

FARM FRESH TURKEY PRODUCTION

Introduction

Farm-fresh turkey production refers to the growing of turkeys in smaller units, when compared to the large-scale contract commercial year-round production. Turkey production can be an additional enterprise to many farms and can increase farm income. Turkeys produced on a farm-fresh basis are usually aimed at the Christmas market. The birds are usually brought to a processing plant for slaughter. The starting point is to identify a market and gear everything towards it. Turkeys can be grown in as little 12 weeks and for up to 24 weeks, depending on the requirements at point of sale.



Turkeys can be grown for between 12 and 24 weeks.

Housing

Turkeys can be reared in almost any kind of farm building, with some modifications. A controlled environment is not essential for Christmas turkeys, but is a must for year-round production. Unlike other poultry, turkeys grow and perform well on fairly low house temperatures (15-17°C). Christmas turkeys are usually purchased

in at five to six weeks of age. They are off heat at this stage, but will require a slightly higher temperature of 17-19°C until approximately nine weeks of age. From six weeks onwards, turkeys can thrive well in lean-to buildings with good litter or bedding, such as chopped straw or white wood shavings.

House size is based on the maximum weight of birds to be in there at any one time. For best farm-fresh results, generous space should be allowed – 0.4-0.5m² per bird. Houses (without a controlled environment) should, as a general rule, not be stocked at rates greater than 20kg per m².

03: Farm fresh turkey production

What is involved?



Turkey flocks can be produced on free range.

Once it is decided that the facilities on a farm are suitable for turkey production, the next task is to acquire the skills necessary to rear and present to the consumer a well-finished table bird. These skills include management in the brooding, rearing and fattening stages. Feeding and lighting programmes, as well as general day-to-day management and disease

prevention techniques are vital. Turkey flocks can be produced successfully on free range. This system requires a secure, dedicated grass paddock with daytime access. Where land is being used for other purposes prior to free-range turkey production, the land must be left idle for a minimum of four weeks for disease control.

Temperature

Newly hatched turkeys need an incubator temperature of 38°C. Because of their inability to maintain body heat (due to lack of feathering) they must be placed in draught-free surroundings of 37°C for the first day. The temperature is then reduced by 0.5°C per day until they are approximately five weeks of age. At this stage, they are sufficiently well feathered to be able to thrive without the aid of artificial heat.



Turkeys need artificial heat until they are around five weeks of age.

Further information

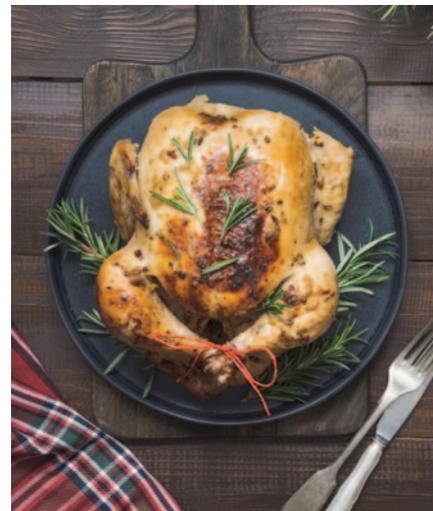
For further information please contact Rebecca Tierney, Poultry Advisor at:
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The following resources are also helpful:

- www.agriculture.gov.ie
- www.bordbia.ie

Fact sheet produced by Rebecca Tierney, Poultry Advisor.

Marketing



There is a demand for oven-ready turkeys.

Turkeys go directly into the human food chain and as such, must be produced and processed so that food safety and product quality can be assured. Increasingly, the demand is for oven ready, farm-fresh turkeys. Birds must be prepared for the market in a suitable food premises. Processing involves a fairly intensive workload. After one year in business, a good product will be the best reference for business in future years. Satisfied customers become long-term clientele, and are willing to pay for freshness and quality.

Flock management

Turkeys are highly responsive to the effects of management. Birds with the same apparent housing, nutrition and facilities are capable of giving vastly different results depending on the care taken with management. Knowledge and skills are important prerequisites to the establishment of an enterprise.

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