Raising Turkeys for Show

Raising turkeys for show can be a great project and very rewarding. It takes a lot of dedication because this project can last from 12 to 24 weeks depending on the show or shows entered. Turkeys need to be cared for and fed regularly for the entire feeding period. Any neglect on your part and the turkey will fall behind in weight and size, not allowing catch up to those fed without interruption. Again, feeding turkeys is long term and requires lots of dedication, care and patience.

Raising turkeys is divided into three phases. Each one is related to the next and bears directly on the final outcome. Environment and nutrition are the only two that you can immediately control by your actions and constant attention. Selection is the third phase where beginners need help and some training. Not knowing how to select can keep you from placing or result in taking the wrong bird to the show. Seek advice and help from someone that is experience in selection to help you learn. The largest, meatiest turkey is usually selected.

Environment
This begins before the poults ever arrive. An adequate shelter with enough space to support an ideal climate is imperative. Allow two square feet at starting. Five to ten square feet per bird is needed for the last six weeks. Sufficient ventilation, controllable temperature and protection from wild birds, pets, rodents and predators plus the elements have to be met for optimal growth. A good facility can meet any changes in temperature to control the growth environment. Protection on the lower three feet of the building prevents drafts and deters animals chasing or reaching through to catch young poults.

A containment ring 4 to 5 feet in diameter should be ready and warmed to 90 degrees before poults arrive. This can be done by raising or lowering heat lamps to set the desired temperature. Set the thermometer out of the direct heat beam to get the temperature set. Poults are not able to regulate body temperature for the first 10 to 14 days. The ring will compensate by holding a warm temperature at the center allowing the poults to locate the area where they are most comfortable. A temperature setting chart for age will be at the end of the paper.

Good managers will not stress young poults by excessive handling or stirring, for this can cause them to be more susceptible to stress disorders, opening the door to other problems. For the first week, uninterrupted rest periods of 2 hours in length during the day and 8 hours at night allow the poults to digest their food and strengthen. Today's poultry are bred to achieve economical and rapid growth. Extra stress from over-handling and improper starting procedures retard development and growth rate. Electrolytes in the water for 7 days are a great help for a good start. **(¼ tsp per gallon of water).**

Litter can be pine shavings, peanut hulls or sand. Cover any bedding for the first week with an old bed sheet, towels or burlap to prevent poults from ingesting it. Eating these large pieces can clog or impact their intestines and cause death.

Uncover bedding and enlarge the ring after the first week to allow more space and movement, but keeping the temperature regulated.

Ventilation is extremely critical.
Today's poults require lots of fresh air to achieve maximum growth. They cannot tolerate stuffy conditions or high ammonia concentration. If the pen is stale or smelly at your height, imagine the concentration on the floor. Prevent any drafts for the first two weeks but have fresh air exchange.
In addition, try to regulate humidity. Dry air can cause rattling breath, while high humidity can prevent poults from cooling themselves with their respiratory system. Sprinklers on the roof, misters, water coolers and fans can adjust temperature and humidity effectively in hot weather. Avoid any wet litter and change it out, for this can lead to bumble foot or foot sores, breast blisters, environments conducive to spread of disease, and ammonia production from the droppings.

Fresh clean water is as important as feed
Electrolytes need to be used the first seven days, then every time the poults are handled. Examples are spreading wing bands, culling or moving. Use electrolytes for 24 hours, 12 before and 12 after each time this happens. Apple cider vinegar is and excellent source of ascorbic acid using the rate of 1 oz. per gallon three days per week helps leg strength. Keep the water clean enough that you would drink from the container yourself. When the poults are six weeks old, use a large open top water container. This can be a plastic bucket or ice chest with out a lid. Ice chest will keep the water cooler, encouraging more water consumption.

Feeding and feed selection
30% Turkey Starter Crumbles should be fed for the first10 to 14 days
30% Turkey Starter Pellets should be introduced and switched over by day 14 until day 28. They can stay on starter until eight weeks but they are wasting the extra protein. Poults consume more feed by pellet than crumble. 26% Show Broiler Starter Pellets is a good source of feed from four to eight weeks.
At 8 weeks the poults need to be culled. Remove unthrifty, small or stunted poults and poults that do not meet the quality of the faster growing ones. A scale to weigh and separate by weight can be helpful. Keep at least 3 to 5 for each one to be shown. In the case of multiple children showing, that number can be reduced to 3 to prevent over crowding and feeding extra birds that do not fully meet the criteria.
21% Show Broiler Finisher Pellet is excellent from here until the show.

Steam rolled corn can be added at the rate of 2 oz. per turkey per day as a top dress starting week eight after the first culling. Divide the total weight of two ounces per poult and spread as a top dress feeding over 3 or 4 times per day. It helps finish the turkey and that rate will not reduce the protein that enhances growth. At eight weeks, also start feeding one cup of shelled peanuts to the entire pen once per day. This can be found in the bird food area. This adds protein and oil to develop the poult.

There are many additives, vitamins and much advice on raising better turkeys. Winners are great managers, great feeders and pay attention to details. Everyone starts equal, it is what you do that makes you a winner.

Water plays a significant role in turkey production. From day one to the last day, fresh clean water in ample quantities is a must. Turkeys will drink a quart of water or more a day the last six to eight weeks. Growth rate and food consumption and conversion **are directly related to adequate clean water intake. Keep the water clean enough that you would drink out of the**

trough. Sanitize the water container daily with a 5% Clorox solution or soap and water. **Doing this will prevent spread of bacterial growth and algae. This bacterial growth can cause "drop crop" and other related health issues.**
Those prevent the bird from growing out properly. Have at least two feeders and water sources to provide two inches of space for each turkey

Temperatures
Day 1 through 8 - 90 degrees as a comfort zone with two or three heat lamps
Day 9 through 14 - 88 degrees
Day 15 through 21- 86 degrees
Day 22 through 35 - 82 degrees
Day 36 to day 70 – 76 to 80 degrees
Over 70 days 75 or cooler

Providing dry shelter and protection from hard drafts give turkeys the protection they need. In case of temperature drop or freezing temperature, heat lamps ensure warmth as needed. Turkeys will seek the heated area as needed. Prevent water from freezing in extreme cold as this will lower water intake slowing growth and conversion. Drastic changes in weather or environmental conditions can cause death.

Selection
The largest and heaviest bird with the most meat is usually the winners in competition. Broken wings, bruises and open wounds will get the turkey disqualified at check in. Breast that are wide and rectangular with long straight keel bones that have matching meat to the end are most desirable. Width, depth and length of the breast should be proportional and resemble a **"U" shape.** Toms will out grow hens and be larger at an early age. Learn the difference. Know the rules of a particular show. Know the sex of the bird and which is required at that show. Some shows have a class for toms and hens while others are a sexed hen show.

Transporting the turkey to show in a container with 4 to 6 inches of clean litter ensures safety. The container should be cool and dark preventing the turkey from moving about and possibly bruising itself. Make sure there is ventilation in that container. Avoid slick bottom containers to prevent leg damage. If long transport is necessary, have feed and water available to prevent dehydration and gorging when feed is returned.

Keep good and accurate records for the next year's project. This will help you improve the next and consequent years. Knowing the amount of feed, medication, weight achieved at different time frames and general health better prepares managers for improvement.

Conclusion
These guidelines will help you as feeder produce a quality bird for you show. Attention to details, quality housing, dedication to correct feeding, fresh water, culling and selection will help you grow a competitive turkey.

Producers Cooperative Association: modified from Vader original publication

50 Birds

Turkey Starter Crumble (W2) - 1
Turkey Starter Pellet (WK4) – 3
Show Broiler Starter (WK8) – 12
Show Broiler Finisher (WK10) – 10
*varies on project length
(WK12) – 12
(WK14) – 15
(WK16) – 17
(WK18) – 18
(WK20) - 20