

# How to start a poultry farm

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**If you are interested in starting a poultry farm, there are some basic facts that you must know before you can start. When you want to produce foodstuffs, especially meat, poultry is the only type of animal production that can provide an income in the short as well as the long term. When you farm with chickens, you produce meat and eggs, but there are also valuable by-products such as manure and feathers.**

You can also farm with chickens while farming with something else, and you can farm with them anywhere in the country. You can even farm with chickens in the backyard of a city house. You do not need a big farm to farm with chickens.

When you think of keeping poultry for household purpose or as a business, the first question you ask is “How do I start?” The answer to this question is not a simple one, because there are many different poultry production systems. There are also many different breeds used for different products and a variety of housing and equipment systems.

## **What are the different production systems available?**

There are basically three systems from which the farmer can choose:

- **Extensive** – This system of keeping chickens is the oldest form of keeping chickens. According to this system, you keep chickens but you do not provide them with any housing, feed and medicine. These chickens can walk all over the property feeding themselves, laying their eggs anywhere, hatching and rearing chickens without your knowledge. With this system you do not have any control over the number of eggs that you can collect, or the number of chickens that are hatched, and grow up.
- **Semi-intensive** – When you keep chickens in this way, you provide them with housing, nests, feed and medicine. Although you provide them with housing, you also have a camp attached to the house where these chickens can walk freely. By providing them with housing and nests, you have control over the number of eggs that you collect as well as the number of chickens that are hatched and grow up. With this system you can increase your flock and sell some eggs.
- **Intensive** – This system is a system where you keep the chicken inside a chicken house and provide them with housing, feed and medicine. Normally this system will be for commercial use only.



The photographs show five of the most common chicken breeds in South Africa:

- 1: Naked Neck
- 2: New Hampshire
- 3: Ovambo
- 4: Potchefstroom Koekoek
- 5: Venda

The system that you choose will depend on:

- The reason why you want to keep the chickens. Is it to provide eggs and meat for your home, or is it as a business, or a bit of both?
- Do you have enough land available for a semi-intensive or intensive system?
- How much money do you have available to build a house and buy equipment.
- Your knowledge of chicken farming.

### What breeds are available?

The most common breeds that are available in South Africa can be divided into two groups. There are the breeds that can be kept under the extensive and semi-intensive systems – indigenous breeds such as the Venda, Ovambo, Potchefstroom Koekoek, Naked Neck and Natal Game, as well as standard breeds such as the New Hampshire, Rode Island Red and Black Australorp. These breeds are normally used for more than one purpose. Then there are the breeds that are used in an intensive system such as the Ross or Cobb for meat production and Hi-line or Lohmann for egg production.

*Fowls for Africa* presents courses on poultry farming. The next courses will take place on 28 February and 2 March 2006. The subjects that will be covered include:

- Farming systems
- Record keeping
- Quality of eggs
- Health management
- Poultry housing
- Care and rearing of chicks
- Immunisation and vaccination.

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