

## Farmer Skill & Knowledge Checklist: Poultry—Meat Production

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This checklist is a guide to the types of skills and knowledge useful to a poultry meat producer in Maine. Increasing your levels of knowledge and skill can help you:

- improve your farm management skills,
- increase your chances of having a profitable egg enterprise, or
- gain employment in a successful egg operation.

If you are just starting out, don't be intimidated by this list; just use it to prioritize your learning. If you are experienced, remember that you can always improve and learn more, whatever your skill level.

**Circle your current and desired (target) competence using this scale:**

- 1=No knowledge/skill  
2=Some knowledge/skill  
3=Well-informed/experienced

Recommended knowledge	My current level			My target level		
<b>Breed Selection</b>						
Be able to identify and list the characteristics you are seeking for your operation.	1	2	3	1	2	3
Be familiar with common breeds of meat poultry (chickens, ducks, turkeys, and game birds).	1	2	3	1	2	3
Be able to visually recognize specific poultry breeds for meat production.	1	2	3	1	2	3
Know the difference between purebred, crossbred, and hybrid poultry breeds.	1	2	3	1	2	3
Know how to effectively select a breed and species for your farm.	1	2	3	1	2	3
Know how and where to order chicks or poults.	1	2	3	1	2	3
Be familiar with USDA's National Poultry Improvement Plan (NPIP); see contact information below.	1	2	3	1	2	3

## Brooding and Chick Care

Know how to select a brooder.	1	2	3	1	2	3
Be able to properly set up, use, and maintain a brooder.	1	2	3	1	2	3
Know how to receive and properly handle day-old birds.	1	2	3	1	2	3
Be able to provide ample clean water to young birds.	1	2	3	1	2	3
Know how to select the proper feed for day-old birds.	1	2	3	1	2	3
Know when and how to change feed from starter to growers.	1	2	3	1	2	3

## Poultry Health Care

Understand the importance of sanitation and biosecurity on your farm—and when visiting other farms.	1	2	3	1	2	3
Be able to develop a biosecurity plan for everyday practices and for biosecurity emergency.	1	2	3	1	2	3
Be able to select and use suitable disinfectants.	1	2	3	1	2	3
Be familiar with pathogens common to poultry.	1	2	3	1	2	3
Know which disinfectants work effectively on pathogens.	1	2	3	1	2	3
Understand the importance of and know how to use personal protective equipment.	1	2	3	1	2	3
Know how and where to submit poultry to a diagnostic lab.	1	2	3	1	2	3
Be familiar with common poultry medications and their proper uses.	1	2	3	1	2	3
Be familiar with typical vaccines and their applications.	1	2	3	1	2	3
Be able to effectively observe birds in their flocks.	1	2	3	1	2	3
Be able to recognize and detect an unhealthy bird.	1	2	3	1	2	3
Understand the significance of reportable diseases such as Avian Influenza and know where to find information.	1	2	3	1	2	3
Be able to detect external parasites on birds.	1	2	3	1	2	3
Be able to effectively prevent and/or treat specific external parasites like mites, lice, and bedbugs.	1	2	3	1	2	3
Be aware of potential risk for internal parasites, depending on poultry breed and length of production cycle.	1	2	3	1	2	3

## Poultry Nutrition

Be familiar with the digestive tract of poultry.	1	2	3	1	2	3
Be familiar with the daily nutrient requirements of your poultry species.	1	2	3	1	2	3
Know how nutrients are balanced in a feed ration (protein energy, vitamins and minerals, and water).	1	2	3	1	2	3
Understand the nutrient value of different feed ingredients.	1	2	3	1	2	3
Be able to read and understand a feed bag label.	1	2	3	1	2	3
Be able to select the proper feed for different ages and productive stages.	1	2	3	1	2	3
Understand the importance of clean water to meat bird productivity.	1	2	3	1	2	3
Be familiar with methods to prevent drinking water from freezing.	1	2	3	1	2	3

## General Management

Be familiar with poultry-related terms.	1	2	3	1	2	3
Know the body parts of poultry.	1	2	3	1	2	3
Be able to differentiate a cockerel from a pullet.	1	2	3	1	2	3
Be able to differentiate a rooster from a hen.	1	2	3	1	2	3
Be able to properly catch a bird without harm to the bird or yourself.	1	2	3	1	2	3
Know how to properly hold a single bird.	1	2	3	1	2	3
Know how to hold several birds at one time.	1	2	3	1	2	3
Be able to effectively weigh single birds.	1	2	3	1	2	3
Know how to transport birds safely and humanely.	1	2	3	1	2	3
Be familiar with sources of poultry equipment.	1	2	3	1	2	3
Know how to detect excess levels of ammonia.	1	2	3	1	2	3
Be able to detect signs of rodents on the farm.	1	2	3	1	2	3
Know how to effectively control rodent populations.	1	2	3	1	2	3
Be able to detect signs of predatory animals in Maine.	1	2	3	1	2	3
Be able to effectively protect poultry from predators.	1	2	3	1	2	3
Know how to recognize types of cannibalism.	1	2	3	1	2	3
Be familiar with the causes of cannibalism, and know how to prevent/correct it.	1	2	3	1	2	3
Understand the influence of light quality and quantity on growth.	1	2	3	1	2	3
Be familiar with the certifying agency for organic products.	1	2	3	1	2	3

## Facilities

Know the minimum space requirements for your poultry species.	1	2	3	1	2	3
Be able to calculate and provide enough roosting space.	1	2	3	1	2	3
Be able to select proper bedding for poultry.	1	2	3	1	2	3
Understand the importance of ventilation and air exchange in the poultry house.	1	2	3	1	2	3
Be able to effectively maintain temperature for birds in extreme weather conditions.	1	2	3	1	2	3

## Pastured Poultry

Understand the advantages and limitations of raising poultry on pasture in a portable house.	1	2	3	1	2	3
Be able to recognize when birds need to be moved to fresh pasture.	1	2	3	1	2	3
Be able to protect birds from inclement weather when at pasture.	1	2	3	1	2	3
Know which pasture crops are best for pastured poultry production.	1	2	3	1	2	3
Know how to maintain pastures, and address issues such as structures, fencing, and predators.	1	2	3	1	2	3

## Manure

Understand the nutrient value of poultry manure as fertilizer.	1	2	3	1	2	3
Understand how manure can pollute water supplies; be able to develop and implement a manure management plan.	1	2	3	1	2	3
Be able to control filth flies.	1	2	3	1	2	3
Know how to effectively use poultry manure.	1	2	3	1	2	3

## Productivity

Know how to maintain records for mortality, growth rate, and feed consumption.	1	2	3	1	2	3
Know how to calculate feed efficiency of group of birds.	1	2	3	1	2	3

## Culling Poorly Performing Birds

Be able to set and follow a standard for culling birds from your flock.	1	2	3	1	2	3
Be familiar with typical growth rates for meat birds.	1	2	3	1	2	3
Know how to recognize birds with poor performance such as those with leg problems.	1	2	3	1	2	3
Know how to properly and humanely euthanize culled birds.	1	2	3	1	2	3
Know how to properly dispose of dead birds.	1	2	3	1	2	3
Know how to compost poultry carcasses effectively.	1	2	3	1	2	3

## Food Safety

Be familiar with state regulations for selling poultry.	1	2	3	1	2	3
Know who can answer questions about state regulations related to poultry.	1	2	3	1	2	3
Be familiar with proper processing of birds for meat.	1	2	3	1	2	3
Know the proper temperature for poultry meat in a refrigerator and how to check it.	1	2	3	1	2	3
Know how to recognize freshness in poultry meat.	1	2	3	1	2	3
Be able to recognize and discard poultry meat that is not suitable for human consumption.	1	2	3	1	2	3
Know what a HACCP plan is and why processors need one.	1	2	3	1	2	3
Know how to obtain a list of Maine's poultry processors.	1	2	3	1	2	3
Be able to explain the correct handling of poultry meat to customers.	1	2	3	1	2	3

## Selling Your Product

Be familiar with, and be able to explain to potential customers, the value of poultry as food.	1	2	3	1	2	3
Be familiar with, and be able to explain, the value of locally produced food.	1	2	3	1	2	3
Be familiar with the use of poultry in a variety of recipes.	1	2	3	1	2	3
Understand the importance of value-added poultry products.	1	2	3	1	2	3

## Economics

Be able to keep and use financial records effectively.	1	2	3	1	2	3
Know how to develop and use an enterprise budget for your operation.	1	2	3	1	2	3
Be able to determine the break-even point for your product or products.	1	2	3	1	2	3
Be able to identify and implement money-saving or labor-saving practices.	1	2	3	1	2	3
Know how to transfer financial records to income tax Schedule F, "Profit or Loss From Farming."	1	2	3	1	2	3

## Sources of Information

### ATTRA/National Sustainable Agriculture Information Service

(formerly known as the “Appropriate Technology Transfer for Rural Areas” project)  
(800) 346-9140

[attra.ncat.org](http://attra.ncat.org)

### Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association (MOFGA)

Diane Schivera, organic livestock specialist

(207) 568-4142, [dianes@mofga.org](mailto:dianes@mofga.org)

[www.mofga.org](http://www.mofga.org)

### Maine Department of Agriculture

*National Poultry Improvement Plan contacts:*

Donald E. Hoenig, state veterinarian

(207) 287-3701, [donald.e.hoenig@maine.gov](mailto:donald.e.hoenig@maine.gov)

Elizabeth McEvoy, assistant state veterinarian

(207) 287-7610, [elizabeth.o.mcevoy@maine.gov](mailto:elizabeth.o.mcevoy@maine.gov)

### University of Maine Animal Disease Diagnostic Laboratory

Anne Lichtenwalner, Extension veterinarian

(207) 581-2789, [anne.lichtenwalner@maine.edu](mailto:anne.lichtenwalner@maine.edu)

[www.umaine.edu/vetlab](http://www.umaine.edu/vetlab)

### University of Maine Cooperative Extension

(county office contacts; books and publications)

[extension.umaine.edu](http://extension.umaine.edu)



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