

## Sunshine Farms - Chicken Care Guide

Greetings! If you received this booklet, you may be new to raising chickens. We are so happy for you, we hope for the best to you and your family as you embark on this wonderful chicken adventure!

### Our Story

Thanks to a gift of baby female chicks we received from a brother and sister in the faith a few years ago, we began raising chickens to have eggs for ourselves to try to reduce our dependency on the supermarket. With our most recent flock, whom we love so much and have blessed us with the best eggs and with their spunky-sweet personalities, we wanted to try to preserve them by getting a rooster to have baby chicks that continued in their lineage. Then we thought, "Why not let these wonderful girls be a blessing to the world"? So now, our hope is that any additional chicks that our chickens produce could potentially go to feeding other families as well and keeping their memory alive for future generations. We hope someday this can be a reality. We hope this booklet will help you with information we wished we knew when we were first starting out, and hopefully help you avoid mistakes we made in the learning process. Here at Sunshine Farms, we believe in an all-powerful God who created all living things, and feel that chickens are one of His most wondrous creations. Aside from our belief that they are a wonderful pet, they also help children to learn responsibility, and they give back to us a great source of animal protein without needing to kill the animal for our food. And the better care we give them, the happier the chickens, and the more they will lay for us, and healthier the eggs will be!

### Space and Other Requirements

Even though it is preferred for chicken owners to have at least a quarter acre of land for the chickens to eventually be able to free range, it is not absolutely necessary. They can easily be kept in a very small backyard or patio as well.

Chickens are not "cheap" (pardon the pun). In all honesty, to us they have been so enjoyable, that they have almost become addicting. One can easily spend lots of "buck, buck, bucks" (another chicken joke) buying things you think would make them happier or healthier. However, it is not necessary to spend a lot of money on raising chickens. Just do the best you can. If you can afford to go organic, non-GMO, high dollar, etc., by all means do so. But with some ingenuity, bits of here and there and whatnot you may have lying around and not much use for, and basic carpentry skills, you can save that money and still have plenty of fresh eggs for you and your family! In the long run you may not save money raising your own chickens for eggs (what you spend versus what you get), but the quality of the eggs and the enjoyment we get as a family for us is worth it all.

### Chick Care Basics

Unless you have a broody hen, you will have to be the chicks' surrogate "mother" until they are old enough to forage outside for their food and bugs.

Everything for the care of the chicks should be fully set up before you bring them home. They should be kept in a brooder the house until they are ready to be moved outside. You will need:

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|---|---|
| *A brooder - a plastic, metal, glass, or wooden tote (the bigger the better because the chicks will grow) | *Chick Grit   |
| * Chick feed (we like Dumor Chick Starter)  | *A chicken wire cover for the brooder that will allow plenty of air for them to breathe, but not allow them to jump out when they are big enough. |
| * Heat lamp that can be well secured to avoid fires   | *Optional - chick roosting bars made of small sticks which can be homemade or purchased.  |
| * Red heat lamp bulb  | *Optional - Thermostat to control heat lamp temperature ( <i>see below</i> )  |
| * Flake Pine bedding (white bag from Tractor Supply)  |   |
| *Food bowl(s)   |   |
| *Water bowl(s)  |   |

Their bedding should just be enough to cover the bottom of the brooder be changed as often as you can (scooping out the poop from time to time will keep you from having to change it so often), but no less than once a week. Replace their feed when it gets low, and change their water at least once daily. The temperature settings for the thermostat should be 95° the first week, then lower it 5° every week thereafter.

The brand we use and feel comfortable with is the Inkbird ITC-308 Digital Temperature Controller.

## **Creative Solutions for Food and Water Bowls**

For chicks, we found that there was no need to buy special feeders and waterers unless you wanted to. Since they don't drink much water, putting the lid of a mason jar on top of a small block of wood works ok, but don't put too much water in because the little chicks could drown. For feeders, you can cut a large hole into a small cardboard box and then fill the box with chick feed, and use rubber bands all around the outside leaving a hole just big enough for them to put their heads in to get to the food. The rubber bands can be moved as they grow. Another thing we did was attach plastic water bottles to the top of a traditional stand-up feeders and waterers (with packing tape), then attach a hook through the water bottle cap, then it can hang from the lid of the brooder (and not get so much bedding into it), and eventually we move the waterers out with them into the interim coop (see below).

## **Moving Them Outside**

Once they are fully feathered and lose all of their baby chicky fluff, they are able to be moved outside. We recommend a temporary, interim outdoor shelter by themselves until they are fully grown. We have found that the best solution is a wooden or PVC structure that can be slid from place to place to give them fresh grass every day. This structure should have roosting bars for night time sleeping and a nesting box or two depending on how many chicks you have. It should also have regular chicken grit, clean food (they can now have layer crumble or pellets mixed in with their chick feed) and fresh water available to them at all times. This structure should also be resistant to digging predators by placing objects around the perimeter.

In about a month or two after you move them outside, you may begin to see some tiny eggs! It is a very egg-citing time! Once they are laying, they can move to full-fledged layer feed. It is also about this time that you may realize that one or more of your chicks are actually roosters. At one time, this may have been considered a bad thing, and people's first inclination is to kill the young rooster. But STOP!!! We are here to tell you that there are many benefits to having a rooster in your flock. We will discuss that a little further ahead.

## **Stationary Coop vs. Mobile Coop (A.K.A. Chicken Tractor)**

Depending on your space and time restrictions, there are pros and cons to both, so you can decide what is best for you. Mobile coops (like the one you made for your teenage chicks) are great for people who have predator problems and can't let them free range, and it also gives the chickens access to fresh grass daily. It is nice to make them tall enough so you can go inside to change food, water, get the eggs, or do whatever needs to be done inside the coop. Whatever you decide, please do what you can to predator-proof your coop. It should be fully enclosed and able to be secured at night with a thumb activated latch (not a hook). Doors can easily be made by securing chicken wire to a PVC pipe and using elbows, make it into a door that can open and shut if it is secured to another PVC with long cable ties. Also, be sure to put items around the perimeter to discourage digging predators.

We had a mobile coop for our first flock, but as our flock expanded, the mobile coop became the stationary roosting area for the permanent coop and we just attached a run to the place where the door used to be. Right now, we are planning to extend the coop and run even more to receive our newest set of baby chicks when they are old enough.

The coop should have enough roosting bars for all of your chickens, preferably all the roosting bars should be at equal height to prevent dominance. Of course, fresh food and water should be available at all times.

## **Moving Youngsters to the "Big" Coop**

We highly suggest, that, unless the chicks are with the mama hen that hatched them, that the adolescent chicks not be in with any full sized chickens that you may have until the babies are fully grown, because the bigger chickens are (almost guaranteed) to pick on the little ones, and could cause them so much stress that it will not be healthy for the younger chickens.

## **The Run**

If you want to give your chickens greater protection from predators, you may want to build or make a run for them. A run is an enclosure, usually attached to a coop where they can dust bathe and entertain themselves during the day. The run should be big enough for each of them to have at least 3 sq. ft. of roaming space per chicken. Remember to make whatever adjustments you need to make to keep predators out.

## Roosters

There are only two reasons we can think of to not have a rooster in your flock, and we have learned that thankfully both of these issues be remedied:

**1) The crowing** - One of the most beautiful and recognizable animal sounds in the world, has now become one of the least tolerated of all. And sadly, the beautiful and majestic crowing of the rooster has been the doom of many, many roosters worldwide. Fortunately, for the benefit of all, now there is a rooster collar that is guaranteed to drastically reduce the volume of the rooster's crowing to the sound of any typical clucking hen. Here is the website: <https://nocrowroostercollars.com/> - Collar Disclaimer - Although the collar is safe and effective, the rooster will undoubtedly not like the collar at first, and will take up to an entire day squirming around trying to get out of it. Once he gets used to it, or most likely by the next morning (*when he has forgotten about it*) he should be fine and act totally normal. Just periodically check that it the collar is not too tight on him, especially as he grows (*if he is a young rooster that is not fully grown yet*).

**2) Being Territorial** - If there is more than one rooster in your flock, they are almost guaranteed to fight, and it will not be good for the losing rooster. If you learn that you do have more than one rooster in your flock, (or if your flock is just too big for you to manage well) we hope you will either separate your roosters to keep the ratio of 8 hens to 1 rooster) or pass on this blessing to (an) other famil(ies) by giving them (a) rooster(s), a couple of hens or baby chicks (if you have them), and a printout of this booklet (or forward the PDF to them). The website to access this booklet will be given at the end.

## The Benefits of a Rooster

Keep in mind, having a rooster is not necessary for your hens to produce eggs. Aside from keeping roosters alive (they are God's creatures, too), we feel there are wonderful benefits to having a rooster in your flock:

- \*Maintaining calmness in the flock
- \*Keep the hens from fighting
- \*Protects the hens from predators
- \*Keeps the flock together
- \*Calls them into the coop at night

- \*Alerts them to food
- \* Fertilizing the eggs (before the hens lay them - that you can either incubate or allow the hens to brood) to produce more baby chicks.

It is possible, and even very healthy for us, to eat eggs that have been fertilized by a rooster. Some people have strong personal or religious objections to this, so if you do, you may want to keep the hens laying the eggs your family will eat separate from your "mama flock" that will produce the baby chicks.

## More Coop Care

Sprinkling diatomaceous earth at least once a week in the coop and run, and a little bit in their daily feed helps to keep the chickens from mites and other internal and external parasites that frequently try to attack them. If you are able to put something under their roosting bars that can be emptied from time to time will make the coop a lot cleaner (they poop the most at night while they sleep). We don't actually shovel out the coop, but we sprinkle bedding through the coop and part of the run to self-compost their waste.

## Our Feed Recipe

This recipe took us quite a while over a few years of trial and error, but we feel that we have come up with a very good feed that our chickens love and that keeps them happy and healthy. This is what we do. We take equal parts of each of the following:

- \*Whole Oats
- \*Whole Corn
- \*Black Oil Sunflower Seed (BOSS)
- \*Layer Crumbles

We know of some chicken owners who leave everything whole, and their chickens will eat them. For our chickens (who are admittedly a little bit spoiled and won't eat it whole), we grind everything except the crumbles, then mix it all together in a big 5-gallon bucket and scoop it out in good measure every afternoon we let them out to free range and to do "room service" (collecting eggs, sprinkling bedding and diatomaceous earth, cleaning feed and water bowls, etc.) What we also do is mix some of our feed with water, and they LOVE it. We try not to give them scraps if we can help it, because with some of our last girls we noticed they suffered from stomach issues from scraps. Their stomachs can be a bit on the delicate side, so we keep it as simple as we can. Also, always make sure the chickens have access to grit, which helps them digest their food. Otherwise, they can easily fall susceptible to various crop issues.

## Free Ranging

Allowing the chickens out to free range all day (accompanied by the rooster) while allowing them access to lay their eggs in their nesting area, food, and water, is probably the best way for your chickens to stay happiest and healthiest. If that is not feasible for you, potentially the next best option is to have them in the mobile coop that you move every day. If you can't do that, and have to keep them in the coop and run all day, allowing them to free range supervised for at least an hour a day is great. That is what we have been going for about a year and our chickens are extremely happy and lay large, clean, and delicious eggs. If you can't let them free range, supplement them with greens and Mealworms or Black Soldier Fly Larvae (BSFL) for protein.

## Egg shells

We have found instead of throwing the eggshells away or putting them in the compost pile, you can feed the egg shells back to the chickens. The calcium in the egg shells helps them with egg laying and also replenishes the calcium in their bones. After your family has eaten the eggs, just rinse the inside and outside of the egg shells off very well, let them air-dry, and then put them in a bag and crush them into roughly 1/4 to 1/2" pieces. Letting the chickens eat eggshells does not give them a taste for eating eggs. On the contrary! By eating the eggshell, we have found that the shells of the eggs the hens lay are so hard they can't break them by pecking them. The shells are so hard that sometimes we even have a hard time cracking them open on the frying pan!

## Broody Hens vs. Incubators

Some breeds of hens tend to be broody (want to sit on the eggs to hatch them), or it may happen to certain hens at different times of year. If you are not wanting to hatch eggs, a broody hen can get the other hens to become broody as well, and soon nobody will be laying. To remedy this, simply take the broody hen off of the eggs, and lead her to some food or water, or open the door so she can go outside for fresh grass. After two or three times of doing this, she will usually forget the idea of being broody and get back to normal chicken life. If a mama hen has laid on eggs until they hatch, this is probably the most wonderful time of all! To see new life enter the world is one of the most amazing miracle we can ever see. Usually, the mama hen will show them where to find food and water, and will keep the other chickens away, so there is nothing you have to do, except treat them like you would all of the others. Letting a mama hen do all of the work makes our job a lot easier. If you do not want to let a broody hen hatch eggs, then an egg incubator is the way to go.

## Illnesses

Probably the most unfortunate part of raising chickens is when one or more of them fall ill. Over the years we have learned different things to keep our hens healthy for longer, like letting them free range as much as possible, using the Diatomaceous Earth, giving them eggshells for calcium so they won't be eggbound, making sure they have good quality feed and clean water at all times, and not letting them eat scraps have helped a lot. If you suspect illness, it is sometimes best to separate the affected chicken in a chicken wire-enclosed dog cage or chicken tractor with and do the best you can to help them recover until they can all hopefully be reunited.

## In Closing

Like we said before, if your flock ever becomes too big for your to manage, please consider sharing the love you have received with another family so they can do the same (*we hope you will not charge or make a business out of it*) so that others can also have lots of chicks and lots of eggs for their family, to keep the love of God going and going. We hope you have found this information helpful, and that this ministry is a blessing to you. If you have any questions, please feel free email us at [dontgiveupministries@gmail.com](mailto:dontgiveupministries@gmail.com) or send us a contact form on our website: <https://dontgiveupministries.com>. A PDF of this booklet can be downloaded for free, and much more, at this address: <https://www.dontgiveupministries.com/sunshine-farms>

Written to you with love, Sharon & Sunshine from Sunshine Farms. Special Thanks to: Pastor Al, Moses, Abuela Blanqui, Rich and Sungmi G. Also, we want to thank Becky, Lisa, and so many chicken and homesteading YouTubers and websites that have helped us over the years with our journey. Please feel free to look them up or find new ones of your own for specific issues you may be having. Most of all, we want to give ultimate thanks to God for everything. Without God, nothing is possible. With God, **all things are possible**. God bless!!!