

## **Bulletin #2215, Why Poultry Might Be a Suitable Enterprise for Persons with Disabilities**

### **Why Poultry Might Be a Suitable Enterprise for Persons with Disabilities**

*By Richard Brzozowski, Poultry Specialist, University of Maine Cooperative Extension and John Hancock, Project Director Kentucky AgrAbility, University of Kentucky*

*Reviewed by Poultry Specialist Dr. Paul Patterson of Penn State University*

**For information about UMaine Extension programs and resources, visit [extension.umaine.edu](http://extension.umaine.edu). Find more of our publications and books at [extensionpubs.umext.maine.edu](http://extensionpubs.umext.maine.edu).**

### **Disabilities and Farming**

Having a disability or chronic illness might prevent or limit an individual from being employed by another person or company in a full-time or part-time basis. However, because farming is a form of self-employment, it could be suitable as a means to generate an income or partial income for a person with disabilities. In farming, you are your own boss. You can work as long or as hard as you are able. Many tasks in farming can be performed with machinery or can be automated. Machinery and automation can save time, reduce physical stresses, and allow the farmer to be more efficient and safe. In addition, farming can be therapeutic as the experience allows you to be outdoors, growing and caring for animals or plants. Caring for and improving the land, plays an important role in producing food for yourself, your family or others.



Involvement with certain types and kinds of farming enterprises can be limited by a disability. However, some farming enterprises might present better opportunities with fewer physical and financial risks than others. This article is designed as an exploratory tool. As with any farming enterprise, reliable markets need to be identified and secured for your products or services before making investments in birds, supplies, and capital.

### **Typical Poultry-Related Chores**

Physical tasks are necessary for a successful and efficient poultry enterprise. Below is a list of typical poultry-related chores. These chores are divided into general, egg bird, and meat bird categories. Depending on your specific situation and setup, some chores may not apply. As you view the list, consider each chore and how it might be performed or if it is necessary in your situation. Look at a possible poultry enterprise critically.

#### **Physical Chores for General Poultry Production**

- Trimming beaks

- Sexing chicks
- Setting up brooders (heaters for baby birds)
- Maintaining brooders
- Preparing brooders for storage
- Cleaning windows for best natural light
- Moving portable poultry keeping units (poultry tractor)
- Cleaning out and disinfecting pens/houses/units
- Carrying or moving feed (minimum 50lb sacks)
- Distributing feed to birds
- Observing birds (up close or from a distance)
- Gathering and catching birds
- Holding birds
- Handling and inspecting birds
- Crating birds
- Cleaning and disinfecting crates
- Setting up and using biosecurity protocol (clean footwear and clothing, disinfectant foot baths)
- Distributing bedding in areas where birds are kept (blowing, shoveling, bag options)
- Cleaning and disinfecting feeders and watering units
- Cleaning roosts and perches
- Closing in birds at night
- Cleaning and changing lights
- Maintaining timers
- Purchasing birds
- Removing injured, sick or dead birds
- Composting carcasses of dead birds
- Culling birds that don't meet set standards
- Keeping production and financial records
- Interacting with customers
- Interacting with employees or helpers
- Purchasing, securing and storing supplies
- Collecting fecal samples for analysis
- Setting up and taking down electric netting (fencing)
- Monitoring charge on electric fencing
- Monitoring area for possible predators
- Monitoring area for rodents
- Controlling rodents effectively (setting and clearing traps or bait stations)

## Physical Chores Related to Egg Bird Enterprises

- Gathering eggs
- Grading eggs
- Candling eggs
- Cleaning eggs
- Packing eggs (30 dozen cases weigh approx. 45lbs)
- Counting eggs
- Labeling egg cartons
- Refrigerating eggs
- Transporting eggs to market(s)
- Selling Eggs to customers
- Cleaning out and disinfecting nest boxes
- Maintaining egg inventory records
- Maintaining inventory records for egg cartons, flats, cases and other egg-related supplies

## Physical Chores Related to Meat Bird Enterprises

- Processing birds for meat (killing, scalding, plucking, eviscerating, cutting, chilling, packaging)
- Handling processed poultry
- Weighing processed poultry
- Labeling processed poultry
- Transporting processed poultry
- Cleaning and disinfecting processing tools and equipment
- Maintaining processing tools and equipment (sharpening knives, lubricating, adjusting, repairing, etc.)
- Cleaning and disinfecting processing building, room or area
- Composting feathers and poultry parts from processing
- Testing for cleanliness of processing equipment and area (swabbing, sampling, etc.)
- Maintaining inventory records of processed birds
- Interacting with meat sales regulators
- Selling poultry meat

## Advantages of a Poultry Enterprise in Comparison to Other Farming Enterprises

After considering the relevant chores and tasks required in keeping poultry, it is also recommended to consider the advantages of a poultry enterprise compared to other farming enterprises.

- **Poultry are small in size and light in weight compared to other species of livestock.** For these reasons, poultry are more easily caught, handled, slaughtered or transported compared to other species of livestock. Many tasks in relation to poultry production are not strenuous. These points allow a person with limited strength (back and upper body strength) to successfully raise, handle and transport poultry.

- **Most poultry species are not aggressive towards or dangerous to people.** Being charged, gored, stepped on or kicked are not of concern. However, birds will occasionally peck workers. Roosters and geese can act aggressive.
- **Many tasks in relation to poultry production can be automated.** Automated systems for door-opening/closing, lighting, feeding, watering, egg collecting and egg candling are available for small-scale enterprises.
- **The production cycle of meat poultry is relatively short** (6-20 weeks in length from start to finish depending on the species). This allows for relatively easy entry and exit from the enterprise. This also allows for a quicker cash flow and return on investment.
- **The production cycle of an egg enterprise for a batch of hens is about 12 to 15 months in length** (from ready-to-lay pullets to end-of-lay or spent hens). This allows for relatively easy entry and exit from the enterprise.
- **Poultry are efficient converters of feed to meat or eggs.** This allows for efficient growth and production.
- **A small number of birds can be managed efficiently as a potentially profitable enterprise.** Spreadsheets are available to calculate breakeven points for egg or meat enterprises and in figuring how many hens are needed to meet an egg market.
- **The cost of starting a small-scale poultry enterprise is relatively small** compared to other agricultural enterprises. But investments in a facility, birds, feeders, waterers, bedding, nest boxes (for layers), egg cartons, electricity, feed, feed storage bins, housing or coops will likely be necessary.
- **Poultry can be raised in a building or on a small parcel of land.** Dependence on a large land base for hay production, cropland or pasture is not absolutely necessary for poultry.
- **Poultry can be raised on one level (ground level floor).** This allows a person with mobility issues or in a wheel chair to work the birds.
- **Wireless video cameras can be used to monitor birds 24/7** if necessary. This technology reduces the need to be ever present.
- **Production and financial records can be kept using voice recognition software** if necessary. This allows someone with sight or hand use limitations to be actively involved in the record keeping aspect of the enterprise.

## Other Poultry Enterprising Opportunities

The production and marketing of eggs or meat are the most common poultry enterprises for US farmers. However, other poultry-related enterprises that some individuals might consider include:

- **small-scale hatchery** — selling chicks, poults, ducklings, goslings, keats, cheepers, squabs, etc.
- **pullet production** — selling birds that are near to the age of egg-laying or ready to lay
- **feather enterprise** — selling feathers for fly-tying, crafts and fashion
- **fertile egg business** — selling eggs to schools, 4-H clubs, FFA chapters or others for embryology projects.
- **bird rental** — for agritourism, entertainment, educational or insect control purposes Bird rentals could be available for a special event like a dove release or on a seasonal basis such as swans at a city park or renting guineas for tick control.

These alternative poultry-related enterprises will likely require additional knowledge and skills but could be a suitable opportunity for persons with physical or developmental limitations.

## Conclusion

Keeping birds for profit might just fit your situation. Invest adequate time in the exploration process and in considering the advantages and drawbacks of raising poultry. For more information on raising poultry on a small scale contact your local [UMaine Extension county office](#), state poultry specialist or visit the website at <http://www.extension.org/poultry>.

*This project was supported by the AgrAbility Competitive Program of the USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA), grant number 2014-41590-22324. Send a reprint of each publication directly to the Program, attn. Aida Balsano.*

---

*Information in this publication is provided purely for educational purposes. No responsibility is assumed for any problems associated with the use of products or services mentioned. No endorsement of products or companies is intended, nor is criticism of unnamed products or companies implied.*

© 2015

**Call 800.287.0274 or TDD 800.287.8957 (in Maine), or 207.581.3188, for information on publications and program offerings from University of Maine Cooperative Extension, or visit [extension.umaine.edu](http://extension.umaine.edu).**

*The University of Maine does not discriminate on the grounds of race, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, including transgender status and gender expression, national origin, citizenship status, age, disability, genetic information or veteran status in employment, education, and all other programs and activities. The following person has been designated to handle inquiries regarding non-discrimination policies: Director, Office of Equal Opportunity, 101 North Stevens Hall, Orono, ME 04469, 207.581.1226.*