

Broiler Chicks: Pitfalls to avoid.

By Taruvinga Magwirotto

In many years of working with broiler farmers, I have seen them make many simple mistakes that caused them huge losses. I want to share with you some of the errors, and how to solve them.

1. Chick **failure to grow**: - you hear these kinds of stories numerous times. One farmer said his chicks were so stunted that by week 10, they were less than 1 kg. Needless to say, proper broilers, if given the right feed and management, will reach +-2 kg in 5-6 weeks.

Probable causes: - I always start off by asking the **source** of the stock. Where did you buy the chicks? Buying birds in a cardboard box labelled "Irvines" is not the same as buying Irvines day old chicks. Ensure that you are getting what they say you are getting. In short, buy stock from *trusted* sources.

Feed: - Two scenarios can happen here. The first one is: if you buy feed from unethical feed companies, it is possible to get feed which is **not balanced** for all nutrients. Protein is the one feed ingredient which is the most expensive part of a compound feed; therefore it is the one that can be "cooked". This means you can buy a bag labelled 21% crude protein (CP) when in fact it is 10% CP. And this is very difficult to find out unless you do **feed analysis**, which is also expensive.

Solution:-buy from trusted sources. What this means is that it is difficult for new suppliers to get a foot hold in this business, but if they are persistent and supply good quality, they eventually make it.

Still on feed: - In the second scenario, you may buy from a trusted source but still your animals may not grow as fast as you anticipate. If you have workers working for you, there is always the risk that they are underfeeding, either deliberately or unintentionally. Keep an eye open, and have them trained as necessary.

Qualities of a good chick

Another way to avoid problems is to really scrutinise your chicks before accepting delivery.

Below are qualities to look out for:

- Active and lively
- Normal size not too small 38 grams
- Straight feet and toes- no curled toes and feet, indicated by red hocks.
- Two bright eyes- not abnormal eyes or blind
- Good dry feathers- not sticky wet feathers.
- Straight closed beaks- not crossed beak, open or dry beak
- Normal colour – not pale
- Soft belly- not hard and swollen belly; no remains of yolk. If belly is too large, that is evidence of poorly absorbed yolk.
- Completely healed navel- no unhealed or thick navel cord
- Normal cloaca (vent) – closed cloaca or droppings sticking.

Keep at it. It will all come together! Follow our blog for automatic updates