

# Chicken



## What are chickens?

A mature male chicken is called a rooster and a mature female chicken is called a hen. A cockerel is a male chicken under one year of age. A pullet is a female chicken under one year of age. Baby chickens are called chicks. A broiler is a young meat-type chicken, usually weighing between 1.7 and 2.5 kilograms. It takes 39 to 42 days to reach this weight. A roaster is a young meat-type chicken, usually weighing about 3 kilograms. It takes about 50 days to reach this weight.

## Interesting Facts:

All Nova Scotia chickens are "grain fed". Chicken feed is made up of grains such as corn, wheat and barley. Grains are the primary source of energy in the ration. Protein-containing ingredients, such as soybean meal and canola meal, are added to feed in smaller quantities. In much smaller quantities, fats are added to increase energy levels as well as improve the taste and texture of the feed. Finally vitamin and mineral supplements are added to ensure that all the chicken's nutritional requirements are met. A clean, fresh supply of water is also an important element of a chicken's diet. Chickens do not have teeth. They use an organ, called a gizzard, to make their food smaller for digestion. At no time are hormones used in the production of chicken. The use of hormones in poultry has not been allowed in Canada since the 1970's.

## Where is chicken produced in Nova Scotia?

Kings County produces approximately 85% of the chicken production in Nova Scotia. Lunenburg, Antigonish and Annapolis Counties produce the remaining commercial production.

## How many chickens do we produce?

There are more than 85 registered chicken farmers in Nova Scotia and they produce more than 43 million kilograms of chicken each year. Most farms are family owned and operated.

Nova Scotia's chicken industry is under a supply management system. Supply management is a business system with merit. It meets the challenge to provide stability and ensure supply demands are met with acceptable levels of return for independent farms. This is done through Chicken Farmers of Canada (the national agency) and Chicken Farmers of Nova Scotia (the provincial marketing board).

## How are chickens produced?

In the chicken business it all begins with the egg. Eggs are collected from broiler breeder operations and taken to hatcheries. At the hatchery, the eggs are sorted onto trays and placed in large incubators. The temperature and humidity are electronically controlled in the incubator.

The eggs are turned several times daily and are transferred to hatching trays for the final three days. It takes 21 days of incubation for the egg to develop and hatch a chick. Upon

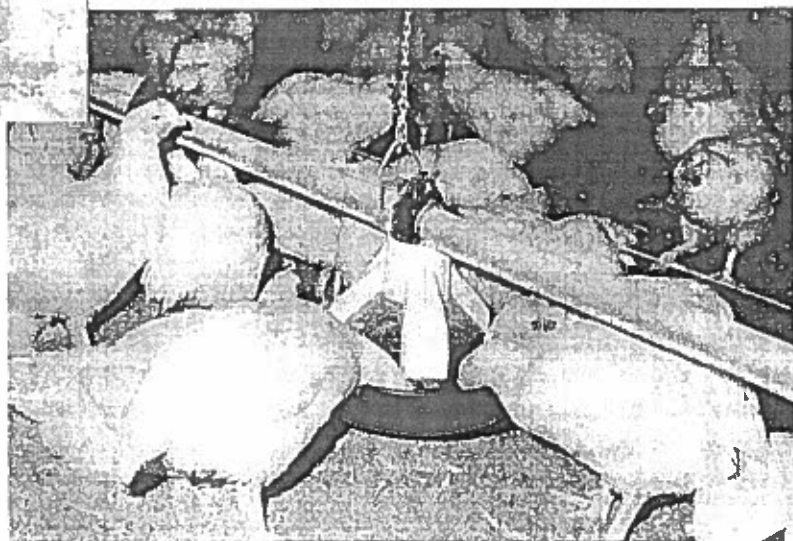
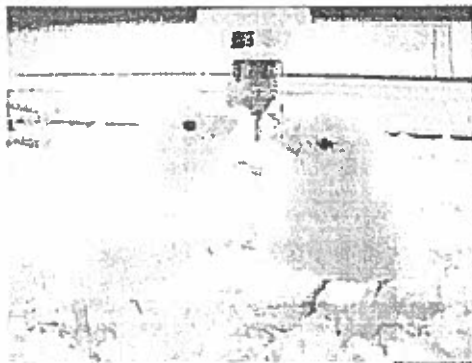
hatching, the sex of the chick is determined and they are vaccinated to prevent illness. Within twenty-four hours of hatching, the chicks are put in heated trucks and delivered to farms. Meanwhile at the chicken farm, the farmer is busy preparing the barn for the arrival of the new chicks. Before new chicks are placed in the barn, it must be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected to prevent disease and keep the new flock healthy. The barns that house chickens are specially designed to ensure that the proper temperature, humidity and air quality are maintained no matter what time of year the chicks arrive. Prior to the arrival of the chicks, clean chopped straw or wood shavings, often referred to as litter, is spread on the barn floor. Broiler chickens are not kept in cages. They are floor raised with access to food and water at all times.

### **How is chicken used?**

Chicken meat is sold either fresh or frozen, whole or half birds, or cut into various pieces such as breast, thighs, drumsticks or wings, which may be sold as skinless and/or boneless. Chicken can be prepared in a variety of ways. It can be fried, roasted or broiled. Further processed product such as nuggets, soups, stews or pies are tasty alternatives.

### **What happens after chickens leave the farm?**

When the chickens reach market weight of 2 - 3.5 kilograms (approximately 40 days for broilers and 50 days for roasters) they are transported to a processing plant in trucks specially designed for shipping live poultry. Nova Scotia has two processing plants; they



are ACA Co-operative Limited and Maple Leaf Poultry. At the processing plant, every chicken is checked by an inspector to ensure the chickens are healthy and safe to eat. The chicken products are then shipped to grocery stores, restaurants or for further processing.

**What challenges do chicken producers face?**

Chicken farmers are facing increasing competition from global markets that are able to produce chicken at a lower cost and import into Canada. As a result of this, those in the poultry industry closely follow the activities of the World Trade Organization (WTO). It is very important to chicken farmers to ensure that the three pillars of supply management are maintained in the WTO negotiations. Nova Scotia farmers have to bear the cost of putting food safety, animal welfare and environmental regulations into effect.

Today's chicken farmers take pride in caring for their birds and providing a quality product that can be enjoyed year round. Chicken farmers in Nova Scotia are involved in a National Food Safety program for chicken known as "Safe, Safer, Safest". The Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) has recognized this On-Farm Food Safety Assurance Program (OFFSAP). Most chicken farms do not allow visitors into their barns and never allow other animals in. When authorized people are permitted in the barns, they must put on plastic boots and other protective clothing. Barn doors are kept locked with a DO NOT ENTER BIOSECURITY IN EFFECT sign on the door. Biosecurity is one part of the On-Farm Food Safety Assurance Program (OFFSAP) that helps keep the chickens healthy and ensure a quality product on the market.



**Who is involved in producing chickens?**

Nova Scotia's chicken processing industry employs over 900 people. Feed mills, farms, hatcheries, farm equipment dealers, veterinary clinics and trucking companies employ many more. The following are some of the spin-off industries from chicken farming:

- Broiler breeder producers
- Hatchers
- Veterinarians
- Equipment suppliers
- Trucking companies
- Processors
- Government inspectors
- Restaurants, hotels, institutions, retailers, fast food outlets
- Pharmaceutical companies
- Nutritionists and field workers

**Contacts and other resources:**

Chicken Farmers of Nova Scotia

