



## Selecting and Preparing Broilers for Show

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Raising meat-type chickens at home can be a rewarding and productive experience. Not only does it put meat in the freezer, it can also be a great 4-H project for young poultry enthusiasts. Many counties provide opportunities at fairs and other venues to show broilers in competition. The purpose of this fact sheet is to serve as a guide for poultry 4-H project participants and others wishing to participate in preparing their birds for the show.

### Initial Preparation

- 1) Two weeks before the show, make preliminary selection of the broilers. Select three birds for every one you wish to show. Leg band them so that they can be easily identified. Ideally they should be separated from the rest of the flock with their own source of feed, water, and fresh bedding.
- 2) Two days before the show, place them in coops or temporary catch pen so they can be easily handled.
- 3) Weigh each broiler. Eliminate all birds above or below the minimum and maximum weights set forth in the show rules.
- 4) Examine the selected broilers meeting the weight requirements for the following physical faults (*do not consider any bird that has one or more of these defects*):

#### General Defects

- Cuts and tears
- Broken or disjunct bones
- Skin or flesh bruises anywhere other than on the wing tip.
- Breast blisters
- Extremely dirty feathers
- Large ulcers or sores of the foot pad
- Insect bites
- External parasites (e.g. lice or mites)



**Figure 1.** Select broilers with clean, smooth, non-ulcerated footpads, such as those shown here.

### **Feathering Defects**

- Pin feathers, particularly those just coming through the skin.
- Discolored areas of skin caused by sunburn or raw skin resulting from inadequate feathers (i.e., “barebacks”).
- Feather color is important only to the extent that it might detract from the appearance of the ready-to cook poultry. Generally speaking, any color is acceptable.

### **Conformation Defects**

- Breast that is dented, crooked, knobby, or dented.
- V-shaped breast or “slab-sided” (birds which are much deeper than they are wide).
- Back that is narrow, crooked, humped, or hunched.
- Deformed legs and/or wings.
- Body that is definitely wedge-shaped.
- Defects such as crooked toes or beaks. (These may be important considerations in judging for placement of closely matching birds.)

### **Fleshing Defects**

- Width of breast not carried well back to the end of keel, or which is V-shaped or concave rather than full and rounded (U-shaped).
- Thin drumsticks and thighs.
- Back that is not well fleshed along the vertebrae and around the hip bones.



**Figure 2.** Breast comparison. Note the desirably deeper broader breast of broiler on right extending along total length of keel.



**Figure 3.** Back comparison. Note the desirable width of back carried well toward tail head in broiler on right.

### **Finish Defects**

- Lack of fat cover in the skin between the heavy feather tracts in the collar of the wishbone where the thigh skin joins the breast, or around the tail head and the abdominal region.

5) Place birds that pass the above inspection in a separate coop or pen for consideration as potential show birds.

6) Select your entry from this group of birds considering these factors:

- **Length** – The breastbone should be long, straight, and free from defects such as dents or knobs and carried well back between the legs. Breastbone should be parallel to backbone.
- **Width** – back should be long and wide with a broad spring of ribs.
- **Depth** – The body should be full and deep. Body depth must be consistent with breast width, or balanced. Birds which are extremely deep but are narrow across the back and breast are termed “slab sided.”
- **Fleshing** – fleshing refers to the amount and distribution of muscle. Breast, drumsticks, and thighs carry the bulk of the meat and should be examined closely. As the breast meat is the most valued part of the broiler, this section should be given considerable attention.

### **Final Preparations**

1) Each broiler intended for the show should have clean legs, feet, and feathers. Wash feet and legs in warm soapy water (use a mild dishwashing detergent). An old toothbrush may be helpful in removing dirt and grime. To clean feathers, dip the bird in a shallow tub of 95°F water to which has been added a small amount of mild dishwashing detergent. Gently work the soapy water through the feathers with your hands. Rinse in another tub of 80°F to 90°F water. It is recommended to rinse in an additional tub of 70°F water in order to remove all detergent and help acclimatize the birds to ambient temperature. Some exhibitors may add a few drops of glycerin or a little bluing agent to this last tub of water giving the feathers an added glossiness and crisp color. Caution should be used not to add too much glycerin or bluing; otherwise, the

feathers may take on an unnatural blue coloration or become a sticky after drying. Dry with a towel and place birds on clean shavings in a warm draft-free area. Wash birds at least 24 hours before the show so they have time to thoroughly dry and preen their feathers.

2) While transporting to the show, place each broiler in its own separate cage with floor covered with plenty of clean wood shavings. This will help minimize feather soiling on transit.

3) If the show entry requires a pen of birds, make sure each broiler in the pen is closely matched in size, gender, conformation, and color.



**Figure 4.** Comparison of female (left) and male 8-week-old broilers.

Remember, showing broilers in competition is meant to be an enjoyable experience. Not everyone will raise a grand champion, but everyone is a winner who participates and comes away with a greater understanding of poultry raising.

## References

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