

Considerations of Raising Chickens for Egg Production

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The recent surge in egg prices—reported as high as \$9 per dozen—has prompted many people to consider raising their own chickens for egg production. Various factors, such as outbreaks of bird flu and contamination issues, have disrupted local and national egg supplies. While keeping chickens can be a rewarding way to ensure a steady egg supply, it's important to evaluate the associated costs and requirements before diving in. This article aims to provide essential information for prospective chicken owners—not to dissuade, but to help you prepare.

Selecting Chickens

The first step is choosing the right chicken breed. Some breeds are renowned for their egg-laying abilities, such as Rhode Island Reds, Orpingtons, Leghorns, Ameraucanas, Marans, and Plymouth Rocks. There are numerous other breeds suitable for egg production, so it's essential to research which breed aligns best with your specific goals.

Another decision is the age of the chickens you start with. If you opt to raise chicks, be prepared for 6–9 months of feeding before they begin laying eggs. Alternatively, you could purchase hens that are already laying eggs. However, be aware that chickens typically reach their peak egg production during their first two years. Although they can lay eggs for 5–10 years, their production decreases significantly after the initial two years.

Feed and Supplies

The most significant expense in chicken keeping is feed. Chickens consume about ¼ pound of feed per day on average, though this may increase with wastage. If starting with chicks, you'll need to transition from starter feed to grower feed, and finally to layer feed as they mature. Layer feed can come in pellets, scratch, or mash forms—your choice will depend on budget and personal preference. While feeding food scraps can help reduce costs, it's crucial to provide a balanced feed to ensure your chickens receive essential nutrients.

Additionally, you'll need feeders, waterers, and a chicken coop. Feeders and waterers are typically affordable and widely available at farm supply stores. However, choosing a chicken coop requires careful thought. You can either purchase a premade coop or build one yourself. Keep in mind that cheaper coops may not withstand harsh weather conditions. Ensure the coop is sturdy, weather-resistant, and large enough to comfortably accommodate all your chickens. Coops are often one of the largest expenses when getting started with chickens.

Other Considerations

1. **Molting Season:** Chickens naturally go through a molting period when they shed their old feathers and grow new ones. During this time, which typically lasts 8–12 weeks, they stop laying eggs. For example, my own chickens recently finished their molt and have just started producing eggs again.

2. Health Issues: Like any animals, chickens can fall ill. Veterinary care or medications may be necessary to get them back to good health, so it's wise to set aside a small budget for unexpected medical expenses.
3. Financials: Many people are surprised by the initial costs of raising chickens. Between coops, feed, and supplies, the investment often outweighs the cost of even the priciest store-bought eggs. That said, most chicken owners I've spoken with continue to keep their birds—not just for the eggs, but for the joy and satisfaction that come with raising them.

Conclusion

If any of you are interested in raising chickens and would like more information, please reach out to the Juab County Extension Office (435-623-3450) we would be happy to help you! While some chicken owners manage to break even with their egg production, many find that the joy and satisfaction of raising animals far outweigh the costs and work involved.