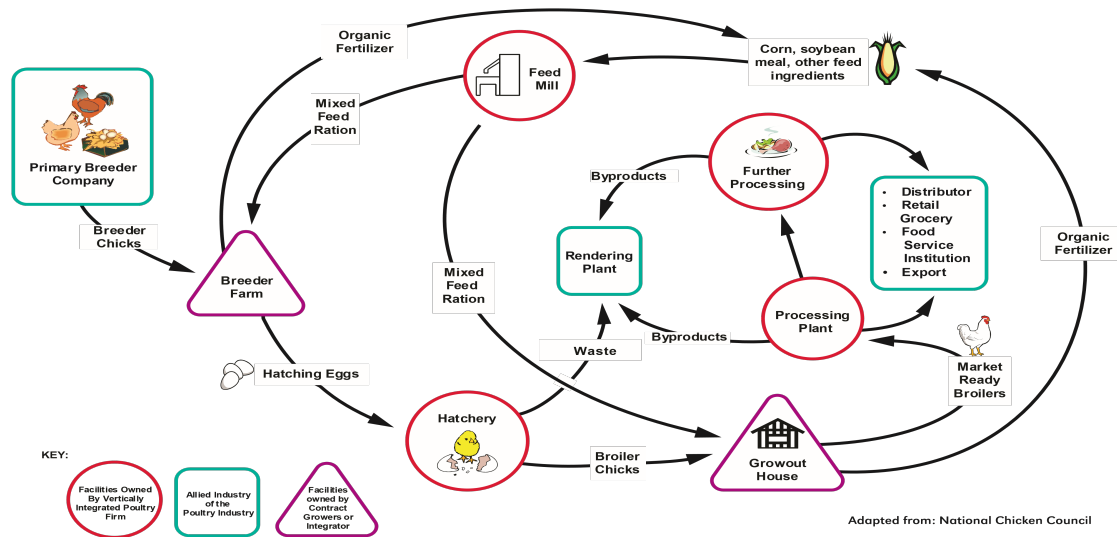


Poultry Expansion 101 Fact Sheet

Dr. Sheila E. Purdum, Extension Poultry Specialist, Dept. Animal Sci., University of Nebraska

There are basically 3 poultry industry sectors in our state which includes commercial egg producers, broiler producers, and turkey producers. Each sector also includes breeder farms producing fertile eggs. Traditionally Nebraska has primarily been a commercial egg state but is now seeing rapid growth in the broiler sector and hatching eggs sectors. Nebraska will nearly triple its total chicken and turkey numbers/year to 30+ million on the farm at one time and with a grand total of 150 million hatched and housed per year. It is important to know that not all 150 million plus are all hatched and housed at once. The majority of the chickens coming to Nebraska during our current Poultry expansion are broiler chickens which have a 6-7 week life cycle. That means that they are only housed for 6-7 weeks, so a farmer raising broilers will likely have 6 batches of chickens per year, thus the state may have a total of 150 million chickens produced per year but only 1/6 of those are on farms at one time.

The following schematic has been adopted from the National Chicken Council to show a Typical Vertically Integrated Poultry Company. While the majority of investment is into chicken houses on contract producer farms, a substantial infrastructure investment will be made into building hatcheries, feed mills (new and expansions), feed source storage (corn and soybeans), a processing plant and distribution (transportation of products).



Terminology also changes with the different poultry sectors. In the broiler sector, a young male chick is a cockerel and a young female chick is a pullet, chickens may be raised in a straight run format which is males and females together or as a sex separate placement. Chicks are placed all at once in an All IN/All OUT schedule, no mixing of ages in a single house. In the commercial egg sector, pullets are grown in separate houses from layers due to different equipment needs. There are no roosters present and it takes approximately 4 months for the pullet to mature to a laying hen. In breeder farms, both pullets and cockerels are raised together with a ratio of 8-10 pullets/cockerel. In the turkey industry, young

males are called Toms and young females are called hens and are routinely placed in sex separate housing. On the breeder side of things, all female turkey hens are artificially inseminated and toms are housed separately from the females. It is a very labor intense industry to produce fertile turkey eggs. In the broiler and commercial egg industries, reproduction of fertile eggs is by natural mating. It is also important to realize that commercial egg chickens are a completely different breed of chicken (Leghorns) genetically selected to produce high rates of egg production from broiler chickens (Plymouth White Rocks x New Hampshire crosses) genetically selected to maximize meat yields. Most of the egg producing chickens have been kept off the floor in cages to keep eggs clean while meat producing chickens are always grown in open floor housing environments.

Impact of the current expansion on transportation is also significant. Most truck traffic will be associated with feed delivery, finished birds transfer to the processing plant, and litter removal for land application. Additional traffic will result from bedding, fuel, and chick delivery. For a single broiler house, one would anticipate up to about 115 tractor trailers or related equipment accessing the farm over the course of a single year. Since most facilities are likely to be built in groups of 4 to 8 houses, this would amount to 460 to 920 loads of feed, litter, animals, and bedding annually or 9 to 18 loads per week. Unlike corn and soybean production, traffic will be relatively constant throughout the year.

Questions may also arise regarding the welfare of raising such large populations of chickens in confinement. Most of the expansion for broilers will involve floor raised birds with 24 hr access to feed, water, modern ventilation to provide heat in the winter and cooling in the summer, bedding to gather manure droppings and space to dust bathe. The laying hen industry in our state is also very rapidly converting from traditional cage to cage free environments to meet consumer demands. Both the National Chicken Council and United Egg Producers groups have animal welfare self-auditing programs that chicken producers participate in to guarantee their birds comfort.