

KSU Poultry Newsletter

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We Need Poultry Judges!

There is a need for judges for competitive poultry shows around Kansas. The pandemic suspended many animal shows and with this long gap, many of our seasoned judges have retired or cut back their schedule. There is probably a gap in new judges as many have not been able to complete poultry judging apprenticeships. I'd like to renew old names on my list and add a bunch more new ones. If you, or someone you know, is a poultry judge, please let me know (sbeyer@ksu.edu).

Avian Influenza Update

The persistence of this current avian influenza outbreak is disappointing, however, there could be some cracks in the spread as migrating birds continue to move north and temperatures (finally!) start warming. Without wanting to beat the drums too much on the topic, flock owners need to stay locked down to keep the numbers of infected farms from increasing.

A question that has been asked more is "should I not feed backyard birds at this time"? So far, the data has not shown any persistence of influenza in song birds, which is a good sign. It is always a good thing to be sure that your feeder isn't messy, with feed spilling all over the ground, attracting all types of animals to the grain lying around. A good pile of uneaten corn in some mixes could attract wild waterfowl and that's what we don't want hanging around right now. And I have never recommended allowing wild birds to eat from your chicken feeders – these birds certainly bring in mites, worms, and coccidia, and can be considered prime sources of these parasites in home flocks. So, keep your bird feeder far away from your poultry, and be sure to keep it tidy and clean.

Remember that the Kansas Department of Agriculture, Division of Animal Health, is keeping on top of the influenza issue with lots of updated information. Their web site is at agriculture.ks.gov/AvianInfluenza or you can call them at 833-765-2006.

Protecting Backyard Poultry from Predators

It's easy to notice a theme in my personal notes on producer calls that the number one cause of Kansas chicken deaths is not disease but is a pet dog! After dogs, coyotes are persistent chicken killers, followed by a host of different wild animals including skunks, raccoons, bobcats, opossums and more. Don't forget predator birds like hawks and owls that often grab chicken dinner when they are able. The coop and yard need to be far more stout to keep animals out than to keep poultry confined.

Here's something to keep in mind: once a predator has stolen one tasty chicken dinner, you can bet it will return again and again until you prevent them from success. This means you will need to "harden the chicken fortress" before they get them all.

Use only wire for fencing since animals are less able to chew through wire. Some of the new, lightweight “chicken wire” hexagonal netting is often too soft and flimsy and predators are able to chew or tear holes in the fence, so get a higher gauge wire. If you can cut it with a pair of ordinary scissors, it’s probably not heavy enough to withstand chewing animals. I have noticed more growers using electrified netting products for poultry confinement. These can be effective when working, but if power is lost, the entire flock is at risk because the netting itself is not always constructed to be sturdy enough to prevent predator damage when the power is off. I have observed that some electric netting is too short, and when not installed correctly, it can sag so the fence is not very effective. Electric nets might be better used as temporary day runs, or devices to exclude birds from vegetable and flowers and not for permanent fencing.

The most important element of a coop fence is the interface between the ground and the bottom of the fence. Dogs and wild animals will instinctively dig near the bottom of the fence, so it should be secured to the ground. Some poultry keepers will bury the bottom of the fence into the ground for a few inches. Another approach is to install the full length of wire on the fence, then take a roll of wire and lay it out on the ground around the pen. This wire will be buried around the edges to avoid lawnmowers and such, then it is attached to the bottom of the vertical wire fence. Digging predators tend to focus their effort along the bottom of the fence, and do not realize that they need to move back to go under the edge of the buried wire.

I like to install the vertical fence in one piece, very tight. Then I dig a 3-4” deep, 24” wide strip around the outside of the fence bottom. Then I roll out a 24”(±) strip of fence or mesh wire and bury it. This wire can be any old scrap or used wire netting from around the farm, since it will be out of sight. Overlap pieces in the trench and leave enough exposed so that you can weave it into the vertical fence.

I like coops and yard designs that are moveable. In this case, burying wire around edge of the coop is not practical. What I do here is build a moveable panel with an attached skirt. I build a stand alone frame and attach the fencing. Then I attach 4” sections of pipe to the vertical sides, and then drive rebar into the pipe so each section will stand alone. To the bottom of this, I have attached a wire skirt that hinges off the bottom of the fence. After I move it, I just allow the skirt to sit on top of the ground. It works better if you use a very heavy skirt, like cattle or hog panel, so that the weight keeps it against the ground. When mowing, you can just lift it up against the fence and then plop it back down when you are done.

If you have persistent predators that just won’t seem to give up, you might need to step it up. I usually install an electric fence along the bottom of the fence, as well along the top. Be sure that you install this system so that it includes the coop and gates, as many predators will keep testing until they find a place to climb around the system. Portable systems powered by solar panels are handy but be sure the one you choose develops enough power to scare off the predators attacking your run.

If air borne predators are attacking your flocks, then you will need to put protection over the top. In this case, plastic or cotton netting is lighter and will normally do a good job keeping large birds out. But beware, at KSU, I’ve seen eagles sitting on our gamebird nets so be sure whatever you build is sturdy! It helps if trees and other roosting areas are further back from your pens. I have read about growers who ran strips of wire across the top 1-2’ apart with the theory that a gliding bird could not easily pass through the strips, but I have seen predators rest on the roof or fence, then simply drop to the ground between the wires! If you use this technique, it is just as effective if you use heavy fishing line and not wire. You can run this in all different patterns and directions because it is inexpensive plus it may cause less harm to large birds.

For more information about building a chicken coop and run, see Housing Tips for Small Poultry Flocks, KSRE publication #MF3296 at <https://bookstore.ksre.ksu.edu/pubs/MF3296.pdf>.

Question of the Month: How should I rid my home poultry flock of worms?

One concern many flock owners have is if, when, and how often they should treat their birds for internal parasites. First, yes, you should treat them to prevent worms. A number of different kinds of worms will infect poultry. Though a worm infestation is not likely to cause death of birds, these parasites could lead to further health issues caused by the infectious agents the worms carry, or they could weaken birds with existing diseases to a point that they could worsen the illness. Another concern is a worm in an egg. Yes, this can happen in unusual circumstances when the worm finds itself in the wrong place at the wrong time and gets encapsulated into the egg during formation. I've seen a large roundworm inside an egg and it does not make eggs look appetizing!

A good number of old medications are no longer approved for use in meat and egg type poultry. There are still a few deworming medications that are approved for PET BIRD use, meaning caged birds that are not used for meat and egg consumption. These products should not be used on home poultry flocks if you intend to eat the eggs or meat.

Many producers will deworm pullets that are not yet laying eggs. Birds pick up worm eggs from grass, soil, and insects which are active during the warm months. Natural treatments, treating the soil, and moving the outdoor area all have no or limited temporary success in controlling internal parasites in poultry. Birds allowed outdoor access should be treated in early spring, and sometimes later in the summer and fall. Birds housed indoors on deep litter or hard floors will not be exposed to many sources of worms so treatment may be less often.

The only currently approved drug for treatment of internal parasites in poultry that does not require that eggs be thrown away is SAFE-GUARD Aquasol for Chickens (fenbendazole) by Merck Animal Health. It may be administered in the drinking water for 5 days at 1 mg/kg. I recommend reading the labels on all products as well as seeking advice from your veterinarian when using medications on poultry.



Happy 70th Birthday, Robert Resser.....and thank you.

Robert Resser celebrated his 70th birthday in May. Robert still works a few hours when needed at the Poultry and Gamebird Research Center, although he retired from full time work in Animal Sciences about 10 years ago. He first came to work milking cows at the KSU Dairy Unit in 1979, then transferred to the Poultry Research Farm in 1991. He has reliably cared for KSU's bird-related projects for all these years even though snow, ice, rain, and high winds (our game bird nets can take a beating in high winds) have sometimes closed the main campus. Lately, he's working fewer hours but he sometimes does the chores and keeps up the yard work! Thanks Robert and Happy Birthday!

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