

2004 Pastured Peepers Production at Prosper Farmⁱ

By S. Seuferer

On April 26, 2004, 85 approximately day-old Pastured Peeper chicks were obtained from Julie Maro, Coon Creek Family Farm.ⁱⁱ The chicks were transferred to a make-shift cardboard brooderⁱⁱⁱ in the Seuferer garage. Three inches of cedar shavings provided floor bedding for the chicks. A red heat lamp hung through an opening in the ceiling of the cardboard box and maintained the air temperature within the box at chick level at approximately 100°F. The chicks were provided with approximately two pounds of Starter-Grower feed^{iv} daily and water as needed. The air temperature was reduced by ten degrees daily resulting in an air temperature of approximately 80°F by April 28. The amount of feed and water supplied increased as required. By May 6, approximately ten pounds feed were provided daily. The feed was removed by 6:00 p.m. Starting at this time temperature was gauged by chick habit and adjusted by using the heat lamp and venting the roof of the box. Table 1 documents the location, quantity of chicks, and feed type; and, the approximate temperature and amount of feed and water according to the week of production.

Table 1. Cultural Information According to Week of Production.

WEEK	DATE	LOCATION	NUMBER	TEMP °F	FEED TYPE	LBS FEED	WATER
1	4/26	Brooder, garage	85 chicks	100°F	Starter-Grower	2	2 qt
	4/27	"	"	90°F	"	"	3qt
	4/28	"	"	80°F	"	"	"
	4/29	"	"	"	"	"	"
	4/30	"	"	87°F	"	4	4qt
	5/1	"	"	80°F	"	8	"
	5/2	"	"	"	"	"	"
2	5/3	Brooder, garage	85	No data	Starter-Grower	8	4qt
	5/4	"	"	"	"	"	"
	5/5	"	"	"	"	"	6qt
	5/6	"	"	"	"	10	3 ga
	5/7	"	83	"	"	"	"
	5/8	"	"	"	"	"	"
	5/9	"	"	"	"	"	"
3	5/10	Brooder, garage	83	No data	Starter-Grower	10	3 ga
4	5/17	Portable pen, grass	"	"	"	15	"
5	5/24	"	"	"	"	20	6 ga
6	5/31	"	82	"	"	30	"
7	6/7	"	80	"	"	"	"
8	6/14	"	"	"	"	40	12 ga
9	6/21	"	"	"	"	"	"
10	6/28	"	44	"	"	"	"
11	7/5	"	"	"	"	"	"
12	7/12	"	43	"	"	"	"
13	7/19	"	"	"	"	"	"
14	7/26	"	42	"	"	"	"
15	8/2	"	41	"	"	"	"
16	8/9	"	"	"	"	"	"
17	8/16	"	12	"	"	"	"

Eighty-three chicks were transferred May 17 to an outdoor portable pen on grass.^v A heat lamp and refrigerator box was also provided within the portable pen for one week for additional shelter. The chicks were provided approximately 15 lbs. Starter-Grower feed twice daily in the morning and mid-afternoon. A constant supply of water was provided. The amount of feed given gradually increased until late June when the birds consumed approximately 40 lbs. Starter-Grower feed daily divided between morning and mid-afternoon. Again, a constant supply of water was provided.

On June 29, at 9 weeks, 36 birds were harvested. The weights are listed in Table 2. The average bird weight was 4.0 pounds; desired average weight was 5.5 pounds.

Table 2. Harvested Bird Weight in Pounds on June 29, 2004.

3.25	3.50	3.75	4.08
3.25	3.50	3.92	4.25
3.50	3.50	3.92	4.25
3.50	3.75	3.92	4.25
3.50	3.75	4.00	4.42
3.50	3.75	4.00	4.42
3.50	3.75	4.00	4.42
3.50	3.75	4.08	4.75
3.50	3.75	4.08	4.75

The remaining birds were grown on until August 18, or 16 weeks, at which time twenty-nine birds were harvested. The weights are listed in Table 3. Average bird weight was 6.1 pounds.

Table 3. Harvested Bird Weight in Pounds on August 18, 2004.

5.00	5.75	6.25	6.50
5.00	6.00	6.25	6.75
5.00	6.00	6.50	6.75
5.50	6.00	6.50	7.00
5.50	6.00	6.50	7.25
5.75	6.00	6.50	
5.75	6.00	6.50	
5.75	6.25	6.50	

Of the original 85 birds, 65 birds were harvested, ten birds were retained as layers for egg production, two chicks suffocated, seven birds were crushed by the portable pen, and one bird was suspected to have suffered heart failure.

Visually, the Pastured Peepers were more vigorous birds and more tolerant of varying environmental conditions. These birds were notable in the way they scratched the soil more and consumed more fresh grass than the Cornish-Rock breed grown previously. The grass production area contained several holes where the Pastured Peepers dusted themselves. Overall, the Pastured Peepers produced less waste compared to the Cornish Rocks and the stools tended to remain intact. The waste of the Pastured Peepers visually contained less moisture than the Cornish-Rock breed resulting in cleaner

birds at the time of processing. The birds harvested at the later date exhibited a visually significant amount of fat surrounding the vent, neck, and lower back; and a lesser quantity of fat found on the legs, wings, and breast. Such fat was not found on the birds harvested June 29. The meat of either harvest group was delicious.

A comparison of cost of production was made between the Pastured Peepers and the Cornish-Rock breed grown previously. Previous records estimate the cost of feed to produce an eight-week, five-pound Cornish-Rock bird to be \$3.86 per bird (20.29 pounds feed per bird at \$.19 per pound). The cost of feed to produce a nine-week, four-pound Cornish-Delaware bird was estimated at \$3.33 per bird (16.85 pounds feed per bird at \$.195 per pound). Using the previous price for feed, \$.19, and calculating an eight-week production period for the Cornish-Delaware bird, the cost of feed would be approximately \$2.89 per bird (15.21 pounds feed per bird at \$.19 per pound).

The Seufferers, Prosper Farm, wish to thank the Maros and those responsible for awarding the SARE Grant for being included in this study.

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ⁱⁱ Pastured Peepers (Cornish-Delaware cross) chicks were hatched in an electric incubator in the Maro home. Details on the incubation method may be obtained from Vince and Julie Maro, Coon Creek Family Farm, LLC, W4855 Hemlock Road, Mondovi, WI.

ⁱⁱⁱ The brooder was fashioned out of a refrigerator box, 72"x36"x36". The box was replaced weekly or as needed depending on waste and moisture buildup.

^{iv} Organic Custom Mix for Starter-Growers, S&S Grains, LLP, S1761 Lewis Valley Rd., Arcadia, WI. Ingredients: 50% organic corn; 26.25% organic roasted soybeans; 10% organic wheat; 5% crab meal; 5% fish meal; 3% Fertrell Poultry Pre-Mix Nutribalancer; and 0.75% calcium carbonate.

^v Outdoor portable pen dimensions are 10'x15' with peaked roof covered by woven poly tarp. The pen was moved daily or as needed depending on waste and moisture buildup.