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RAISING CHICKS AT LINCOLN CREEK RANCH

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At Lincoln Creek Ranch, we are busy before our chicks arrive. We raise Cornish cross broilers for sale each year in batches of 500 birds. The birds' overall vigor and weight gain relies heavily on a healthy brooder environment, and we spend a lot of energy on the first few weeks of our chickens' lives. The following is a description of our operation's approach to the brooder room and raising health chicks that thrive on pasture.

GETTING CHICKS IN THE MAIL

The most affordable strategy to start more than a few dozen chickens is to use mail order. There are many hatcheries across the country that offer a variety of breeds of chicks. Hatcheries are an integral piece of a successful operation, so find a trustworthy hatchery and establish a good relationship with them. When the chicks hatch, they are put into boxes and delivered, usually by the US Postal Service. Pay attention to the hatchery's location before ordering because a trans-continental voyage with the Postal Service is very hard on a day old chick. We like to order our chicks from hatcheries close to home to keep the trip in the mail as short as possible. Be sure to check with your hatchery to see if they will be shipping by truck or air. The extra expense of overnight delivery will easily pay for itself. The Post Office will call early in the morning when the chicks arrive and ask for someone to pick up a particularly loud parcel from their sorting room.

Hatcheries may require the purchase of a minimum number of chicks in order to safely ship the birds; this is especially true in the spring. To raise a smaller flock of chickens, consider sharing a batch with a neighbor or buying a few at the feed store. It's important to get the chicks as young as possible to ensure optimal health. The local feed store usually stocks a variety of egg layer and broiler chicks in the spring. If they will be certified organic, chicks must be purchased from the feed store before they have consumed any feed or water.

FEED AND SUPPLEMENTS

We plan to have all of our chickens' feed and supplements before they arrive. We calculate how much feed our chickens will need and place an order with our feed supplier. This avoids



Healthy Cornish Cross chicks in their first few weeks of life. Photo by Melissa Barker

countless trips to the feed store. We purchase our feed from In-Season Farms, an organic feed processor in British Columbia. Their feed comes as a mash—a loose, unmedicated ground mixture of grains—which is unlike the pelletized feed commonly found at the feed store. We use a broiler starter feed, which is ground more finely and contains a higher level of protein than an adult chicken ration. For 500 chickens we order a half ton of starter (20% protein), 2 tons of grower (18% protein), and 1.5 tons of finisher (16% protein). This amount of feed will yield one pound of processed chicken for every 3 to 3.5 pounds of feed consumed.

We also have an ample supply of kelp meal, brewer's yeast, chick and hen grit, poultry electrolytes, and pro-biotics. These supplements to the chicks' diet... *Continued on page four.*

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