

Building a Chicken Tractor and Starting Pastured Poultry

Pastured poultry is an excellent, and fairly easy, addition to any farm - or backyard! Used within a rotational grazing approach, chickens can help keep soil healthier and more fertile, lower the fly population, and keep chickens healthier (for them and for you). You'll help us build a tractor and learn how we raise and incorporate pastured chickens on our farm.

Date: Saturday, September 9

Time: 10:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m. (TBC)

Location: 6715 Highway YY, Washington, MO

Agenda

- 10:00: Pre-Workshop Survey
- 10:10: Pastured Poultry Lesson (Trisha)
- 10:20: Chicken Tractor Demonstration (Danny)
- 10:30: Chicken Tractor Build (Danny)
- 11:30: Lunch
- 11:50: Post-Workshop Survey / Discussion

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Pre-Workshop Survey

1. Name, Age
2. What is one thing you know about raising chickens for meat?
3. How do you think pasture raised chickens might be different from large operations (like what you buy at the grocery store)?

Post-Workshop Survey

1. What are two new things that you learned today?
2. How do you think pasture raised chickens are different from large operations (like what you buy at the grocery store)?
3. What is one thing you can do with what you've learned today?

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Workshop Supplies, Items, Help Needed

- Chicken tractor materials
- Tools (extra available?)
- Photography (Trisha)
- Video of workshop (live broadcast?). If so, need microphones, to borrow a tripod
- Case of water / drinks
- Pizza or pre-made sandwiches
- Chips

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Aim: What are the benefits of pastured poultry, and how does it work?

Objectives:

- Explain the health and environmental benefits of pastured poultry
- Build a chicken tractor

Lesson:

- Define pastured poultry
 - Sustainable agriculture technique of raising poultry directly on pasture rather than indoor confinement.
 - It quite literally means that we are raising our chickens on our pasture - letting them forage for bugs and dig in the dirt; letting them eat grass, and moving them to a fresh spot each day.
- Benefits of pastured poultry
 - Improves the soil
 - Insects
 - Chickens eat things like crickets and grasshoppers, which can eat the good forage in our pasture
 - They also eat pests like ticks, flies, and larvae that can be problematic to our cattle herd by spreading various disease. They won't eliminate the completely, but as we grow our operation, and run the tractors behind our cattle, it'll definitely help decrease those pest populations over time.
 - Fertilizer
 - If you've ever raised chickens, you know they poop everywhere. The Cornish Cross even more so, it seems. Each day, they're foraging in our pastures and then fertilizing sections daily.
 - If you raise crops, or have a garden, they're great for prepping that ground too. For smaller gardens, the hens especially will scratch up and eat all the old plants and prep your garden for the spring while fertilizing it as well.
 - Weeds
 - Long term, chickens help reduce some of the weeds we find in the pasture. By scratching and foraging they'll help us keep the weeds down
 - Healthier Meat
 - A lot of farmers do market their pastured poultry as more nutritious and healthier. It's gradually becoming more popular - maybe you've seen pasture raised eggs in the grocery store?
 - In the case of eggs, evidence is emerging that the poultry products from grass-fed flocks tend to have less cholesterol, more vitamins A and E, multiplied Omega-3 content, and a healthier ratio of Omega-3s to Omega-6s.
 - Better for the chicken & more humane
 - Chickens are meant to be outside foraging and being in the sun. They're not meant to be cramped indoors. When you give them the outdoor space

and let them live more naturally, there's no need for antibiotics or growth hormones or anything like that because nature does that for us.

- Chickens are carnivores, so it's important that they have enough protein; grass alone - even with protein like legumes - aren't going to be enough for them to be healthy and grow.
- But, having them on the pasture gives them access to natural Vitamins, Minerals, and Proteins - from the sun, from various plants and seeds, and from bugs.
- We know from the start that we're raising birds for meat, but that doesn't mean we have to treat them inhumanely. We want them to be in the sun, have space to roam, have fresh grass and bugs each day because ultimately that's going to make a more nutritious chicken, and one that is less stressed.

- Chicken Tractor

- While we *could* let chickens free range, as you can see, we are surrounded by woods where we know a lot of predators live (because we see them) - coyotes, skunks, racoons, owls, hawks. And there are other wild animals like turkeys and geese that we don't want interacting with the chickens and risking a virus. Ultimately, it's safer for the chickens, and more effective for us - to raise them in a chicken tractor
- The chicken tractor is great for a few reasons:
 - Shelter: protects the chickens from rain, from too much heat/sun
 - Predators: We've got fencing around the entire tractor, and an electric wire as an added deterrent
 - Mobility: with this, we can raise chickens wherever we need to. We just add wheels, and one person can pull it themselves
 - Let's go see how it works and how we use it to raise our chickens

- Chicken Tractor Demonstration

- Electric fence: helps with predators
- Moving: 1-2x a day; fresh grass for healthier chickens; grass left behind is fertilized and bug-free
- Feeding: 2x a day morning/evening; how many bags of feed we go through
- Water: how pump works; always have fresh water available
- Number of chickens / turkeys tractor can house
- When to move to tractor, when to process

- 10:30: Chicken Tractor Build (Danny)
 - 11:30: Lunch
 - 11:50: Post-Workshop Survey
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Workshop Summary:

- Final Attendance: 10
 - 6 4-H Members in attendance
 - 4 Parents in attendance
 - 4 Workshop leaders (Trisha, Daniel, Dennis, Mike)
- Group ranged from ages 9 - 16
- Reviewed the SARE grant and opportunities
- Presentation on sustainable farming, and how chickens work into this practice
- Discussed benefits of pastured poultry
- Reviewed timeline for raising birds
- Demonstration on how to feed and move the birds. Some joined to feed them and help move the tractor.
- Discussed how the tractor was built, and some tips on how to build them more personalized for your needs
- Discussed cost of building materials
- Began building a chicken tractor, showing the steps for putting together and offering guidance on specific plans (we used Suskovich)
- Offered additional book recommendations (Pastured Poultry, Polyface Micro, Rooted Life) for additional resources