

Pastured Poultry 101





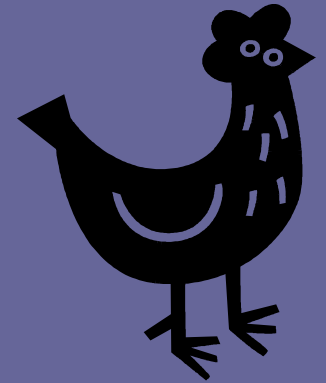
Topics for Discussion

- Why Pastured Poultry?
- Alternative Range Systems
- Poultry Basics
- Recommendations for Success





Why Pastured Poultry?



- Low initial investment, high return.
- Growing niche market.
- Fertility for small gardens and pastures.
- Small animals and family friendly.
- Diversification.
- You don't need a lot of land.
- Complimentary with other animals.



Types of Range Systems

- Yarding or free-range
- Field Pen
- Day-Range
- Egg-mobiles
- Chicken tractor
- Colonies





Yarding or Free-Range

- Perimeter fence surrounding a pasture or grassy area including a stationary coop or barn for shelter.
- One yard or multiple yards.
- Can also have birds free ranging on farm outside of fencing.
- Keep waterers & feeders outside to encourage free-ranging.



Advantages & Disadvantages

- Good for the small flock of birds.
- Less labor intensive.
- Birds are free to move around.
- Manure & pathogen build-up.
- Damage to yard and soil.
- Possible predator losses if using “farmstead” system.



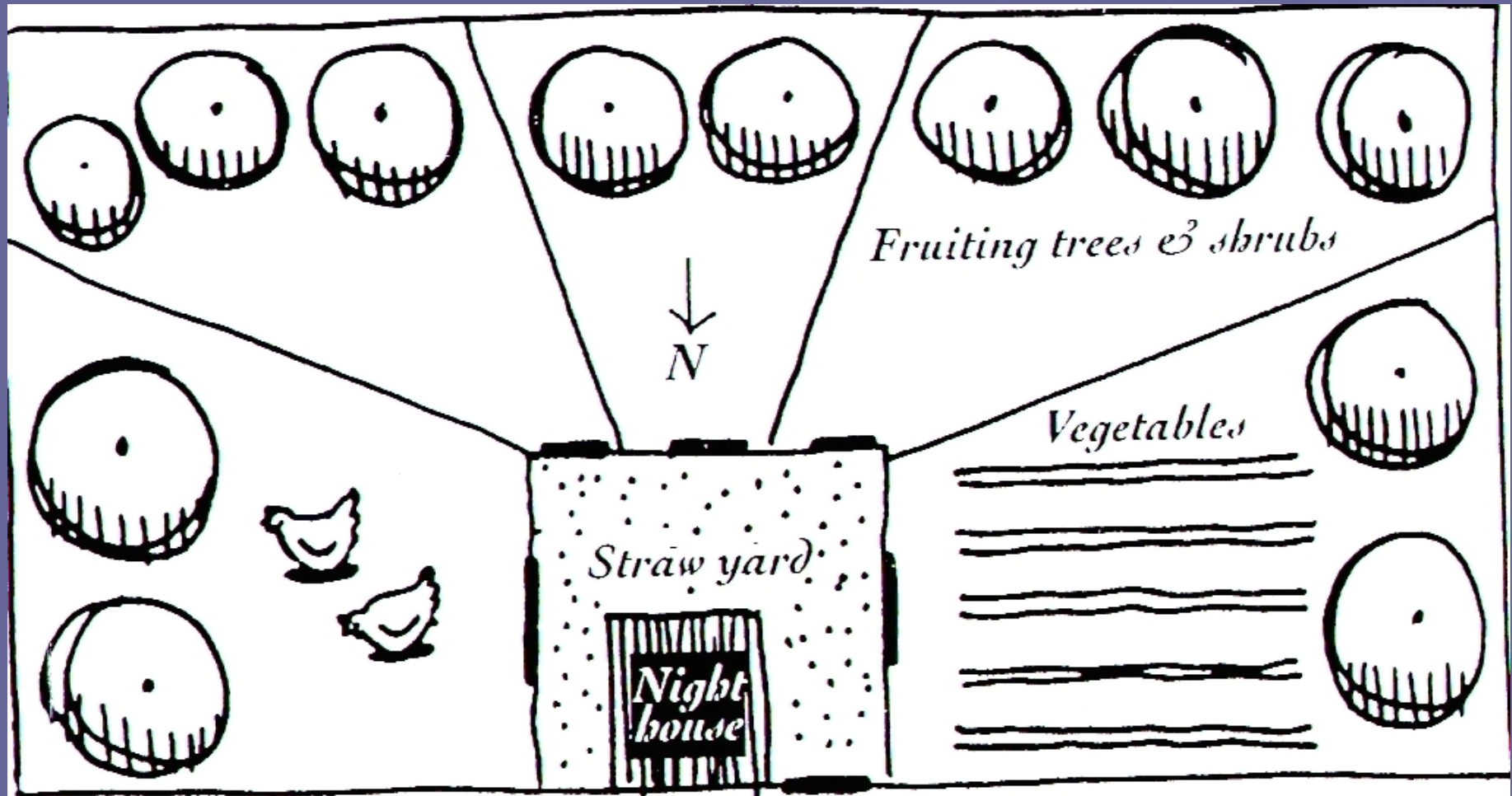
Fixed House and Yard



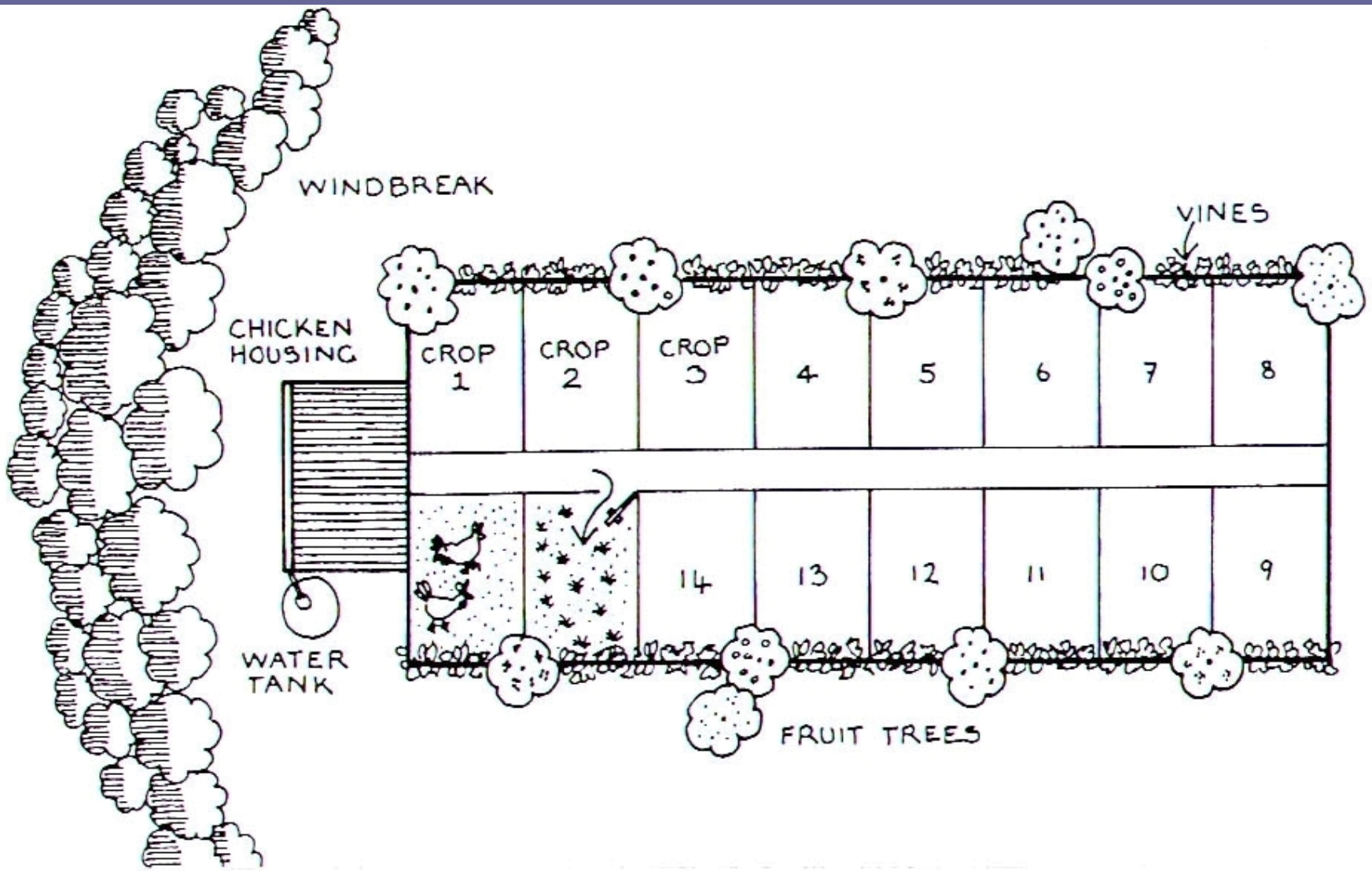


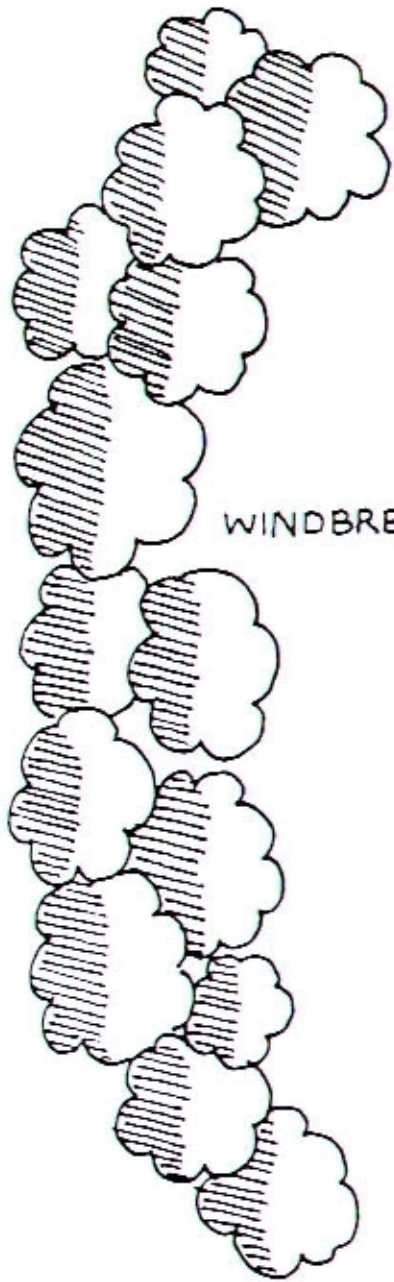




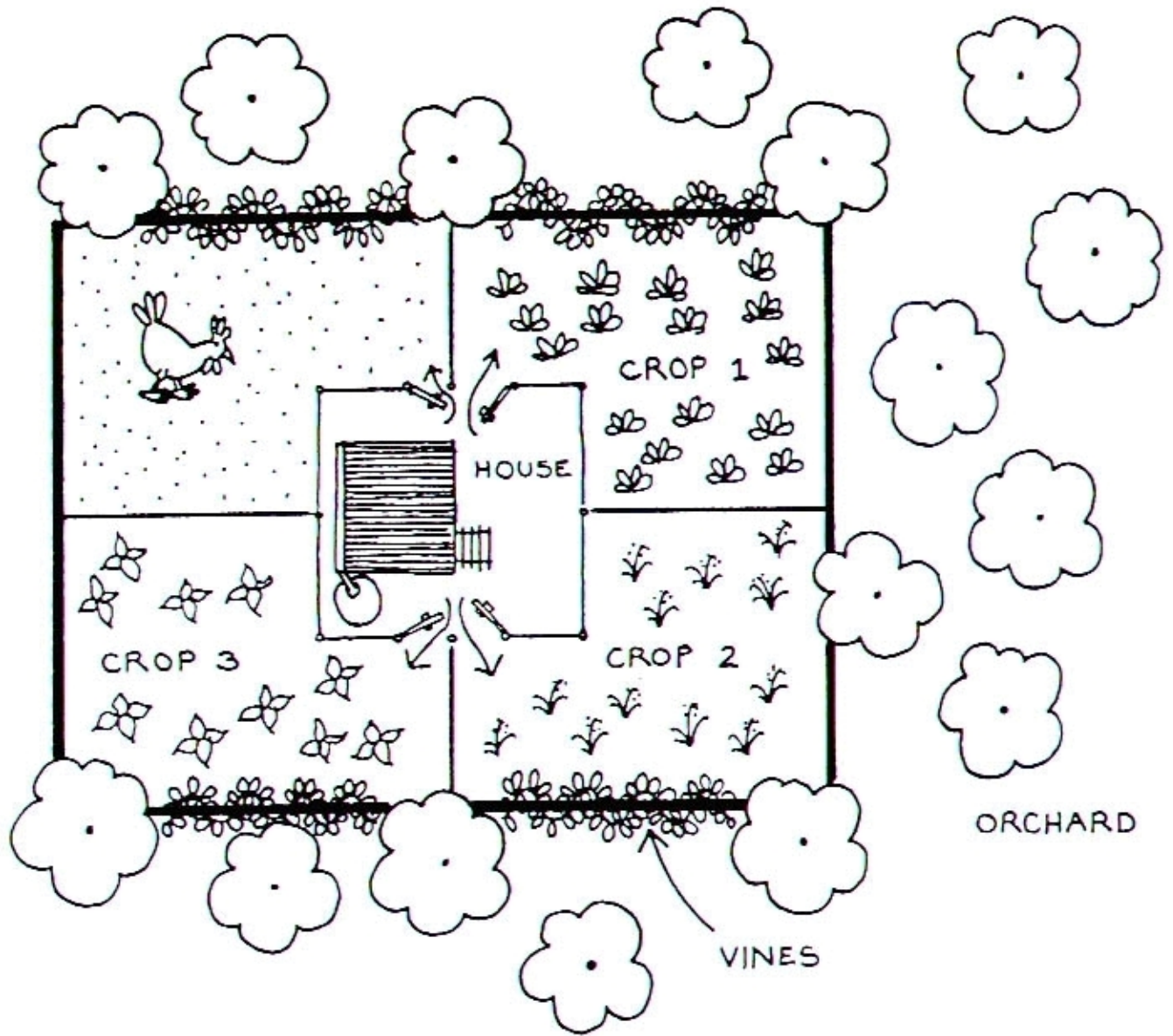


Fixed house with rotating yards.





WINDBREAK



HOUSE

CROP 1

CROP 3

CROP 2

ORCHARD

VINES



Field Pens

- Inexpensive shelters that house poultry and are moved daily to new pastures or fields.
- Used primarily for meat birds, but nesting boxes and roosts can be added for layers.
- Floorless pens 10' x 12' x 2' with 3/4 in roofing.
- Moved with a dolly or on skids.
- Holds 75 – 100 chickens.



Advantages

- Inexpensive.
- Great for beginners.
- Controls grass and manure pile-up.
- No fencing needed.
- Predator proof.
- Nice complement to other grazing animals.





Disadvantages

- Can cause stress or mortalities when moved young.
- Difficult to move.
- Can crush chicks.
- Minimal protection from weather.
- Labor intensive and time consuming.
- Seasonal.











Variations











Day-Range

- Moveable shelters where during the day birds are kept in pastures protected by portable electric netting.
- Use pop holes in structure to let out birds in pasture.
- Can move every week or longer as well as leave house stationary.
- Floor and non-floor versions.





Advantages

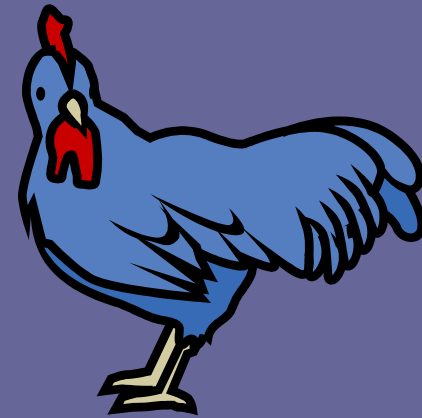
- Protection from weather & predators.
- Can hold more chickens.
- Birds have access to clean pasture.
- Not as labor intensive as field pen.
- Shelter can stay in one place longer.
- No need for perimeter fencing.





Disadvantages

- Need to pay more attention to pasture rotations.
- Can be expensive to build.
- Bedding component.
- Does not deter flying predators.
- Some soil and pasture damage if not moved often.



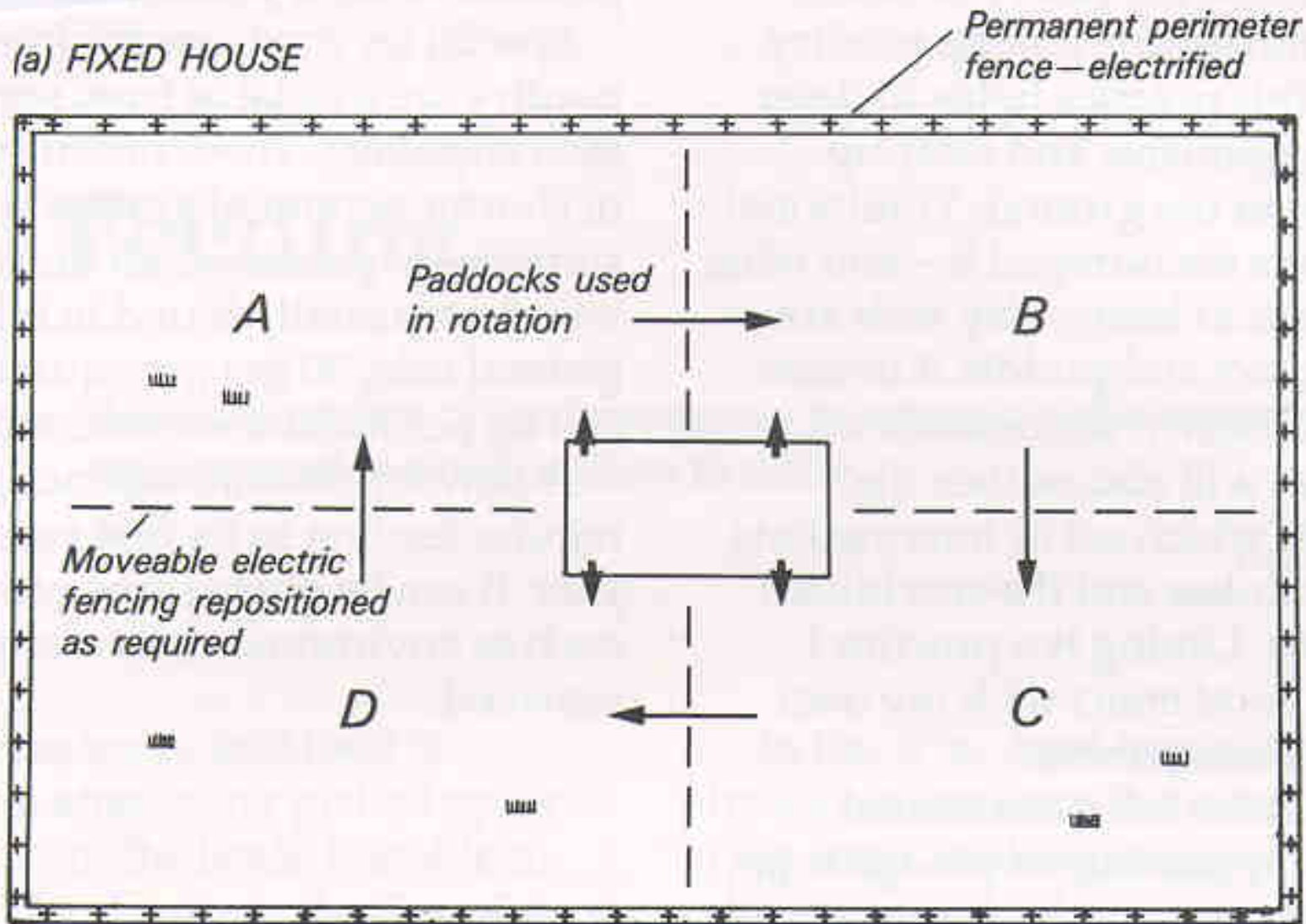








(a) *FIXED HOUSE*





Eggmobiles

- Laying houses on wheels about 12' x 20' for 100 – 200 layers.
- Mounted on a trailer hitch and moved every couple of days.
- Can build with new materials or use old buses and trailers.
- Don't build too big that it is unwieldy to move.



Advantages

- Protection from predators at night.
- Access to outdoors and fresh pasture.
- Manure management.
- Easy egg collection.
- Easily moved with tractors or atvs.



Disadvantages

- Need enough acreage to move around if you have 100 birds.
- Can be difficult to move on hilly ground.
- Have to shut the hens up every night.
- Birds sometimes get lost.
- During winter, use plastic to keep warm.













Chicken Tractors

- Used primarily on a small-scale in gardens for fertility, weed and pest control and tillage.
- Moved daily on fallow beds.
- 4' x 10' pen that holds 20 broilers or 10 layers.
- Can be a pen for day use, or have a mobile house or small runs attached.
- Other methods include hoopouses over gardens for winter protection and enclosing a bed with netting.







Colonies

- Colonies of small roost houses scattered over pasture w/ shared feed and laying houses.
- Move houses every few weeks, 20 – 100 feet away.
- Perimeter fence keeps predators out.
- Roosting houses (8' x 8') closed to 20 inches high with opening for layers to jump in at night.
- Each house holds 50 layers.



More on Colonies

- Reduces labor on collecting eggs.
- No litter in roosting house, litter in laying houses.
- Manure left over from roosting gets spread over pasture by tractor.
- Feeders and waterers kept outside away from house to encourage foraging.





Housing Tips

- Poultry need shelter from rain, snow, and hot sun.
- Need a place to escape predators.
- Ventilation.
- Roosts and nesting boxes if doing layers.
- Shelter vs. house, fixed vs. mobile.
- Make it easy to clean.
- Use litter to dilute manure – wood shavings, straw or rice hulls.



Brooders

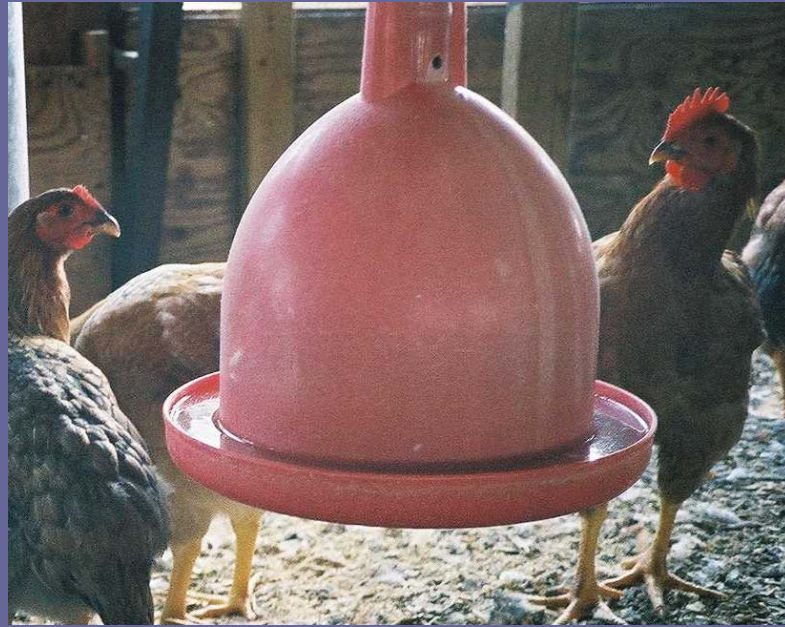




Outdoor access during brooding



Waterers

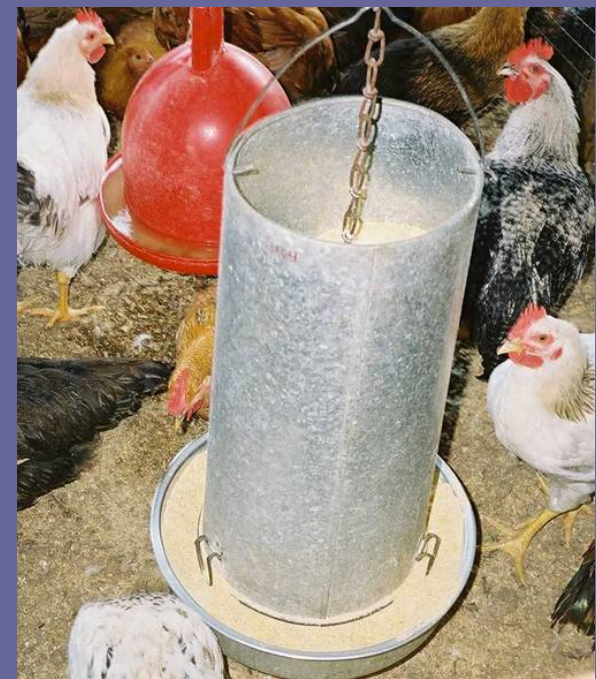








Feeders







Notes on Turkeys



- Turkeys are more aggressive foragers.
- More fragile than chickens at a young age.
- More prone to parasites so longer pasture rotation is important.
- Need more supplements in their rations.
- Growing cycle is twice as long as chickens.
- Can use field pens, but use less birds.

● ● ● | Notes on Ducks & Geese

- Can free-range (keep out of garden!) or graze in pens.
- Niche market opportunities & education of consumer.
- Hardy and not susceptible to many common poultry diseases.
- Great foragers.
- Water for swimming is not needed.





Recommendations for Success

- Always have fresh, clean, cold water available for poultry.
- Pens on skids are easier to move.
- Butchering takes practice.
- Good predator control is key.
- Do your research before starting.
- Keep forage short for poultry.
- Control overhead predators with dogs.



More Tips for Success

- Think about winter housing for birds.
- Try brooding first and then buying pullets the next year.
- To keep hens productive, replace half your flock every six months.
- Start small and be flexible.
- Think about specialty pastures.



“All the indicators point to pastured, home processed poultry as one of this century’s best family farm enterprises.”

Joel Salatin, Polyface Farm