



In response to a steady increase in the number of families raising small poultry flocks throughout the Commonwealth, the Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources (MDAR) has developed this document to aid residential poultry producers in the methods of caring for poultry and of handling the waste products. We hope this document will also serve to educate municipal officials in communities that have not traditionally had experience with agricultural endeavors.

The interest in raising small flocks is not limited to rural settings. MDAR's Division of Animal Health has received requests for information from both residents and officials of suburban and urban areas alike. Before getting started, make sure to check with local city or town officials about complying with all local bylaws, ordinances, or permit requirements.

### **OBTAIN BIRDS FROM A REPUTABLE SOURCE**

The source of any birds or hatching eggs must be from a Salmonella pullorum tested flock. The Salmonella pullorum test is conducted on an annual basis, and is intended to detect the presence of this potentially harmful bacterium that is known to affect poultry and the eggs they produce. The owners of all tested flocks are issued certification of their clean status by MDAR. You should receive a copy of this certification with any birds you purchase. Should you ever find yourself acting as a source of birds for other people, your flock will need to be tested prior to moving any poultry. The testing is performed on all birds over 16 weeks of age, and is provided by MDAR at no cost. Once the flock has been certified pullorum-typhoid clean, you will be free to transfer ownership to others as long as the birds are accompanied by a copy of the testing certificate.

S. pullorum Testing can be performed by:

- Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources
- A licensed federally accredited veterinarian (accredited by USDA)

### **PROVIDE AND MAINTAIN ADEQUATE HOUSING FOR POULTRY**

Poultry require shelter from the wind, weather, and predators. Adequate housing must take all of these factors into consideration. Housing should provide plenty of ventilation, ample space for the birds to move about freely, and an area that is out of direct light for hens to lay eggs. The housing floor must be covered with a dry, absorbent organic material used as bedding, commonly referred to as litter. Litter management is one of the most important parts of poultry housing. Some commercially available types of litter are soft wood shavings, corn cobs, peanut shells, or plant based tree free bedding. In choosing the type of litter, consider its absorbency, density and its ability to maintain a healthy microbial environment. A healthy microbial environment exposes the birds to different organisms which in turn helps promote development of their immune system. Exposure occurs when the birds ingest microbes from the litter. In an effort to promote microbial growth, refrain from changing the litter on a daily or weekly basis. As long as the litter remains dry, it can be changed as infrequently as every 6 months to a year. Of course, saturated areas of litter such as under the water source or feeder should be changed out promptly. Wet, caked manure needs to be removed since it

will increase the levels of ammonia, mold, and toxins in the enclosure and can cause serious respiratory problems for the birds. Composting of this wet material should be done well away from the flock to prevent any possible exposure.

If providing access to the outdoors, this area needs to be fenced to prevent birds from roaming freely onto neighbors' properties, and to offer some protection against predators. Depending on the breed chosen, the enclosure may need to be covered. Providing perches in the poultry house for night time roosting is beneficial to the birds. Poultry naturally like to perch as it provides them with a sense of security and comfort. In addition, locating perches inside the house may provide further protection from nocturnal predators.

## **SUPPLY APPROPRIATE NUTRITION FOR POULTRY**

Nutritionally balanced commercial poultry feeds are available at grain stores, which may be found in the yellow pages under "feed stores". Poultry owners should ensure an ample supply of clean, dry feed at all times. The feed should be suitable for the age and type of poultry on the premise. Always check the label on the product to confirm compatibility. Feed should be stored in rodent-proof containers and be protected from the elements. Some owners choose to offer clean vegetable scraps from their garden or household as an added food source. Other household food waste may be detrimental to the birds' health.

Provide adequate feeder and water space for the number of birds housed. A general rule of thumb is that all birds should be able to eat and drink at the same time if they choose to. Birds should have access to fresh clean water at all times. Water sources should be located out of direct sunlight. Maintaining the water at shoulder height facilitates the birds' ability to drink and helps prevent litter around water sources from becoming saturated.

## **DEVELOP AN EFFECTIVE MANURE MANAGEMENT PLAN**

Manure utilization and soil amendment are an important part of sustainable agriculture. There are various ways for you to manage poultry manure from your backyard flock:

- Direct application to your garden – Application should be in the early spring and the soil must be turned. Never add fresh manure to edible crops. Fresh manure may "burn" your plants and expose edibles to harmful bacterial growth.
- Collection for composting – For more information on composting refer to the Department of Environmental Protection's website (<http://www.mass.gov/dep/recycle/reduce/compos01.htm>).
- Disposal in the trash – larger quantities may require hiring a removal service

## **IMPLEMENT RODENT AND PEST CONTROL**

Ensure poultry housing area is free of any trash and debris, as these conditions may provide hiding places or nesting areas for rodents. Spilled or soiled feeds will attract rodents and pests and should be disposed of promptly. Remove any standing water other than that which is provided for the poultry to drink. Should the use of insecticides, rodenticides or traps be necessary, be sure to check the label for product safety around poultry, and ensure its use is in accordance with state laws and regulations.

## **PRACTICE GOOD BIOSECURITY**

If birds are removed from your flock for any reason and then returned, isolate them away from your resident flock for ten to fourteen days. Be vigilant and watch for signs of sickness. If your flock is experiencing a high number of mortalities or sick birds please report the situation immediately to the Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources at (617) 626-1795. Any new birds that are to be added to your resident flock must be acquired from a current pullorum clean tested flock and should be isolated for ten to fourteen days to watch for signs of illness. Clean and disinfect all crates used to transport poultry to and from your property. Since some diseases can be carried on a person's clothing or shoes, in order to reduce the risk of transmitting disease to your birds it is suggested that you restrict access to your flock by others who also own poultry.

## **TO CONSIDER WHEN BUYING AND SELLING POULTRY**

Always obtain receipts in any poultry transaction. Record the name and address of buyer and seller, date of purchase, number and type of birds purchased or sold, and a copy of the pullorum certificate or the date of the last test.

## **AVOID PROBLEMS ASSOCIATED WITH BACKYARD POULTRY IN SUBURBAN OR URBAN SETTINGS**

As the interest in keeping poultry increases so does the need for education; neighbors and elected officials may have concerns about disease, odors, noise and trespass. In this regard the residential flock owner has some new obligations.

Be open to neighbor concerns and make efforts to alleviate issues. If issues arise after the birds are in place, these are possible solutions to some common complaints:

- Construct or plant sound and sight barriers
- Modify poultry housing to reduce sounds
- Restrict daylight to reduce early morning activity
- Modify manure management

## **CONTACT INFORMATION**

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