

Weighing Broiler Breeders: Technical Bulletin #1

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Recipe for success!

A very important ingredient in the recipe for a productive broiler breeder flock is the collection of frequent and accurate body weights. Weighing birds more than once a week will provide rapid feedback on how feed allocations are affecting body weight gains. When allocating feed, it is important to look at how much the birds have gained in the last few 3 - 4 day periods and what they need to gain in the next 3-4 day period and beyond. Think of it like ploughing a field – to make a straight line you need to focus on a stationary point in the distance and work towards it. Don't look far enough ahead – and you could find yourself wildly off target.

To allocate feed accurately you need to know what your birds weigh. Here are some tips for weighing:

1. Weigh the chicks when they are placed. It is a good idea to weigh several chick boxes from different parts of the load to get an accurate average body weight. Remember to subtract the weight of the boxes.
2. Birds should be weighed on the same day each week. If weighing more than once per week, keep the days consistent to simplify the calculations of gains e.g. weigh every Monday and Thursday.
3. Always weigh birds at the same time on each weigh-day. This ensures that gains are truly on a daily basis. If birds cannot be weighed before they are fed, they will have a consistent amount of feed in the gut.
4. Birds should be weighed before they are fed. If this isn't possible, make sure that the length of time between feeding and weighing is always the same. For example, always weigh birds one hour after they are fed.
5. Weigh birds from all areas of the barn. Prior to weighing, walk the perimeter of the barn, herding birds away from the walls and feeders towards the area where they will be weighed.
6. Ideally, at least 5% of the flock should be weighed. For example, if you have 5000 birds in the barn, weigh at least 250 birds. Weighing more birds will result in a more accurate average body weight.
7. Build a moveable partition that you can use to enclose 50 to 75 birds into an area at a time. For example, linking six 36" wire frames together into a folding fence will allow you to create an area in which you can corral 50 or more birds at one time for a short period of time.
8. Every bird herded into the enclosure should be weighed. Don't leave out heavy or underweight birds unless they are culled.
9. Use a good quality hanging or floor scale – it's a good idea to purchase standard weights so that you can test the accuracy of your scales every time you weigh. You should test the scale using a standard weight that is roughly the same weight as the birds. This may seem like a lot of extra work but remember that you will be basing your feed allocation on these weights. Small errors can cause headaches later on.
10. Count the birds as you weigh them. If you lose track, START the group OVER! An accurate count is one of the most important parts of an accurate flock weight.
11. Write the weights and the number of birds down on paper. It helps to have a familiar form each time so that recording the information becomes a habit. We've provided a sample on the back of this sheet.
12. Repeat the weighing process exactly each time. Weigh the birds in the same part of the barn and don't change your weighing technique.
13. Once all the birds have been weighed, add up all the weights and divide by the total number of birds that were weighed to get the average body weight.

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is a partnership between the University of Alberta, Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, and the Alberta Poultry Industry.



How do I track this information?

We have developed a spreadsheet to track the information that we have found helpful when allocating feed to broiler breeder flocks. The spreadsheet can be downloaded from <http://www.poultryresearch.ca>

For more information on how to use the feed allocation spreadsheet, see The Alberta Poultry Research Centre Technical Bulletin #2: Allocating Feed to Female Broiler Breeders.

Additional copies of the body weight recording sheet can be downloaded at <http://www.poultryresearch.ca>

Bird #	Body Weight	Bird #	Body Weight	Bird #	Body Weight	Bird #	Body Weight
1		22		43		64	
2		23		44		65	
3		24		45		66	
4		25		46		67	
5		26		47		68	
6		27		48		69	
7		28		49		70	
8		29		50		71	
9		30		51		72	
10		31		52		73	
11		32		53		74	
12		33		54		75	
13		34		55		76	
14		35		56		77	
15		36		57		78	
16		37		58		79	
17		38		59		80	
18		39		60		81	
19		40		61		82	
20		41		62		83	
21		42		63		84	

Date: _____

Flock Age: _____