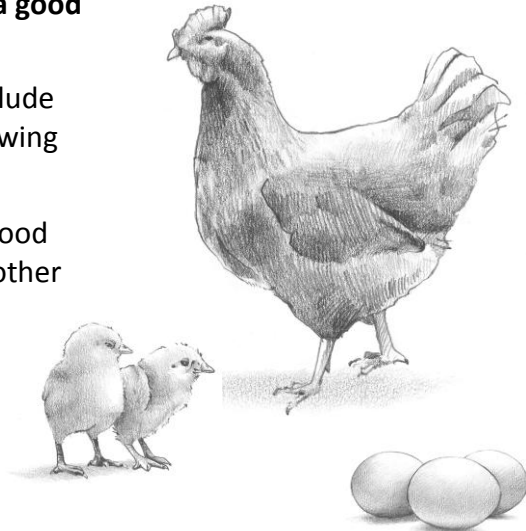


# Small-Animal Production

**Small-animal production can provide a family with a good protein source and some income.**

Animals best suited to small-scale production include chickens, rabbits, guinea pigs, and goats for the following reasons:

- Small-animal production is less likely to upset the food production balance that may be used for meeting other basic family needs.
- Small animals cost less individually for families whose focus is not on producing food to sell.
- The short time to get small animals into production reduces the risk of loss and the time needed to receive benefits.
- The minimal feed requirements for small animals fit well into the limited resources of families.
- Small animals individually yield smaller quantities of animal products. The yields of eggs, milk, or meat more closely match the daily needs of a family and do not require refrigeration.
- Children and adults with special needs can be involved in the management and care of small animals.



Because chickens can live and are eaten in nearly every country and culture in the world, some basic principles of home production of chickens are given below.

**Chickens can be raised at home all over the world.**

Chickens are a good source of eggs and meat. They are the most simple food animal to raise at home. After hatching, healthy baby chicks will begin laying eggs at 20 weeks. Chickens in good health will lay eggs three days out of four for 18 months. They are easy to care for and have four basic needs: clean feed, clean water, a clean coop, and a safe roaming area.

## *Clean Feed*

Chickens will eat many things, including plants, seeds, insects, and scraps from the home, such as meat, fruits, and vegetables. They do best when they have a good source of grains, such as corn, on a constant basis. Almost all areas of the world have agricultural supply businesses that sell chicken feed that has high grain content and is usually supplemented with critical nutrients (proteins, minerals, and vitamins). Chickens also need grit (small crushed rocks) to help them grind and digest food. Chickens that have a roaming area can usually find the grit they need.

## *Clean Water*

Chickens need a constant source of clean water that is easily available. Their water source should never be allowed to dry up. Hens that are laying eggs need a constant supply of water.

## *A Clean Coop*

Chickens need a safe and relatively clean place to lay eggs and roost (rest and sleep). The coop needs to be secure so animals can't get in to kill the birds or disturb their food and water. A small shedlike structure can provide protection from bad weather, a supply of fresh air,

ventilation, and easy access for you to work in while feeding and watering the chickens and collecting their eggs. There needs to be at least two to three square feet (0.2 to 0.3 square meters) for each bird in the coop.

Inside the coop the chickens need nesting boxes with straw or other similar material where they can rest and lay their eggs on a soft, clean surface. Chickens also require roosts where they can sit and sleep. There should be at least one nesting box for every two hens, and there should be two linear feet (0.6 meters) of roost for each bird in the coop.

### *Safe Roaming Area*

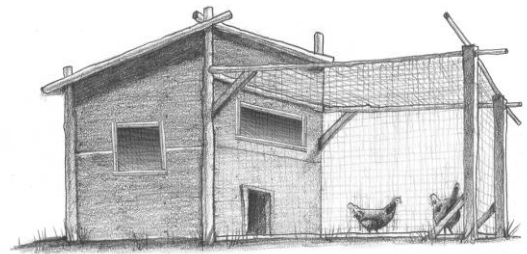
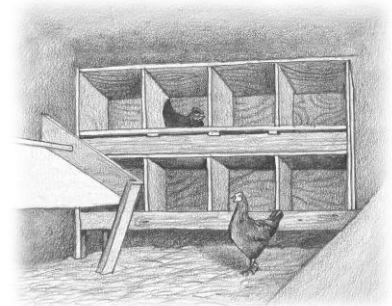
Chickens need room to get out of the coop for fresh air and sunshine and to scratch for food in the soil. The roaming area can be made by attaching a wire run to the coop so the birds can get out of the house but not have free range. Chickens need at least three to four square feet (0.3 to 0.4 square meters) of space for each bird in the run.

Another option is to let the chickens have free range outside of the coop during the day without being restricted by a run. Birds quickly learn to go inside the coop in the evening for protection, but the coop must be secured nightly or animals will get inside and kill the birds.

### **How to care for baby chicks during the first 60 days.**

Baby chicks have special needs but grow fast. With a little attention they can provide the beginnings of an ongoing supply of the high quality growth foods meat and eggs (see page 30).

- A young chick brooder (housing) can be as simple as a sturdy cardboard box or a small animal cage.
- The flooring (bedding) can be wood shavings, straw, or grass.
- The temperature needs to be controlled between 90 and 100 degrees Fahrenheit (32–38 degrees Celsius) for the first week and then should be decreased 5 degrees Fahrenheit (3 degrees Celsius) per week until normal room temperature is reached. A 100-watt bulb or heat lamp in the center of the brooder allows chicks to gather in a comfort zone. If the chicks crowd under the lamp, the brooder is too cold. If they have moved away and are panting, they are too hot.
- Food and water needs are met simply by chick starter feed from the local agricultural store and a small chick waterer.
- Outside time can be provided by creating a safe area near the home where the chicks can explore and scratch. Make sure you can catch them when it's time to come in.
- Vaccination will help prevent the chicks from getting sick. Chicks should be vaccinated for Newcastle disease at 6–8 days of age and against fowl pox at 8–12 weeks.



**Hens need 14 hours of light per day to lay eggs each day.**

When daylight hours are short, use a 25-watt lightbulb in the coop to maintain laying. Don't leave the light on all night or use a bulb that is too bright, or birds will start to peck each other. If you choose not to use a bulb to maintain light, the chickens will be fine, but they will not lay eggs every day and they may begin to molt. Molting is a time when chickens lose their old feathers and start to grow new ones. They will stop laying eggs during this time.

