

Promising Possibilities For Pastured Poultry

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Pastured poultry is a production system that employs raising birds directly on pasture. The birds are housed in portable shelters that are moved regularly to fresh grass. In addition to the natural food sources the birds find in the pasture, they are also fed grain. Because the birds are raised in a cleaner, more beneficial environment, many farmers have found that the resulting birds are healthier and tastier than anything presently available to consumers on a wide scale. Pastured poultry offers a low-cost entry into the growing trend of pastured farming for both beginning and established farms. Low initial inputs and a high quality product can contribute to a small farm's profitability by diversifying farm income.

In addition to a high quality product and potential profits, pastured poultry can be good

for the environment. Pastured poultry complements grazing livestock by controlling harmful pests, raising soil quality, and sanitizing pasture. Cattle and other grazing animals are able reap the benefits of pastured poultry along with the small farmer. Although a pastured poultry enterprise works best in conjunction with other grazing animals, it can also be worthwhile as the sole operation of a small farm because of its flexibility. This method is equally effective for raising broilers, eggs, turkeys, and guinea fowl.

Bill Henning, small farm specialist with Cornell Cooperative Extension's Pro-Dairy program and NWNV Dairy, Livestock and Field Crops Team, was asked by the Finger Lakes Graziers to organize informational meetings on new and innovative grazing techniques. The graziers are an informal group of farmers from Seneca and Yates Counties.

"They were looking for technologies that are compatible with the environment, that would enhance the sustainability of smaller-scale farms, and would enrich their rural communities," said Henning. "One of the topics they were most interested in was pastured poultry."

Henning was aware of Cornell Cooperative Extension's efforts to develop programs that specifically focus on local small farm businesses, and saw an opportunity in the CCE Grants Program For Innovative Small Farm Education offered by Cornell's Small Farms Program. He applied for and received a grant to conduct one of two workshops that he had in mind for the early spring of 2002. Henning hoped to increase farmers' awareness of the practices and benefits of pastured poultry and other nutrient management techniques for grass based farms. He felt that pastured poultry could give these

small-scale farmers a new source of income, complement their present farming enterprises, and help to promote tourism in Yates County.

The first workshop was an information session on intensive grass management (IGM), including nutrient management and the role of pastured poultry. The second workshop was based on the demonstration of a mobile poultry processing trailer.

As a result of the two workshops, 88 percent of the participants indicated that they would be implementing pastured poultry production as part of their farming operations. They also expressed interest in forming a pastured poultry production group to share ideas and information about pastured poultry production and processing.

Perhaps one of the biggest outcomes of the workshops was that a farmer in the Penn Yan area built his own mobile processing trailer in response

to the demonstration. He plans on renting the trailer at the cost of 25 cents per bird, with a minimum fee of \$25. At such a low cost to farmers, this service will benefit the community even if it doesn't make a lot of money for the individual. But, his initiative will help overcome the obstacle of on-farm processing and promote pastured poultry on a wider scale.

"Pastured poultry can be an effective companion to the local wine trails," said Henning. "It's a way to further enrich the beautiful landscape that's provided by the region's small farms." After the workshop, he helped develop a brochure promoting pastured poultry farms, and placed it at areas of interest to tourists visiting Yates County.

For information about additional opportunities for small farms, visit the Cornell Small Farms Program web site at www.smallfarms.cornell.edu.

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Hay Fires — Spontaneous Combustion

COLLEGE PARK, Md. — A hay fire isn't a minor incident, particularly if it is inside a storage building. Storing hay when it is wet can result in problems later, either moldy, low quality hay or spontaneous combustion.

Hay stored at more than 22 percent moisture in a barn or in a stack is at risk.

Chemical reactions occur in high moisture haystacks and these lead to heat building up in the pile. Hay acts as an insulator to hold the heat inside.

When the internal temperature of the hay reaches above 130 degrees Fahrenheit (55 degrees C), a chemical reaction begins to produce flammable gas that can ignite if the temperature goes high enough.

Hay fires generally occur within six weeks of baling. Heating occurs in all hay above 15 percent moisture, but it generally peaks at 125 to 130 degrees F, within three to seven days, with minimal risk of combustion or forage quality losses.

The temperature in the stack then declines to safe levels in the next 15 to 60 days, depending on bale and stack density, ambient temperature and humidity, and rainfall absorbed by the hay, if stored outside.

To avoid hay fires, small, rectangular bales should not exceed 18 to 22 percent moisture, and large round bales should not exceed 16 to 18 percent moisture for safe storage.

In addition, you should check your hay regularly. If you detect a slight caramel odor or a distinct musty smell, chances are that your hay is heating. At this point, monitor the temperature.

A simple probe inserted into the haystack can accurately monitor temperature. Make the probe using a 10-foot piece of pipe or electrical tubing. Close the end of the pipe with a pointed dowel and drill several 1/4-inch holes behind the dowel.

Drive the probe into the hay and lower a thermometer on a string into the probe. The thermometer should be left for 10 minutes in several areas of the stack to ensure an accurate reading.

Watch for the following temperatures:

- 150 degrees F - This is the beginning of the danger zone.
- 160 degrees F - This is dangerous. Measure temperature every four hours.
- 175 degrees F - Call the fire department. Wet the hay down. Remove it from barn.
- 185 degrees F - Hot spots and pockets may be expected. Flames may develop if hot hay comes in contact with air.
- 212 degrees F - Critical temperature has been reached. Hay will almost certainly ignite.