

*The wrong mind set in poultry outreach programmes
Relevance of extension messages.*

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Introduction

Family poultry is considered to be a small but economic activity, normally in the hands of women. A large majority of households throughout the developing world maintain chickens in their backyards to supply small contributions in food and cash to the household when necessary.

The sector is receiving considerable attention from development programmes because it is considered to be an effective tool for reaching the rural poor, especially women.

In several of these programmes, improved chicken breeds have been introduced and credit schemes developed, together with a package of extension messages, in an effort to enhance rural family chicken production. Extension focuses primarily on introducing housing facilities and improving bird health. For example, in Bhutan, where the outreach programme of hybrid pullets is a government activity, housing (with the aim of confinement) is the first priority of the extension service. Women in Nicaragua, who were given improved breeds of chickens, were advised to keep them confined and provide homemade feed. But these home made feeds were not adequate to meet the nutritional needs of the birds, and, as expected, this resulted in poor performance and economic losses. In the end the birds were released which was no problem as such, because improved breeds can do well on free range.

The question is, why is it that extension services so often begin by advising confined management?

The wrong mind set

The statement is, that the above-mentioned mistake in poultry extension is based on the mindset of the extensionists, believing that the development of poultry husbandry starts with confinement in a nice shed.

This concept of poultry development is best reflected by a diagram, published by Bessei

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Table 1 (after Bessei, 1989);
Production parameters and off-take of the traditional scavenging and improved production systems

Production system	Body weight (kg)	Number of eggs / year	Egg weight (grams)	No of cons chickens per hen	Eggs for cons
TRADITIONAL Scavenging, no regular water /feed, poor night shelter	0.8	20 – 30	30	2 – 3	0
IMPROVED TRADITIONAL - step 1 Water / feeding grains, household wastes, improved shelter, care in the first weeks, Newcastle disease vaccination	0.8	40 – 60	30	4 – 8	10 – 20
IMPROVED TRADITIONAL - step 2 As –1, plus further feeding / -watering / housing, treatment for parasites, additional vaccination	1.0	100 – 120	50	10 – 12	30 – 50
IMPROVED TRADITIONAL - step 3 (Semi intensive) as 2, with improved breeds and complete diet.	1.5	160 - 180	50	25 - 30	50 – 60
Industrial egg production	2.0	250 –280	60	-	250 – 280

It is argued that the diagram is not suitable to classify poultry development in a satisfactory way. Backyard poultry production systems are often a mix of the first three steps of traditional poultry management, as, for example, in Nicaragua. There the chickens had no shed, but the sale of eggs exceeded step 3. Apparently, provision of housing seems unnecessary to achieve good egg production. If industrial egg production should be regarded as the last step in the development of poultry production, then how can the pastured poultry production system as advocated by Salatin be classified?

But, above all, the general concept on poultry development, best reflected by this diagram of Bessei, apparently leads to the wrong extension efforts.

An alternative concept for poultry development.

To contribute to a change in mindset, it is proposed to classify poultry development into two paths. One path involves the development of traditional free-range systems into commercial free-range systems such as poultry on pasture. The second path is the development of backyard production into intensive, technology dependent production.

Table 2: A modified Poultry Development Scheme

Phase of development	Path I		Path II	Number
	Free Range	Management	Confined + balanced feeds	
Step 1	Traditional	-		< 10
Step 2	Improved traditional	Grain supplement		< 20
Step 3	Improved free range	Grain supplement Improved breeds Vaccinations, Ca	Backyard	10 – 50
Step 4	Pastured poultry	As step 3 + more feed supplements	Commercial	50 – 4,000
Step 5			Industrial	4000 – 100,000

The main difference between the two paths is the confinement of the birds and the provision of completely balanced feeds. These two criteria must be applied simultaneously. If balanced feeds are not used and out of reach of farmers, then the chickens should be kept free range. If balanced feeds are available, then confined chicken production might be an economic alternative in backyard poultry production, provided adequate health care is available.

Literature

Bessei, W. 1989, Aspects of sub- optimal feeding systems in poultry development. 4th International DLG Symposium in poultry production in hot climates.

Salatin, J. 1993. Pastured poultry profits.