

GENERAL FEEDING ADVICE

1. LAYER CHICKENS

A successful rearing program will produce a uniform flock of pullets of correct body weight and sexual maturity at the time of housing in the laying facility and will ensure the flock can perform to its genetic capabilities.

Nutrition during rearing

Feeding during rearing aims to provide the essential nutrients to allow the pullet to grow as expected and then, ultimately, perform to expectation in the laying phase. Feed types, their nutrient specifications, particle size and changeover times all need to be considered in a good feeding program.

Recommended Feeding Program

The recommended feeding program for layers is detailed in the Table below. This program uses three feeds – chick starter, pullet grower and pre-layer.

Pullet Age	Feed Type
0 – 8 weeks	Chick starter
8 – 16 weeks	Pullet grower
16 weeks	Pre-layer

As the pullet grows, intake increases and generally so does feed particle size. Poultry become used to their feed and dislike changes. At the time of feed changeover, as particle size increases, be vigilant for changes in intake and its consequences for growth.

Chick Starter

Chick starter is the highest nutrient specification feed in the feeding program. Young chicks have small intakes and require a small particle size.

Pullet Grower

Grower feeds are generally lower in nutrient specification because intakes are increasing. Particle size can also increase towards the final particle size of the intended layer ration.

Pre-Layer

Pre-layer rations are generally fed in the few weeks before the commencement of lay. Some nutrients in these rations are increased to support the commencement of lay – increased calcium for eggshell production and increased natural carotenoids for yolk pigmentation.

Full nutrient specifications for all three rations can be found in the article **Layer Feed Specifications**.

Feed Supplements

Supplements to the above feeds ensure the necessary supply of essential vitamins, trace elements, antioxidants, and carotenoids for yolk pigmentation. All rearing rations should contain a coccidiostat to prevent a coccidiosis outbreak.

Nutrition during lay

The performance capabilities of modern layers are excellent but to achieve these capabilities good nutrition and appropriate feed specifications are required throughout the productive life of the layer.

Feed specifications

Typical layer rations are high in protein (17-18%) at the commencement of lay with the feed containing 11.4 MJ or 2720 Kcal metabolisable energy per kg of feed. In the commercial situation it may be appropriate to phase feed layers to reduce costs and egg size if it is too large in later productive life

Phase feeding

Phase feeding fine tunes ration formulations to bird performance, thereby reducing ration costs, limiting egg size increase, and improving shell quality. The initial laying ration, also called a phase 1 ration, is generally fed to 45 weeks of age.

Phase 2 laying rations should be fed from around 45 weeks of age to 65 weeks of age, after which the phase 3 ration is fed to the end of productive life.

Egg shell quality generally deteriorates as layers age. This is because the bird has a finite capability to metabolise calcium (the key ingredient of eggshell) and as the eggs become larger, the shells become thinner. Phase feeding (above) will assist with shell quality as this management tool will restrict the increase in egg size.

Full nutrient specifications for all laying rations can be found in the article **Layer Feed Specifications**.

Grit

Grit of various forms (shell, calcium chip) may assist with calcium uptake and metabolism and is recommended to be fed from around 60 weeks of age to all layers.

For free range layers, grit should be available from the commencement of ranging to assist the gizzard to break down fibre eaten during ranging. Grit will thus assist in preventing gut impaction.

2. MEAT CHICKENS

Successful rearing will produce a relatively uniform flock of broilers with the required body weight for slaughter.

Nutrition during rearing

Feeding during rearing aims to provide the essential nutrients to allow the broiler to grow as expected to its genetic potential. Feed types, their nutrient specifications, particle size and changeover times all need to be considered in a good broiler rearing program.

Recommended Feeding Program

The recommended feeding program for broilers is detailed in the Table below. This program uses three feeds – broiler starter, broiler grower and broiler finisher.

Broiler Age	Feed Type
0-12 days	Broiler Starter
13-25 days	Broiler Grower
26 days to processing	Broiler Finisher

As the broiler grows, intake increases and generally so does feed particle size. Poultry become used to their feed and dislike major changes. At the time of feed changeover, as particle size increases, be vigilant for changes in intake and its consequences on performance.

Broiler Starter

Broiler starter is the highest nutrient specification feed in the feeding program. Young broilers have small intakes and initially require a small particle size.

Broiler Grower

Grower feeds are generally lower in nutrient specification because intakes are increasing. Particle size will usually increase.

Broiler Finisher

Finisher rations are generally fed in the days before processing. This is especially so if the flock has been on any medication that has a designated withholding period.

Full nutrient specifications for all meat chicken (broiler) rations can be found in the article **Broiler Feed Specifications**.