

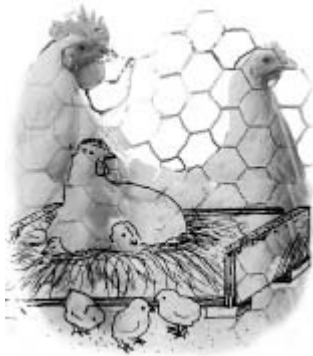


Directorate  
Communication



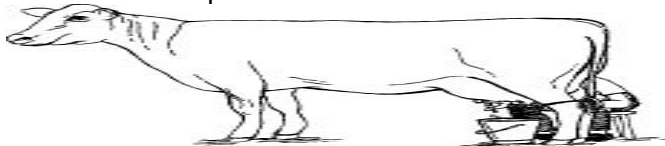
National Department of Agriculture

## Chicken care

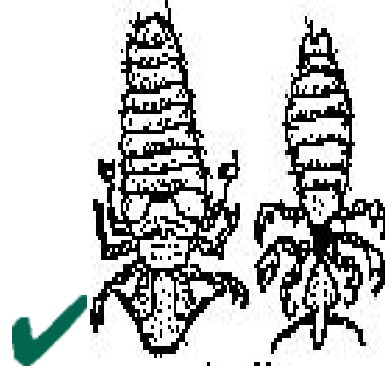


### Shelter and care

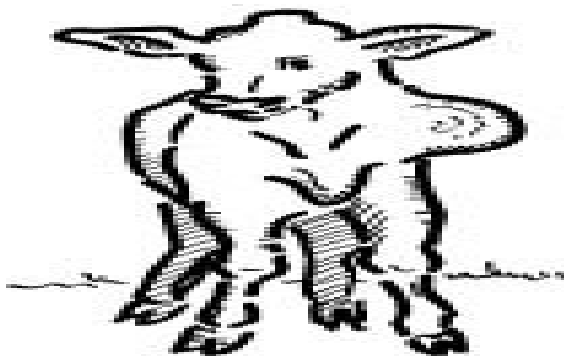
- When chickens are kept in a cage they must be protected from rain, hail, cold winds and direct sun.
- Very hot weather or cold, damp, wet weather can be dangerous to chickens and they can suffer and die. Even if they do not die they will not be as healthy and strong as they should be.
- In hot, humid areas air should be able to pass through the cage to keep the birds cool. Ventilation is important for chickens.



- At least half the cage must have a roof. If it is a metal roof it must be covered with grass or other material, properly tied down, to prevent the metal from getting too hot or too cold. Two sides of the cage must be covered to protect the chickens from rain, cold winds and sun.



- Chickens must have a warm, dry sleeping area. It is best to provide perches or branches for them (for sleeping at night).
- Chickens in a cage cannot escape from animals such as dogs, so make sure that the cage is secure and the chickens are protected from other animals.



✓ This cage has a roof and two of the sides are covered to protect the chickens from rain, cold winds and sun



✗ This cage can not protect the chickens from rain, cold winds and sun

- If one chicken becomes sick or injured take it away and put it by itself in a safe

and dry place, and give it very special care and food until it is well again. If the chicken is very sick or badly injured it will be better to humanely slaughter the chicken.

- Never leave an injured chicken in a cage with other chickens or they may peck at it until it dies.
- Small or weak chickens must be kept, fed and cared for separately.

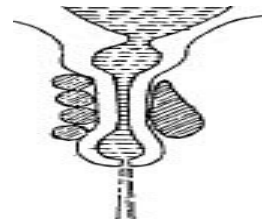


## Breeding



- It takes about 21 days for the chicks to hatch from the eggs.
- There must be a warm, dry, protected area or nest box for the hen to lay her eggs in.
- Put some grass in the nest box, to keep the eggs clean and warm and to prevent cracking.
- Often the hen will not leave the nest to search for food while she is sitting on the eggs. Put food and water nearby, where she can reach it.
- The nest should be near or on the ground once the chicks hatch so they can get in and out safely.

- The hen will be very protective about her chicks and it is better to keep them separate from the other chickens until the chicks are big and strong. They must always have water and food (Grower Mash or Chick Chick No. 1).



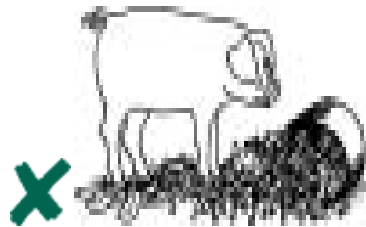
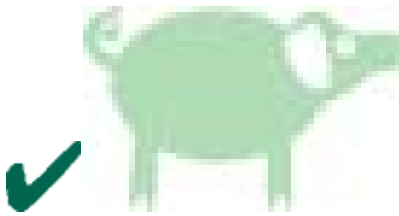
- Never keep too many birds in a cage, they must all have space to move around freely, and stretch their wings. It is best to keep chickens in small groups of about 20, this will help prevent fighting and competition, even among the hens.





- Do not keep roosters together in the same cage because they may fight.
- Do not keep more roosters than hens because the hens will be injured and damaged by the roosters mating them too often.

- One rooster for every 10 hens is a good ratio.
- Roosters should be about the same size as the hens. If they are much bigger they may injure the hens during mating.

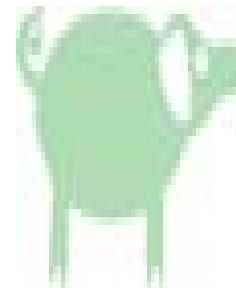


## Water

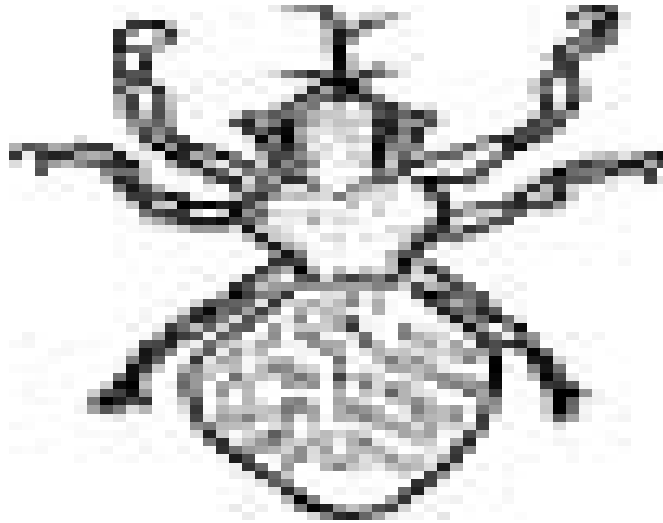
- Chickens must always have clean, fresh water to drink.
- One chicken needs at least 100 ml of water every day.
- In hot weather they need to drink more water to help keep them cool and maintain their appetite.
- The water must be put in the shade.



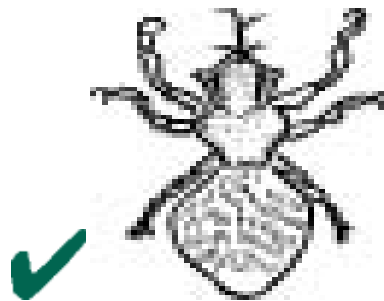
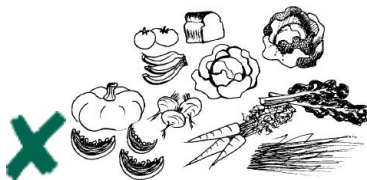
100 ml water



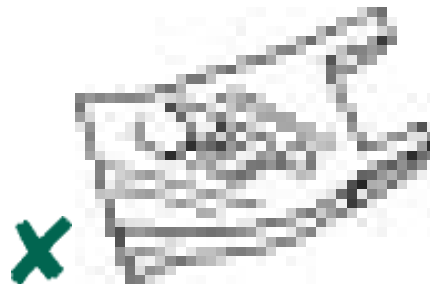
More than 100 ml water when it is very hot



- To prevent the chickens from scratching sand and dirt into the water, raise the container by putting it on to a few bricks or flat rocks.
- Tie the container to the side of the cage, or put a clean rock in the middle, so that it cannot be turned over and the water wasted.



- The side of the water container must be low enough for small chicks to reach the water.



### Good idea

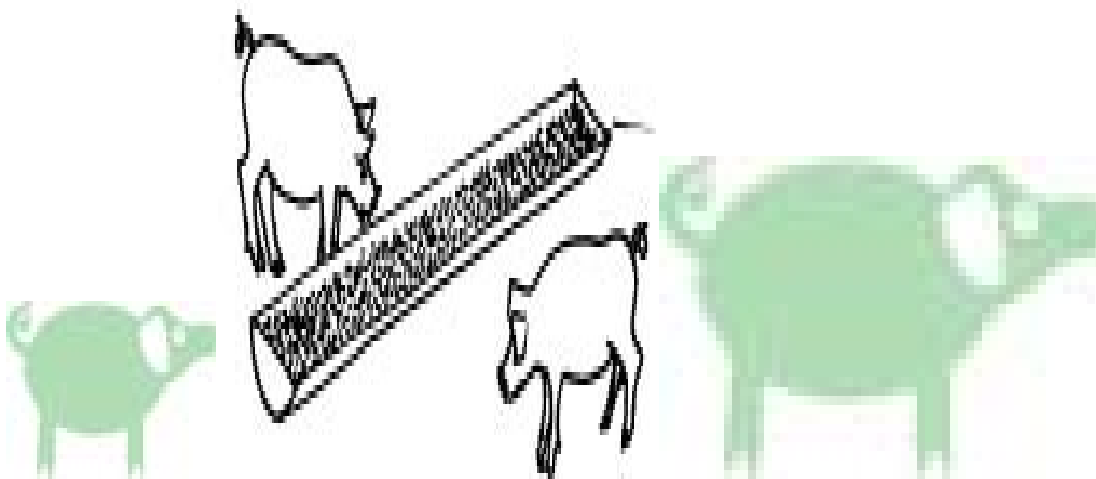


Cut



Make your own water container:

- Cut off the top of the cooldrink bottle and fill with water
- Put an upside down bowl on top and turn over
- Refill every day



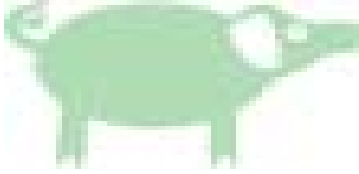
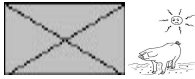
- The water container must be cleaned and refilled every day.



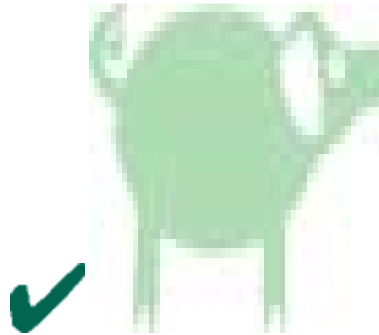
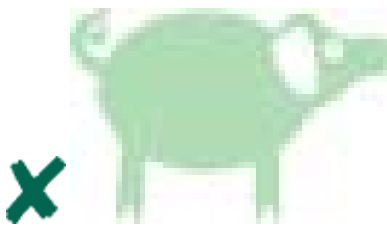
Feed



- Chickens can eat mixtures of leftover food such as mealie-pap, bread, vegetables and mealies. Commercial chicken food is very good (ie Laying Mash, Grower Mash or Chick Chick No1).
- Some food (ie hard pumpkin) will have to be cut into small pieces or cooked to make it soft enough for the chickens to eat. Chickens need a proper, mixed diet to stay healthy.
- To produce strong, healthy eggs and chicks, hens must have calcium. If hens are not fed commercial layer rations they should have access to limestone grit, oyster shells or small regular quantities of bonemeal (meat sawdust).



- If there are more than 10 chickens in the cage, the food should be split into two containers, so that every bird can have a share. Ideally there should always be a bowl of chicken food in the cage.
- Raise the food bowl, or hang it from the roof (low enough for the chicks to reach it) to prevent the chickens from walking in the food.
- Make sure small chicks can also reach the food.



- Food must always be kept dry and be protected from the rain, or it may go wasted (become acid).
- Containers should be cleaned regularly and old/soiled food removed.

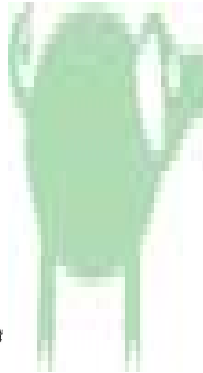


## Hygiene

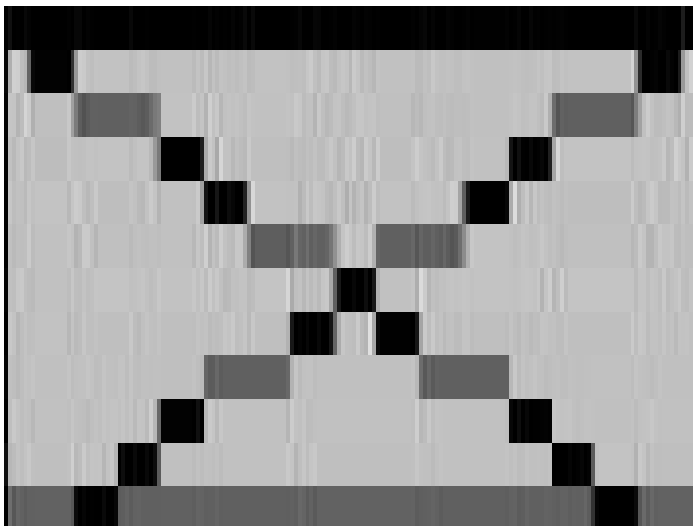
- If chickens are kept in dirty cages they will become sick.



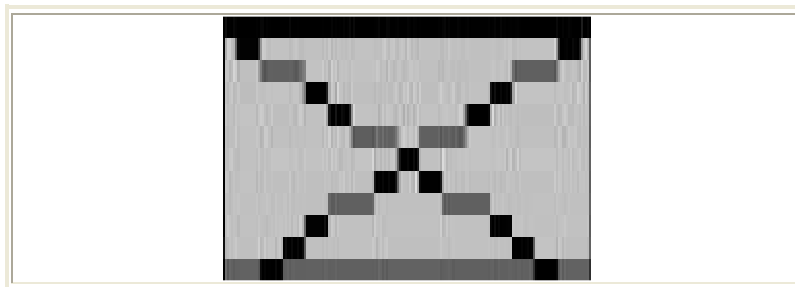
- Clean the floor of the cage at least once a week.
- Putting some grass on the floor will help to absorb the chickens' droppings, especially under the sleeping perches. After a week grass should be removed and replaced by new grass.
- Grass or bedding from the nest boxes must also be changed at least once a week.



- The cage floor should be kept clean because chickens like to lie in the sand and roll in it (dust bathe), and it helps to clean their feathers and to control parasites such as mites and lice.
- It is important that the floor of the cage should have a slope so that excess water can run off, keeping the cage dry.



If water does collect in the cage, it is important to dig a drainage furrow or ditch, leading out of the cage, allowing the floor to dry.





---

2000

Compiled by Directorate Communication, National Department of Agriculture in cooperation with National Council of SPCAs



National Department of Agriculture

Printed and published by National Department of Agriculture  
and obtainable from Resource Centre, Directorate Communication, Private Bag X144, Pretoria  
0001, South Africa

ISBN 1-8687-085-8

This publication is also available on the website of the National Department of Agriculture at: [www.nda.agric.za/publications](http://www.nda.agric.za/publications)



For further information contact the  
National Council of SPCAs, Farm Animal Unit,  
P.O. Box 1320, Alberton 1450, South Africa  
Tel (011) 907 3590  
Fax (011) 907 4013