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Small Farm Egg Production in Southern Nevada

Carol Bishop, Extension Educator, Northeast Clark County

This publication addresses typical production practices and costs and returns of small farm egg production in Southern Nevada. It acts as a decision guide on raising a flock of 15 hens for egg production.

INTRODUCTION

Sample costs and returns to raise laying hens for eggs in southern Nevada are presented here. This publication is meant as a decision guide in the production of eggs, determining potential returns and preparing business and marketing plans. These practices are based on typical production practices in southern Nevada and may not apply to every operation. Insert your own figures into the spreadsheets to get your best estimate numbers.

ASSUMPTIONS

The following assumptions refer to the attached tables and reflect the typical costs and returns associated with small-scale egg production in southern Nevada for 2014. The practices described are not the recommendations of the University of Nevada, Reno, but rather production practices and materials considered typical of a well-managed egg operation in the area at this time as determined by consultations with local producers and the best available research. Costs, materials and practices are not applicable to all operations, as production practices vary among producers in the area. It is assumed that commercially viable egg production will begin 20 weeks after hatching of the chicks.

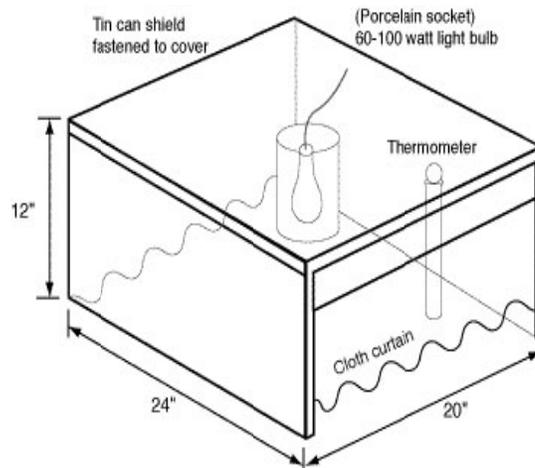


GETTING STARTED

Small-scale egg production can be fun and rewarding. Hens will usually start laying at about 20 weeks of age, and then be productive for two to four years, depending on the breed. They average eight to nine eggs every 10 days during peak of laying cycle. Their antics are interesting to watch as they are very inquisitive birds. Chicks can be purchased from a variety of sources, including online, through the mail or at the local feed store. Purchase birds that have been sexed to ensure most of them are hens, rather than roosters. These costs a little more than hatchery run chicks, but will give a better profitability from the flock as most, if not all, will become producing hens. A rooster is not needed for hens to lay eggs. They are only needed for fertilization if breeding chicks is desired. It is also strongly recommended to ensure that the chicks purchased are vaccinated for Marek's disease (Tilley, 2013). Chicks are available several places online for \$3.50 each. Purchase 10 percent more birds than needed to allow for mortality losses during growth. There are many different varieties of chickens and the color of the eggs varies. White and brown eggs are the most common, with green and blue eggs produced by the Araucana breed (sometimes called Easter egg chickens).

BROODING AND REARING CHICKS

Brooding chicks is easier if started in the late spring to early summer, as it takes less heat to keep them warm. A small area should be cordoned off to keep the chicks near the heat source in the brooder. If using an infrared light, it should be hung with a chain or wire (not the electrical cord), keeping the lamp at least 15 inches above the bedding material. Use porcelain sockets approved for infrared lamps in these fixtures. It can be determined whether or not the chicks are warm enough by watching them. If they scatter and avoid being under the lamp, they are too warm. If they huddle together as close as possible to the lamp, they may be too cool. Reduce the heat by 5 degrees Fahrenheit per week until supplemental heat is no longer required. To reduce the heat, turn off some of the lamps (if using multiple lamps,) use smaller lamps, or raise the height of the lamps (Hamre, 2013).



Homemade Brooder for 25 to 50 chicks

WATER

The importance of a continual supply of fresh water for chickens cannot be overstated. Running out of water for one day will result in lost egg production for several days. Inexpensive fountain-type drinkers are available at most feed stores, hold a gallon of water, and sell for around \$6. Each drinker will supply 12 to 15 adult chickens during cool weather and six to 12 during hot weather. The water temperature should be 80 F or less. During hot weather over 80 F, add an extra water container. A 1-foot square wooden board can be placed under the drinker to give added stability and reduce the chance of tipping and spillage. Always supply extra drinkers in case of spillage or leakage (Frame, 2010). Water containers should be brush washed once a day and disinfected once per week with a solution of 1 tablespoon chlorine bleach per gallon of water.



One Gallon Drinker

FEEDING

Chicks and growing birds require an entirely different sort of feed than hens in egg production.

- For chicks up to 8 weeks old, use a commercially prepared 18 to 21 percent protein chicken starter with coccidiostat.
- Growing birds 8 to 18 weeks old need feed with a 14 to 16 percent protein ration.
- For hens in or approaching egg production (+ 18 weeks), buy a good laying mash with about 16 to 18 percent protein. Hens need to obtain sufficient energy, protein, and calcium in their food. Insufficient levels of these essential nutrients will lead to lower egg production.
- Keep food available most of the time but not continuously. Mature hens will eat between .22 and .25 pounds of food each day. Commercial laying mash is available through local feed stores at \$18 for a 50 pound bag. For 15 hens, a 50 pound bag should last at least 13 weeks. Let the feeders run empty once a week to keep the food from getting stale.
- A scratch grain mix should be spread on the floor late in the afternoon. This encourages the hens to fluff up the bedding material on the floor and help keep it well mixed. It is important to not give too much scratch grain, as this will throw off the percentages of protein the hens are fed in their mash and can affect egg production.
- Laying mash usually has enough calcium for shell production, but as hens get older, oyster shells may need to be added to their diet to continue production of good quality shell.
- Chickens don't have teeth. They pick up small pebbles that lodge in their gizzards. Food passing through the gizzard is ground up with the help of these small stones. If the chickens are allowed out into a run every day, they may not need any additional grit, as they will pick up stones from the ground. If they are not allowed out, a handful of grit should be added to their food to give them the means to grind their food. Both grit and calcium can be purchased at feed stores or online for \$3 per pound.
- Hens will eat more in the cold months and less in the hot. They need more food to generate energy for body warmth during the cold months, and less in the heat.
- Table scraps may be fed to the birds if it is not excessive. Table scraps are not balanced nutrition and will affect health and production. Common opinion is no more than 10 percent of their diet should be table scraps. Avoid strong flavored foods, such as fish and turnips, as these flavors can carry over into the egg. Greens such as lettuce, green leafy vegetables and grass, will help keep a deep rich yellow color in the yolk. The chickens should be fed no more than they can clean up in about 20 minutes (Hermes, 1995).

HOUSING

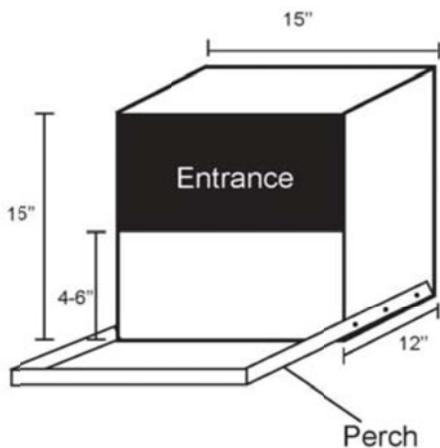
An enclosed space for the hens to stay at night is essential for their protection (Wieland, 2014). The main predators for chickens are raccoons, rats, owls, hawks, weasels, cats and dogs. Housing can be quite varied as long as a few basic requirements are kept in mind. The house or coop must provide protection from both the weather and predators. It must be large enough to have good ventilation but not so large that it gets too cold in the winter. Floor space of at least 1 1/2 to 2 square feet should be allowed for each bird. Nesting boxes should be built 18 inches above the ground, and roosts should be provided. Chickens prefer to roost at night. Approximately 8 inches of roost per hen is sufficient. Birds do better with non-round roosting poles. They prefer square poles (eXtension, 2012); this also produces fewer feet problems (Hermes, personal communication). Easy access to food and water should always be available. Bedding material on the floor should be 2 to 4 inches deep. Sawdust works well. This material helps soak up the waste products, as well as supplying some insulation for the birds.

SIDE BENEFIT OF BEDDING MATERIAL

One side benefit of the bedding material is that as it absorbs the chicken manure, it becomes prime material for composting. The product needs to be properly composted for safety. Composting will generate temperatures of 140 to 160 F which is enough to kill most human and animal pathogens such as E. coli and Salmonella. It also gives the ammonia in the manure time to dissipate. Chicken manure is high in nitrogen and takes five to six weeks to compost. Putting the manure directly onto the garden or lawn before it is composted will burn the plants (Saliga and Skelly, 2013).

NESTING BOXES

Hens seek secluded places to lay their eggs. Nesting boxes provide this, and a clean area for the newly laid eggs. The boxes also make gathering eggs easier. There should be one nesting box for every four birds. Nesting boxes should be 12 to 15 inches in width and height and at least 12 inches deep. A front panel of 4 to 6 inches is needed to help with the feeling of seclusion for the hen and to keep the eggs from rolling out. A 2 to 3 inch layer of clean, dry bedding should be kept in each nesting box to help keep the eggs clean and reduce breakage. Hens like to use the same spot other hens have used to lay their eggs; this indicates that the spot is safe from predators and other dangers. Ceramic or wooden eggs can be purchased and placed in the nesting boxes to encourage the hens to lay their eggs in the box. They cost just over \$2 each.



Generic Nesting Box



New Hampshire Red and Buff Orpington hens

LIGHTING

Fourteen to 16 hours per day of light are needed to keep hens laying eggs. During the winter supplemental light may be needed. From October through February, daylight hours are too few and need to be supplemented. Using one 40-watt light bulb for every 100 square feet is adequate. The light should be added in the morning hours, so the hens can roost at sunset and not get caught away from the roost when the light goes out. Hens will stop laying and go into a molt when the daylight hours get too short. Controlling the amount of light the hens get can lead to laying cycles of 50 to 60 weeks before going into molt, for good layers per laying cycle (Clauer, 2009)

STRESS

It is important not to stress the hens, as stress will cause them to reduce laying. The most common cause of stress is failure to provide a constant source of fresh water. Handling or moving the chickens will cause stress. Once a flock is in place, it is best to leave them there or minimize any moving. Changing of the pen also changes the pecking order and will cause social stress in the flock. Noise from children, farm equipment or predators will stress the flock. Chilling will have a negative effect on egg production. Chickens can take cold, but they cannot take wet, drafty conditions (Clauer, 2009). Because this publication is intended for producers in southern Nevada, the summer heat and how to

possibly avoid unnecessary loss of hens needs to be addressed. Heat stress increases mortality (Marshlay et. al, 2003). Simple solutions may not change Tables 1 or 2 for costs or may only affect them slightly, but if heat stress isn't addressed, a significant loss in hens may result in loss of projected profits. Reduced feed in the summer, cooling water, providing a pan of water for cooling of feet, providing fans, orientation of hen house, and a large overhang on the hen house may contribute to reduced heat stress.

ISSUES

There are a variety of diseases poultry can get. One of the best methods of control is cleanliness and isolation from other birds. Keep the runs covered so wild birds cannot get in with the chickens. Keep litter dry and remove any caked or wet spots. When they are young, the birds should be vaccinated for Newcastle disease at a cost of \$10 for a 1,000-dose bottle. This vaccine is added to the drinking supply. A low-level coccidiostat drug should be fed during the growing stage to prevent coccidiosis, and most starter feeds contain this important drug. Once they are producing hens, additional medication should not be needed. Cannibalism is a problem in chicken flocks, and once it gets started, is hard to stop. Such factors as inadequate ventilation, insufficient drinking and eating space, crowding, and the appearance of blood on injured birds contribute to this problem. Most hatcheries will beak trim the 1-day-old chicks if requested. This is like cutting a fingernail and doesn't hurt the birds, but does contribute to reducing pecking of other birds (Hamre, 2013).

OPERATOR LABOR COST

Most of the year operator labor is minimal. Feeding, watering, and collecting the eggs for a 15 hen flock will take 10 to 15 minutes per day. Twice a year, litter is cleaned from the coop and fresh litter is put down. This should be able to be done in about two hours for a coop this size. Sales time at the farm and at farmers markets should also be considered. An hour and one-half per week for operator's labor is budgeted in this publication.

PACKAGING

Packaging the eggs for sale is done in egg cartons. These cartons are usually either paper pulp or foam, with some fancy forms, such as clear plastic also available. Because the eggs produced are a premium product, packaging them in clear plastic containers adds to the consumer's perception of value. Egg cartons are available either plain or with a variety of printing on them. They can also be custom printed. They can be purchased from multiple places on the Internet and from many feed stores at a cost of around 35 cents each for the clear ones when purchasing in bulk.

SALES

The Nevada Department of Agriculture does not require you to have a producer's certificate to sell eggs, either from your farm or off-farm, however, health departments in Clark and Washoe County and the State Health Division may require you to have a producer certificate to sell your eggs in areas under their jurisdictions. More information can be found at the Nevada Department of Agriculture website at http://agri.nv.gov/Plant/Producer_Certification/Selling_Eggs/.

MARKETING

Farm-fresh eggs are a premium product in the minds of consumers and can easily demand a premium price. A price of \$6 a dozen is a reasonable retail for the urban southern Nevada market, and \$7 to \$8 is not unheard of, especially if delivered to the client or for organic, cage-free, free-range or non-GMO eggs. A simple hand-painted sign along the road at the front of the farm, if allowed, will bring customers in and also add to the homegrown, premium caché. A separate fact sheet on marketing will be forthcoming.

OVERHEAD AND CAPITAL RECOVERY COSTS

CASH OVERHEAD

Various cash expenses paid during the year include insurance, taxes and office expenses. Interest on operating capital is calculated at 75 percent of the total operating cost. A complete listing of investments and associated costs can be found in Table 2, with a yearly budget in Table 1, and cash flow of returns and operating costs in Table 3.

INSURANCE

Insurance on farm investments vary, depending on the assets included and the amount of coverage. A business owner's policy provides coverage for property loss, liability insurance, vandalism and coverage for property damage accidents.

ANNUAL REPAIRS

Annual repairs are calculated at 2 percent of the purchase price of the asset for most items, multiplied by the livestock share percentage.

CAPITAL RECOVERY COSTS

The annual capital recovery costs are what allow the grower to replace equipment when it wears out. Capital recovery costs are the amount the grower must recover through annual depreciation of all farm investments less the salvage value at the end of the items useful life. These amounts should be set aside each year so the funds are available to replace items as they wear out. They are calculated using straight line depreciation. Machinery depreciation time periods are based off IRS Publication 946. Salvage value is 10 percent of the purchase price, which is an estimate of the remaining value of an asset at the end of its useful life.

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Table 1: Costs and Returns for 15 Hen Flock						
Description	Unit of Measure	Total Units	Price/Cost Per Unit	Total Value	Value/Cost Per Bird	Your Ranch
GROSS INCOME						
Eggs	Dozen	388	\$ 6.00	\$ 2,325.00	\$ 155.00	
Cull hens	ea	4	\$ 5.00	\$ 20.00	\$ 1.33	
TOTAL INCOME				\$ 2,345.00	\$ 156.33	
OPERATING COSTS						
Bedding	Bag	4	\$ 10.00	\$ 40.00	\$ 2.67	
Feed	Bag	27	\$ 18.00	\$ 486.00	\$ 32.40	
Veterinary/Medical	Head	15	\$ 1.00	\$ 15.00	\$ 1.00	
Grit and Calcium	lb	5	\$ 3.00	\$ 15.00	\$ 1.00	
Drinkers	ea	2	\$ 6.00	\$ 12.00	\$ 0.80	
Marketing (Labels)	ea	388	\$ 0.03	\$ 11.64	\$ 0.78	
Egg Cartons	ea	388	\$ 0.35	\$ 135.80	\$ 9.05	
Operator Labor	Hourly	78	\$ 13.00	\$ 1,014.00	\$ 67.60	
Accounting & Legal Fees	\$	1	\$ 50.00	\$ 50.00	\$ 3.33	
Maintenance (Buildings, Vehicles, etc.)	\$	1	\$ 25.59	\$ 25.59	\$ 1.71	
Utilities	Hours	500	\$ 0.12	\$ 57.50	\$ 3.83	
Water	Monthly	12	\$ 5.00	\$ 60.00	\$ 4.00	
Miscellaneous	Head	15	\$ 0.50	\$ 7.50	\$ 0.50	
Interest Operating Capital	\$	\$1,447.52	6.50%	\$ 94.09	\$ 6.27	
TOTAL OPERATING COSTS				\$ 2,024.12	\$ 134.94	
INCOME ABOVE OPERATING COSTS						
				\$ 320.88	\$ 21.39	
OWNERSHIP COSTS						
Capital Recovery (Depreciation):						
Buildings, Improvements, & Equipment	\$		\$ 99.16	\$ 99.16	\$ 6.61	
Purchased Livestock	\$		\$ 15.75	\$ 15.75	\$ 1.05	
Cash Overhead:						
Liability Insurance	\$		\$ 150.00	\$ 150.00	\$ 10.00	
Office & Travel	\$		\$ 50.00	\$ 50.00	\$ 3.33	
Interest on Retained Livestock	\$		\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	
Annual Investment Insurance	\$		\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	
Annual Investment Taxes	\$		\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	
TOTAL OWNERSHIP COSTS				\$ 314.91	\$ 20.99	
TOTAL COSTS						
				\$ 2,339.02	\$ 155.93	
NET PROJECTED RETURNS						
				\$ 5.98	\$ 0.40	

Table 2: Investment Summary

Description	Purchase Price	Salvage Value	Livestock Share (%)	Useful Life (yrs)	Annual Taxes	Annual Insurance	Annual Capital Recovery	Annual Repairs
Buildings, Improvements, and Equipment								
Coop	\$ 800.00	\$ 80.00	100	15	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 48.00	\$ 16.00
Fencing	\$ 200.00	\$ -	100	10	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 20.00	\$ 4.00
Troughs	\$ 19.50	\$ 1.95	100	10	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 1.76	\$ 0.39
Nesting Boxes	\$ 20.00	\$ 2.00	100	10	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 1.80	\$ 0.40
Tools	\$ 200.00	\$ 20.00	100	10	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 18.00	\$ 4.00
Feeders	\$ 20.00	\$ 2.00	100	5	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 3.60	\$ 0.40
Heater	\$ 20.00	\$ 2.00	100	3	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 6.00	\$ 0.40
Sub Total	\$ 1,279.50	\$ 107.95	NA	NA	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 99.16	\$ 25.59
Purchased Livestock								
Hens	\$ 52.50	\$ 5.25	100	3	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 15.75	
Roosters	\$ -	\$ -	100	4	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	
Sub Total	\$ 52.50	\$ 5.25	NA	NA	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 15.75	
Total	\$ 1,332.00	\$ 113.20	NA	NA	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 114.91	\$ 25.59

Table 3. Cash Flow													
Description	January	February	March	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December	Total
Production:													
Eggs	\$ 129.17	\$ 193.75	\$ 258.33	\$ 258.33	\$ 193.75	\$ 193.75	\$ 129.17	\$ 129.17	\$ 193.75	\$ 258.33	\$ 258.33	\$ 129.17	\$ 2,325.00
Cull hens	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 10.00	\$ 10.00	\$ -	\$ 20.00
Total Income	\$ 129.17	\$ 193.75	\$ 258.33	\$ 258.33	\$ 193.75	\$ 193.75	\$ 129.17	\$ 129.17	\$ 193.75	\$ 268.33	\$ 268.33	\$ 129.17	\$ 2,345.00
Operating Inputs:													
Bedding	\$ 20.00	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 20.00	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 40.00
Feed	\$ 48.60	\$ 48.60	\$ 48.60	\$ 48.60	\$ 36.45	\$ 24.30	\$ 24.30	\$ 24.30	\$ 36.45	\$ 48.60	\$ 48.60	\$ 48.60	\$ 486.00
Veterinary/Medical	\$ 1.25	\$ 1.25	\$ 1.25	\$ 1.25	\$ 1.25	\$ 1.25	\$ 1.25	\$ 1.25	\$ 1.25	\$ 1.25	\$ 1.25	\$ 1.25	\$ 15.00
Grit and Calcium	\$ 3.00	\$ 3.00	\$ 3.00	\$ 1.50	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 1.50	\$ 3.00	\$ 15.00
Drinkers	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 12.00	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 12.00
Marketing (Labels)	\$ 0.97	\$ 0.97	\$ 0.97	\$ 0.97	\$ 0.97	\$ 0.97	\$ 0.97	\$ 0.97	\$ 0.97	\$ 0.97	\$ 0.97	\$ 0.97	\$ 11.64
Egg Cartons	\$ 11.32	\$ 11.32	\$ 11.32	\$ 11.32	\$ 11.32	\$ 11.32	\$ 11.32	\$ 11.32	\$ 11.32	\$ 11.32	\$ 11.32	\$ 11.32	\$ 135.80
Operator Labor	\$ 84.50	\$ 84.50	\$ 84.50	\$ 84.50	\$ 84.50	\$ 84.50	\$ 84.50	\$ 84.50	\$ 84.50	\$ 84.50	\$ 84.50	\$ 84.50	\$ 1,014.00
Accounting & Legal Fees	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 50.00	\$ 50.00
Maintenance (Buildings, Vt)	\$ 2.13	\$ 2.13	\$ 2.13	\$ 2.13	\$ 2.13	\$ 2.13	\$ 2.13	\$ 2.13	\$ 2.13	\$ 2.13	\$ 2.13	\$ 2.13	\$ 25.59
Utilities	\$ 4.79	\$ 4.79	\$ 4.79	\$ 4.79	\$ 4.79	\$ 4.79	\$ 4.79	\$ 4.79	\$ 4.79	\$ 4.79	\$ 4.79	\$ 4.79	\$ 57.50
Water	\$ 5.00	\$ 5.00	\$ 5.00	\$ 5.00	\$ 5.00	\$ 5.00	\$ 5.00	\$ 5.00	\$ 5.00	\$ 5.00	\$ 5.00	\$ 5.00	\$ 60.00
Miscellaneous	\$ 0.63	\$ 0.63	\$ 0.63	\$ 0.63	\$ 0.63	\$ 0.63	\$ 0.63	\$ 0.63	\$ 0.63	\$ 0.63	\$ 0.63	\$ 0.63	\$ 7.50
Interest Operating Capital	\$ 5.23	\$ 7.84	\$ 10.45	\$ 10.45	\$ 7.84	\$ 7.84	\$ 5.23	\$ 5.23	\$ 7.84	\$ 10.45	\$ 10.45	\$ 5.23	\$ 94.09
Total Operating Costs	\$ 187.41	\$ 170.03	\$ 172.64	\$ 171.14	\$ 154.88	\$ 142.73	\$ 172.11	\$ 140.11	\$ 154.88	\$ 169.64	\$ 171.14	\$ 217.41	\$ 2,024.12
Net Returns	\$ (58.25)	\$ 23.72	\$ 85.69	\$ 87.19	\$ 38.87	\$ 51.02	\$ (42.95)	\$ (10.95)	\$ 38.87	\$ 98.69	\$ 97.19	\$ (88.25)	\$ 320.88

*There are small inconsistencies in this Table due to rounding.

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