



# Junior Fair Market Poultry

Shelby County Junior Fair Board

18 USC 707

## Welcome

If you are reading this, you are either thinking about showing poultry or ducks for your 4H project; or have already decided. When you first get started, it can seem overwhelming. There is a lot of information out there. It also varies depending on who you talk to. Everyone has their own tips and trick. This document will break down this information into an easy to understand “manual” to help you be successful in your project.

Showing poultry and ducks at the fair can be both rewarding and fun. It can also be stressful, but does not have to be. Before jumping in and purchasing your chicks or ducklings, it is important to decide which classes you are interested in entering. Each class has different requirements as well as subclasses available. We will go through each of the classes and what the 4H member should consider before choosing a class. It is highly recommended you read through this whole manual, however, there is a table of contents to help you find the specific information you are looking for.

Please keep in mind that each county has their own rules concerning their Junior Fair. This info is as detailed as it can be, but it is important to reach out to your local Junior Fair Board or Extension Office to get the specifics for your county.

We hope that the following information makes your 4H project an enjoyable adventure and brings you success for the Junior Fair.

*Shelby County Junior Fair Board*

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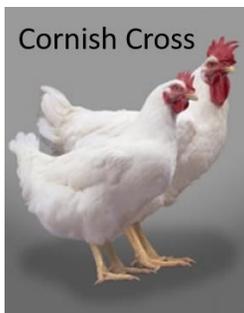
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# Market Chickens

## Overview

Market chickens are a quick growing chicken. They are normally ready for processing between 6 to 8 weeks. There are a variety breeds that can be used as market breeds. The breeds generally labeled as market birds are as follows:

- Cornish Cross
- Cornish Rock
- Freedom Rangers
- Red Rangers
- Red Broilers



Via: <http://welphatchery.com>



Via: <http://mcmurrayhatchery.com>

The most commonly used breeds are the Cornish Cross or the Cornish Rock. It is important to reach out to your local Junior Fair Board or Extension Office to find out if they have a breed requirement for Market Poultry.

If there is no requirement in your area, breeds can be chosen based on preference and some of the following factors:

- Age requirements of chickens
- Time to reach market weights
- Availability

It is also important to understand what poultry judges are looking for in market poultry when choosing breeds. We will cover what judges generally look for later on in this manual.

Market poultry can be purchased through a hatchery or at your local farm store.

## Getting Started

Once you have determined which breed you will be using for your poultry project and purchased them, you will need to know how to take care of them until the fair.

There are two classes under the market chicken class. You have fryers (4 - 6 lbs.) and broilers (6 – 8 lbs.) You will want to purchase your chicks so that they are 6 to 8 weeks old at fair time and fall into the appropriate weight groups.

All chicks, no matter the breed have the same basic requirements. We will discuss each of these requirements below.

**Heat Source:** All chicks need a heat source until they have their feathers. They are unable to regulate their body temperature until then. A baby chick's environment needs to be kept at 95 degrees Fahrenheit the first week and can be decreased by 5 degrees each week until you reach 70 degrees Fahrenheit. Keep in mind that the temperature inside the brooder will be determined by the surrounding temperature. It is important to check the temperature at the chicks' level to determine what the temperature is. Make sure the chicks can get away from the heat source. Chicks can easily be overheated.

There are a variety of heat sources that can be used. They all work well and come with their own challenges. Your heat source should be determined by your environment and brooder set up.

- **Heat lamp:** Most commonly used heat source. They can be found at any farm store. A heat lamp uses a radiant heat bulb and is usually hung above the brooder. You can get both red and white heat bulbs. Make sure you are using the correct bulb and that it is safe for chicks. The heat lamp needs to be hung securely as they can be a fire hazard.
- **Heat plate:** heat plates are a safer alternative to a heat lamp. A heat plate mimics a mother hen and allows chicks to gather under the plate to keep warm. It keeps a comfortable temperature surface that chicks can contact without harming the chicks. They have adjustable legs to adjust as the chicks grow.
- **Heating Pad:** A heating can be used in the same manner as a heating plate, but it is less expensive. You need a heating pad without automatic shut off and a small section of sturdy hardware cloth or fence panel to create a small "cave" for the chicks to gather under. Make sure this is sturdy. As the chicks get older, they like to roost on top of it!



Via: <http://www.strombergschickens.com>



Via: <http://www.premier1suppliers.com>



Via: <http://backyardchickens.com>

**Housing:** Many people use a brooder for chicks, but a barn or coop can be used as well. As long as you have electricity for your heat source and they are safe from predators or other animals, as well as drafts, anything will do. A brooder can be a plastic tote, a galvanized water trough, a large cardboard box, or even a plastic baby pool. What you use will depend on the number of chicks you have and how long you will need to keep them in the brooder. A chick needs  $\frac{1}{4}$  square foot of space in the first couple of weeks but will quickly grow and need about 1 square foot of space. It is important chicks have adequate space. Lack of space can cause many behavioral issues, sickness, and you will have to clean the brooder a lot more frequently.



Via: <http://www.afarmgirlinthemaking.com>



Via: <http://thekeeperofthecheerios.com>

**Bedding:** You will need bedding to put into the brooder. You can use pine shavings, old towels, rubber shelf liners, paper towels, or puppy pads. Make sure that you do not use anything that will have a slick surface as this will cause leg issues in chicks. If you choose to use pine shavings, make sure to use large flakes so the chicks do not confuse it for food and try to eat it. You can also use paper towels on top of the shavings for the first week to ensure they understand where their food is.

**Feed:** Chicks should be started on a chick starter, a meat bird feed, or a turkey/gamebird starter. Make sure to pay attention to the amount of protein in the feed as this will determine how quickly your birds grow. The types of feeds mentioned above have between 20% and 28% protein in them. You want your birds to grow at a consistent rate to avoid many health problems that can be found in market chickens. If you feed the higher protein in the beginning, you are going to want to switch to a lower protein feed the last couple of weeks before the fair to keep them from getting too big.

Most feed bags and internet searches will tell you that 2 lbs. of feed per 1 lb. of weight gain. This means 1 bird will eat about 10-12 lbs. of feed over 8 weeks. This will vary based on how active your birds are. It is important to weigh your chickens daily to track their weight gain as well as track the amount of food you are feeding each day. You can find charts and instructions on how to do this in the Market Chicken project book.

It is important to note that you want your chickens to land in the range of the sub class you are entering them. If you are entering a meat chicken into the fryer class they need to be between 4 to 6 lbs. Having the biggest chicken in the class is not going to guarantee you will win the class. This also goes for the broiler class, which is a range of 6 to 8 lbs.

The first week, the chicks should have feed and water available 24/7. After the first week, many members use a, 12 hours with feed and 12 hours without feed, rotation. You cannot free feed market chickens. Generally, they will continue to eat as long as there is food to eat!

Depending on the number of chicks you have, you can use a 1-quart feeder or a 14-opening feeder for your chicks. They come in a variety of colors. You will want to use a large feeder once they have moved out of the brooder, but these smaller feeders are a good idea to keep adequate space available in the brooder. You can also reuse the small feeders in your pens at fair. More on that later.



Via: <http://mypetchicken.com>



Via: <http://mypetchicken.com>

**Water:** Chicks should have access to fresh water at all times. As mentioned above with the feeders. You will want a 1-quart waterer for your chicks, but will want to upgrade the size as they are moved out of the brooder. Some members use electrolytes in the water first couple of days. This can help with stress and give the chicks a good start. You can find electrolytes for chicks at your local farm store.



Via: <http://mypetchicken.com>

## ***Out of the Brooder***

Once your chicks have reached between 2 to 4 weeks of age, they can be taken out of the brooder. It should be noted that most market chicken breeds never fully feather. They tend to have bald spots, especially on their bellies. This is completely normal and they can be put outside as long as it stays at least 40 degrees Fahrenheit overnight. Cold outside temperatures are generally not a huge concern for market chickens as the timing of fall happens well after the last frost. This is Ohio though, and our weather is not always reliable!

How you house the chicks at this stage will vary. There is no right or wrong answer and is usually based on preference of the 4H member. They can go into a standard coop with a run, a stationary pen, or a chicken tractor on grass.

If you will be moving your chickens to a coop, keep in mind that they will not roost like other chickens. They are a heavy breed and will not jump up on roosts. You do not want them to do this as there is potential they will injure their legs. They will sleep in a pile or in a group in a corner of the coop. Keep in mind, market chickens are not as active as other breeds of chickens. They will not usually travel far from their feed and will even eat while laying down if given the opportunity. This also means they will poop in the general area they are spending most of their time. This will require regular cleaning of the coop and making sure the chickens stay clean as well.

If you are using a stationary pen, just be sure they are protected from predators and that you have a way to keep the area clean. Did we mention they poop a lot!



Via: <http://www.backyardchickens.com>

The option of a chicken tractor can allow you to exercise your market chickens regularly. A chicken tractor also keeps them on clean grass as it has wheels and can be moved 1 to 2 times a day. You do not want your chickens to lay around all the time! This causes their already weak legs to struggle to support their weight causing injury.



No matter which housing option you choose, make sure your chickens have the following;

- Shelter from the sun: you are far more likely to lose market chickens due to heat than cold. They need to be able to get into shade. If you are using a stationary pen or chicken tractor, it does not need to be completely covered, but a partial covering will give them shade and protect them from rain.
- Hanging Feeder: As mentioned above, market chickens lay around A LOT, if allowed to. Hang feeders high enough to reach the chest of your market birds. It keeps them standing while eating and will keep them from losing the use of their legs.
- Protection from Predators: Everybody loves chicken. Raccoons, foxes, hawks, mink, weasels, and loose dogs are just a few that you have to be concerned about.

### ***Getting Ready for Fair***

Two weeks before fair you should begin determining which birds have the potential to go to fair. Check those that will be within your weight ranges. Use the charts you have been monitoring their weight gain. This should tell you how much weight they will gain over the next couple of weeks.

Observe your market birds. You want birds that have uniform and good-sized breasts. This will require you to hold your birds by their legs (upside down) with their breast facing you. Do not let them flap their wings as this can cause bruising to the skin. Bruising can cause disqualification at show time. With the breasts facing you look at the length of the bird's chest. You are looking for as close to a rectangle as possible across the entire chest of the chicken. Look at the keel bone (running down the center of the chicken); this needs to be long and straight. At this point you want to also examine the breasts of the chicken. You need to ensure the depth, length, and thickness is equal on both sides. It should be wide and fully rounded throughout the entire length of the keel bone. You also want to pay attention to the market chickens that stand and walk well. They should have nice looking feathers. Keep in mind that most market chickens will not have many feathers on their bellies.

As you are inspecting your birds, mark those that you think you would like to take to the show. You can use small colored zip ties or leg bands. Make sure the bands are not too tight and cut any extra off zip ties. Choose four birds that do not have any broken bones, leg problems, blisters, or bruising and are mirror images of one another. You should be able to put three birds in a pen and not tell them apart. This includes comparing the breast side of the chickens. Most 4H members choose all females or all males. Your male market chickens will have larger and bright red combs, while your females will have much smaller combs. This should be done for both the fryer and broiler classes.

**Female**



Via: <http://purelypoultry.com>

**Male**



Via: <http://meyehatchery.com>

You will repeat this process 2 to 3 days before fair. Go through your potential birds again and ensure they still meet all the criteria. You also want to weigh them and ensure they still fall into the weigh range of the class. If any of the birds do not meet these criteria, this will be removed from your selection. You may have to look at your other birds to see if they would make a better show bird. If you do not have enough suitable birds for all sub classes you have entered for fair, do not worry. You can scratch for these classes and focus on the birds that you do have. Remember these are live animals and this is a learning experience.

### ***Supplies Needed at Fair***

Two weeks before the fair is a good time to make sure you have all of your supplies for the fair. Your chickens will be at the fairgrounds for the entire week of fair so you want to make sure you have all of their needs (and yours) covered. Below is a list of items that 4H members find useful to have on hand, with a brief explanation of why they are used.

- Tote with lid for supplies: Space can be limited where you chicken pens will be so try to find one that will hold most of your supplies when not in use but not take up a ton of space. Usually an 18-gallon tote works well. You will need a feeder and waterer for each pen
- Small waterer and feeder: You can use the 1 qt waterer and 1 qt feeder you used in the brooder. Some 4H members find it useful to use small bowls that can hang on the cage. There are many different DIY ideas that members use for feeders and waterers while trying to keep the pen clean and dry. You will need a feeder and waterer for each pen.

Block to set feeders up on if not using something that hangs on the cage

- 2 crates: Many people use Sterilite crates like pictured below. They work well due to all the holes in them giving the chickens ventilation and air movement. These will be used to transport your chickens to the show ring. You can use any type of tote, just make sure they have plenty of ventilation, as your group will be called to line up before the previous group is finished. It is usually HOT during fair and you do not want your chickens overheating.



- Towels: These can be used for bathing your chickens and to throw over the top of crate when transporting chickens
- Microfiber towels/washcloths: Will be used when bathing chickens
- Nail files and/or nail clippers: You will need to make sure your birds nails are not too long. They can harm themselves and scratch the judges.
- Dish soap: Try to avoid anything that is a good degreaser. It will strip too much oil from your chicken's feathers when bathing them. You want your chickens feathers to shine!
- Vinegar: For bathing chickens.
- 3 buckets: For bathing chickens
- Feed: It is a good idea to fill an ice cream bucket (or something of similar size) with a lid. Keep in mind space is limited. Remember to put your name of your feed buckets so it doesn't get mixed up with other exhibitors supplies.
- Bedding: Pine shavings for the pens.
- Liquid Vitamins: You can use something like Poultry Cell or a poultry electrolyte. Being in a noisy fair and the heat can stress your chickens. Vitamins or electrolytes in their water can help keep the stress from shocking them.



- Number Clip or Safety Pins: This is for your number that will be given to you at check in. It needs to be where the judges can see it.

## ***Arriving at Fair***

The day of check in, you will need to bring your chickens to the fair. The Junior Fair board will have designated check in times for each project class. Pens will be set up and your name will be on cages that have been assigned to you. If you need assistance finding your cages, grab a Junior Fair Board member and ask for assistance.

You will want to make sure you have the pen set up with shavings, feed, and water before putting your chicken in the pen. There will be a lot of commotion as exhibitors are bringing their animals in, other classes will be going through their weigh in, etc. Your chickens are going to be stressed so move slowly and make sure you are handling them gently and calmly. You do not want to injure your chicken while putting them in cages or have one get away from you! Find a place under your chickens' pens for your supplies and make sure your items have your name on them. Make sure your area is neat and tidy. The public will be walking through these barns and this is a reflection on all Junior Fair Exhibitors.

## **Weigh In/ Check In**

Make sure you know the time for weigh in/check in. You will need to have all necessary documents at this time. This will include and NPIP paperwork and DNF forms. This goes without saying, but you will need to take your chickens up with you. Use the Sterilite crates to carry them up. When it is your turn, your chickens will be weighed and banded with a number. These bands will stay on your meat birds for the entire fair. Your name, the weight of your birds, and the numbers on their bands will be documents on slips. You will be given a copy of these slips. When you are finished with the weigh in/check in process return your chickens to their pens, check their food/ water, and take a deep breath!

At this point, you will be simply taking care of your chickens until show day. You are responsible for feeding, watering, and cleaning their pen. This is something you must do daily and multiple times a day. Keep in mind the temperatures are normally hot and you will need to make sure your chickens have plenty of water available to them.

## **Bathing Chickens**

The evening before the show you are going to want to clean your birds. You can bathe them before you bring them to fair, but keep in mind they will get dirty again and giving them multiple baths before the show can stress them out as well as take any shine off their feathers. Bathing chickens is pretty straightforward; however, it can be stressful for them and you. Keeping them calm is key as you do not want them to get injured or have any bruising when you take them into the show ring.

Set up three buckets of water. You want the water to be the same as the outside temperature. Too cold or too hot can shock the birds. In one bucket, put a small amount of dish soap. Just enough to get them clean, as too many suds can be difficult to rinse off the chickens. The second bucket needs a little bit of

vinegar. You only want enough to cut the soap from the first bucket. The third bucket should be just plain water for a final rinse. It should be noted you are going to get wet while bathing chickens so be prepared!

Carefully lower your bird into the first bucket. Do not submerge the head. Make sure the feathers are thoroughly saturated. You will want to use a microfiber towel or cloth to wipe any gunk off of the chicken feathers and to wash around the eyes and beak. Make sure to stroke gently and in the direction of the feathers. When you are satisfied that the chicken is clean submerge the chicken in the third bucket, again do not submerge the head and rinse the soap off gently. Use the third bucket to follow the same process as a final rinse. Wrap your chicken up in a towel leaving the head and feet exposed. This is the time to check the toe nails of your chicken. If they are long you can trim with nail clippers or file them with a nail file. You are just ensuring the pointed tip of the toe nail is rounded and blunt so they do not scratch the judge.



Via: <http://communitychickens.com>

Depending on the weather and temps, you can allow your chicken to air dry or you can blow dry them with a blow dryer. You want to use a low heat setting as it can get too hot. You will not get them completely dry with a blow dryer, it can take hours for their feathers to fully dry. Once you have finished with your chickens, you can put them back into their cage. It is a good idea to clean your chicken pens and add fresh shavings before putting the chickens back. It will save you from a bunch of spot cleaning right before the show.



Via: <http://communitychickens.com>

## **Show Day**

Make sure you familiarize yourself with the exhibitor dress code for poultry. Remember, this is a 4H project so the judges are not just looking at your chickens.

It is important to be at the barn at least 15 minutes before the show starts. This gives you time to check on your birds and address any last-minute concerns that may come up. Make sure you know when you will be called to the show ring and pay attention to the announcements throughout the show.

When you are called into the show ring, you will be directed to a table with a chicken pen on the table. Place your bird (s) into the pen and wait for further instructions from the judge. The judge will come to handle each bird in the class. Make sure to relax and answer any questions the judge may have politely.

The judge is going to look at the same criteria you were looking at when selecting your market chickens for fair. Here is the terminology the judge will use and a quick explanation of what each term means:

- *Fleshing*: This is the amount of muscle your chicken has. The judge will determine this by feeling the width of the breast and back over the loin region. This is where you want your chicken to look like a rectangle when observing their breast area.
- *Finish*: This is where the judge will look at the amount of fat on your meat chickens. Some fat is necessary but you do not want excessive fat on your bird
- *Feathering*: Judges will be looking to see if your birds still have their juvenile flight feathers. They are pointed at the ends. Market chickens that are processed before they molt these juvenile feathers produce more meat per pound of feed consumed, making them an ideal market bird.
- *General Appearance*: Judges will be looking for clean market chickens, that are structurally sound. They should be able to stand and walk on feet and legs with no obvious issues. The market chicken should offer eye appeal.
- *Pen Uniformity*: The judge will be looking to see your pens are uniform or mirror images of one another.
- *Absence of Defects*: The judge will be looking for blisters, bruises, sores, cuts, infected follicles, broken bones, manure burns, crippling and lice/mites. This can be cause for disqualification.

Do not forget to shake the judge's hand when you are finished. Each place will be announced after each class has been judged. No matter what place you receive be proud of your hard work and display your ribbon on the front of your chicken pen!

## **Showmanship**

Each livestock exhibitor has the opportunity to enter a showmanship class. This class is for the exhibitor to show their knowledge of their selected species. The exhibitor will be judged on how they handle their chickens as well as how they answer questions about chickens. There are three levels of questions for each age group. Questions can range from questions like: How many eggs can a hen lay in one year to Many starter feeds for chickens are labeled "medicated". What is the medication and why is it in the feed? Utilize the study material provided on the 4H website as well as chicken books from your local library to help answer these types of questions.

You tube is a great place to search for showmanship videos that show how to handle your bird for a showmanship class. You can also reach out to seasoned poultry exhibitors to help you practice for showmanship and to understand the judges' expectations.

### ***Tips and Tricks***

1. Order more market birds than you think you will need. You want to make sure if anything happens you have birds to take to fair. This number will differ for each family and be determined by the space you have available to raise the birds. Predator attacks and health concerns are just two common issues 4H members experience with their market birds every year.
2. Handle your birds, A LOT. Handling your market birds daily, from the day you purchase them until fair, is key to keeping your birds comfortable with being handled. If they are comfortable with being handled, there is less risk of them panicking when you or a judge reaches into a cage to grab them. This minimizes the risk of injury to your chickens and anyone handling them.
3. Apply oil to your market birds' combs, wattles, feet, and legs prior to judging.
4. Use the feed and weight charts in your project book. Understanding how a market chicken converts feed to weight is key to raising a healthy market chicken. It also allows you to observe and handle your birds. You will have healthy birds and will catch health issues quickly and they can be addressed before they cause harm to your market birds.
5. Ask questions! If you do not have another poultry exhibitor in your 4H club ask your advisor for assistance. They can pair you up with a seasoned exhibitor from another club or the Junior Fair Board.