space for movement of the little chicks around feeders and waterers.
2. Provide adequate fresh bedding for the new flock of chicks. This may be a 3-4 inch base of fresh wood shavings or a 2-3 inch base of wheat straw. It is important to stir wet spots from drinker spills or manure buildup to avoid excessive moisture in the brooding area. Replacement of wet litter will need to be attended to by about 3-4 weeks of age.
3. Provide a light source for a minimum of 12 hours per day. It is hard to get adequate feed intake and growth without supplemental light.
4. Provide fresh and clean water and feed daily. When using bell type drinkers, place the drinker above the litter on a board to keep the chicks from kicking litter into the drinker. If litter is kicked into the drinker, wash it out and re-fill with clean water. Keep feed pans clean of manure and litter on a daily basis too.
5. Move the feeders and waterers around the pen regularly to avoid a build-up of manure and moisture. Aerate the litter with a rake or stick when you move equipment to help keep the litter in good condition.
6. At about 3-4 weeks of age, provide more space for your chicks. At this time they are growing very fast and they will need less heat but more space to exercise and MOVE! At this time, it may be safe to introduce the chicks to a separate pen in a mature flock space. But keep the chickens separated until about 8-10 weeks of age.
7. Once your new chicks are about 8-10 weeks of age, introduce them to their adult environment. If you plan to have layers, introduce them to their nest boxes at this early age for acclimation to potential laying sites.
8. Fresh air/ventilation of your brooding and adult facilities is important to the long term health of your flock. One of the most common health issues in poultry is respiratory disease. Adult farm



flocks need constant fresh air to avoid a buildup of noxious ammonia gases and dust. An open inlet and fan in an enclosed pen/barn will help facilitate a good air environment.

9. Clean your adult pen approximately once a month of wet spots. Wet litter breeds bacteria and disease along with ammonia fumes. Good litter management is important to both your bird's health and your comfort while working in the chicken coop.

Raising poultry is a great family adventure. Young children learn how to care for an animal and parents interact with their children in a learning and nurturing environment. The family eventually benefits from fresh eggs and/or meat. If raising poultry is also a 4-H project, many other benefits can be realized from this experience.

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