



Poultry recordkeeping

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Cooperators:

- **John Wesselius** – Sioux City
- **LaVon Griffieon** – Ankeny

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Web Link:

http://bit.ly/pfi_livestock

In a Nutshell

- Poultry are a relatively inexpensive and low-labor enterprise to add to crop, horticulture, or livestock farms.
- Practical Farmers began keeping records of their poultry enterprises, to determine if they were profitable.
- Cooperators were provided worksheets to record the number of animals, feed purchases and uses, transportation and processing costs, and labor requirements.
- In both cases, revenue exceeded costs, and the return to the operator was positive.

Project Timeline:
2012 - 2013



Broiler chickens in movable pens at the Wesselius Farm.

Background

Poultry are a relatively inexpensive and low-labor enterprise to add to crop, horticulture, or livestock farms. Meat birds grow rapidly and allow for multiple batches within a year, while layers provide a somewhat steady income source. Turkeys, particularly heritage breeds, present a value-added Thanksgiving product; ducks are rising in demand as well. The ability of poultry to consume pests and other leftover feed makes them particularly practical, and a new farmer may offer eggs or meat as an inexpensive way to entice customers into larger purchases, say of beef or pork. While there are some less-tangible benefits of poultry production, it is important for farmers to ensure that the enterprise is financially-sound. Starting in 2012, Practical Farmers began keeping and submitting records of their poultry enterprises, to determine whether they were profitable.

Materials and Methods

Cooperators were provided worksheets with which to record the number of animals they purchased or raised, inventory of product sold or used, feed purchases and uses, transportation and processing costs, and labor requirements.

Results

John Wesselius' participated in 2012 as well. Results from 2012 are summarized below for comparison to the new data from 2013:

- Total cost to raise a chick to slaughter weight (6 lb live, ~4.2 lb dressed): \$8.80/bird
 - o Feed cost: \$3.30
 - o Transportation: \$0.24
 - o Processing: \$2.52
 - o Other costs (farmers' market table, bedding, etc): \$2.74

- Selling price: \$3.39-3.59/lb
- **Net return: \$5.88/bird**

John Wesselius raises multiple groups of chickens each year, but summarized the information from the last one. He has minimal equipment costs, as he's reappropriated an old hog house for a brooder, uses rain gutters as feeders, and even the waterers he purchased this year were "shared" among many different groups. Chicks start in the brooder and are fed a young chick ration (Chick-Go from Kent Feeds) for the first few weeks, gradually replacing with a broiler ration (corn, soybean meal, zinpro, premix). They are moved from the brooder to four 10x12 ft portable pens for the remainder of their lives. John sells the birds for \$3.19/lb whole or \$3.39/lb cut up, so an average price of \$3.29 is used for revenue estimates. In 2013, average dressed weight was 4.4 lb/bird and the cost of raising the bird was \$7.01, though this does not include farmers' market booth

expenses. His 2013 net return of \$7.47/bird was far greater than the net return of \$5.88/bird in 2012. The production costs and revenues from 2013 are summarized in **Table 1**.

LaVon Griffieon provided data for two

sets of birds, one from spring and one from fall 2013. Her birds start indoors but move out into portable shelters after the first few weeks. She uses home-ground feed: premix, soybean meal, and corn. She estimates that the birds get about 20% of their calories

up; the average of those two prices is used to estimate returns. Summary cost and revenue information for the spring and fall birds is shown in **Table 2**.

Conclusions and Next Steps

Comparing both years of John Wesselius' birds, the feed cost was lower in 2013 (\$2.75/bird in 2013, versus \$3.30/bird in 2012). Selling price was also lower in 2013; however birds were slightly larger. It is hard to compare overall profitability since farmers' market fees were not included in the 2013 summary.

Results from LaVon's birds suggest that it is more economical and efficient to raise as many chickens as possible at the same time, as the labor and transportation costs were very similar between the groups despite different numbers of chickens. Still, total expenses per bird were essentially the same between groups. Because the fall birds were raised to a greater weight, however, the expenses per lb of saleable product were less. Similarly, because of the greater weight per bird and greater number of birds, the fall birds returned more gross dollars and greater profit per bird.

In both cases, revenue exceeded costs, and the return to the operator was positive. Each farmer must decide what their break-even return to labor is, but with record-keeping projects like these, the process is simplified. Between groups of birds within a year, or across years, production numbers and efficiencies can be compared to identify weak spots and strong points in the production system.

Table 1

2013 production cost and revenue summary from the Wesselius farm

Basic information		Expected revenue	
Qty of chickens to butcher	299	Total saleable lb	1315.60
Amount of feed (lb/bird)	13.7	Price (\$/lb)	3.29
Age of birds at slaughter (d)	54	Total (\$)	4328.32
Amount of feed (lb/bird/d)	0.25		
Avg dressed bird weight (lb)	4.40		
Labor		Expected return	
Time spent (h/d)	1.20	Total revenue (\$)	4328.32
Total time (h)	66	Total costs (\$)	2096.20
Total cost at \$7.25/h	478.50	Return (revenue - costs)	2232.12
		Return (\$/bird)	7.47
		Return (\$/hr)	33.82
Costs			
Chicks	286.00		
Feed	821.80		
Processing	777.40		
Fuel	132.00		
Misc	79.00		
Total	2096.20		
Total (\$/bird)	7.01		
Total (\$/lb)	1.59		

from the pasture: some alfalfa, white clover, timothy, bromegrass, and orchardgrass. The spring birds were only raised to 48 days, whereas the fall birds were raised to 58 days. Thus the spring birds did not consume as much feed – total, per bird, and per day – and required less labor time. However, since the fall birds finished at heavier weights, the total cost per pound of product was lower. LaVon sells the birds for \$3.30/lb whole or \$3.50/lb cut

Table 2

Spring and fall 2013 production cost and revenue summary from the Griffieon farm

Basic information			Expected revenue			Costs		
	Spring 2013	Fall 2013	Spring 2013	Fall 2013	Spring 2013	Fall 2013	Spring 2013	Fall 2013
Qty of chickens to butcher	224	348	Total saleable lb	728.00	1329.36	Chicks	299.50	417.50
Amount of feed (lb/bird)	11.7	15.7	Price (\$/lb)	3.40	3.40	Feed	680.00	1410.00
Age of birds at slaughter (d)	48	58	Total (\$)	2475.20	4519.82	Processing	604.00	696.00
Amount of feed (lb/bird/d)	0.24	0.27				Fuel	82.02	80.00
Avg dressed bird weight (lb)	3.25	3.82	Expected return			Total	1665.52	2603.50
			Spring 2013	Fall 2013	Total (\$/bird)	7.44	7.48	
Labor			Total revenue (\$)	2475.20	4519.82	Total (\$/lb)	2.29	1.96
			Total costs (\$)	1665.52	2603.50			
Time spent (h/d)	2.12	2.30	Return (revenue - costs)	809.68	1916.32			
Total time (h)	119	134	Return (\$/bird)	3.61	5.51			
Total cost at \$7.25/h	859.49	967.88	Return (\$/hr)	14.05	19.50			

PFI Cooperators Program

PFI's Cooperators' Program gives farmers practical answers to questions they have about on-farm challenges through research, record-keeping, and demonstration projects. The Co-operators' Program began in 1987 with farmers looking to save money through more judicious use of inputs.