

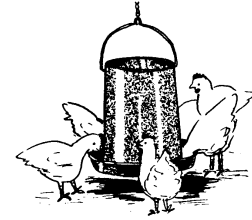


*The University of Georgia*

**Cooperative Extension Service**

*College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences / Athens, Georgia 30602-4356*

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## ***BACKYARD FLOCK TIP . . .***

### **WHICH FEED DOES MY FLOCK NEED?**

It goes without saying that an essential part of poultry rearing involves providing adequate amounts of the correct diet. Sometimes backyard poultry producers are confused by exactly which diet is needed. In fact, this is a relatively straight forward matter. Virtually all poultry feeds have about 60% corn and 25-30% soybean meal. It is the adjustments in these two ingredients, plus the addition of smaller amounts of a few others, that differentiate one diet from the next. Corn, or some other grain such as milo or wheat, provides most of the energy the flock needs to maintain its body and to support growth. Soybean meal provides most of the protein, of which meat, feathers and most of the egg are composed. Obviously, more calcium, (in the form of limestone), is needed for a laying hen diet to produce good quality egg shells. Aside from this, the differences in feeds are relatively minor.

Providing proper nutrition for our flock is the general objective. Birds being grown for meat generally receive a starter diet for the first 3 week and then a finisher ration until slaughter. The main difference is that the amount of protein decreases and energy increases as the bird ages, as a greater proportion of its feed intake goes to maintain the body. The main benefit of changing from a starter to a finisher diet is that the latter feed is somewhat less expensive. However, for a small backyard operation, the feeding of a well balanced broiler starter or grower feed throughout is quite satisfactory.

For egg production at least 2 diets must be used. The pullet diet is used to rear birds up to the initiation of egg production. At that time a layer feed with 3.5% calcium (as opposed to 1% in the pullet feed) must be used. If not, the bird must pull calcium from its bones in order to make eggshells. This is obviously not healthy. It should be noted that there is no harm in feeding a broiler starter diet to pullets for the first several weeks. This may help them get off to a faster start in life.

It is often possible to find “scratch feed” available for purchase. It is important to remember that scratch feed is not a complete feed and cannot be assumed to contain vitamins, minerals or high

### **PUTTING KNOWLEDGE TO WORK**

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protein ingredients. Rather, it is what its name implies: something for chickens to scratch at in the yard as a supplement for other feeds. If the scratch feed consists exclusively of ground grains (check the ingredient label) it will not be nutritionally balanced and should never be the sole source of feed for the backyard flock.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Nick Dale". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Nicholas M. Dale  
Extension Poultry Scientist

Extension County Coordinator/Agent

“Your local County Extension Agent is a source of more information on this subject.”