

Free Range and Farm Fresh Poultry



Poultry on the Farm

A Production & Marketing Opportunity



Poultry on the Farm

Commercial poultry production in Ireland is one of the most intensive farm enterprises. Breeding stock and production facilities used are among the best available worldwide.

The poultry industry is a competitive, efficient and integrated business with contracts between producers, hatcheries and processing plants the norm. There are two distinct sectors - **poultry meat** and **egg production**.

Growing demand for traditional foods, coupled with an increased interest in environmental issues and concern for animal welfare mean that some consumers are prepared to pay a premium for suitably produced products. This presents a production and marketing opportunity for free range and farm fresh poultry products.





Egg production

The consumption of eggs in Ireland, and throughout most of Europe, has declined steadily over the last twenty years. This has now levelled off and recovered slightly from the lowest consumption point of 160 eggs per person in 1994.

The decline in consumption was accompanied by a desire for eggs that were produced outside of an industrialised system. Thus, free range egg production has once more become a farm enterprise. Free range eggs are the growth area of the egg market.

It is in the interest of producers that these eggs are produced in conditions and unit sizes that are, and can be seen to be, distinctly different from the intensive systems that supplied the egg market from the late sixties. Free range eggs are perceived by some consumers to be from a healthy environment with birds having access to green pastures and bird welfare being a consideration.

Egg consumption per person

1982	1987	1992	1995	1997
237	198	173	161	163



Poultry meat

Poultry meat includes chicken, turkey, duck and goose meat. This is a major growth area. Poultry meat consumption per person in Ireland has grown from 17.5 kilograms in 1985 to over 30 kilograms in 1997.

Broilers and turkeys are produced on contract to poultry processing plants but there are some opportunities for farm fresh and free range production of chickens, turkeys and geese. There is increasing consumer demand for free range meat. Supermarket buyers are looking for free range produce to meet consumer demand.

Independent information

Teagasc has established a free range poultry unit at Mellows Agricultural College, Athenry, Co Galway. On the unit, independent performance figures for the various enterprises are collected and collated, and the results are used for training and advisory purposes. The unit also serves as a training and demonstration area for prospective producers.



Market approach

Every poultry enterprise must be market led. There are no agencies or fall back schemes for unsold produce. Producers make their own marketing arrangements either through linking with existing outlets or through making new contacts in shops and supermarkets.

In marketing free range and farm fresh poultry products, the strategy is to find a niche market and to produce for it.

Fundamental marketing questions must be asked and answered before committing finance to a poultry enterprise. Also, it is important to note that regulations govern all poultry production and marketing. Both eggs and poultry meat go directly into the food chain and it is in everyone's interest that the highest standards are maintained.



Training courses

For prospective producers who wish to investigate, research and ultimately establish a poultry enterprise, short (20 hour) training courses are provided. In an era when efficiency, competitiveness and quality control are the components of success, training is essential.

For those who want to know more about the possibilities, the rewards and the pitfalls of the industry, information advice and training is provided by the Teagasc Rural Enterprise Service. For further information or details on courses, contact:

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