



Sustainable Poultry Network USA BREEDER Standards of Welfare and Husbandry

Our Mission: “Equipping farmers, chefs and people to breed, grow and market sustainable flocks of Standard Bred Poultry.”

First and foremost, all *certified flock owners* must support our six core values.

- I. **Standards:** All breeding flocks of poultry are identified by the *Poultry Standards* noting where the breed originated. Genetic lines must trace back multiple generations; and exhibit traits that meet the standard guidelines for the breed.
- II. **Pastured:** Provide birds’ access to natural, outdoor pasture and allow birds the opportunity to perform natural and instinctive behaviors essential to their health and well-being.
- III. **Local:** Develop local networks of farmers who are committed to *sustainable poultry production models* that promote and encourage sustainability through raising and selling poultry products locally.
- IV. **Multiplied:** Commit to working and cooperating with local farmers for ongoing education: training for understanding, coaching for implementation and mentoring for multiplication. Our goal is to reproduce other local self-supporting, sustainable-poultry farmers.
- V. **Welfare:** Maintain humane and conscientious attitude toward the birds in their care, housing and husbandry as laid out in the welfare standards of the *SPN-USA™*. The standards premise is that animals are allowed to behave naturally, ensures social interaction, comfort, with physical and psychological well-being.
- VI. **Marketing:** Connect intentionally with those who prepare birds for eating. Inform all chefs and consumers of the nutritional differences between genetically engineered poultry and historical, heritage breeds and equip them with effective marketing tools to be successful and profitable with their business.

Our welfare philosophy: We believe that the best welfare for all domesticated poultry is done by people who choose to breed/raise poultry because they love the birds! They actually enjoy being with the birds, taking pride in their work and the fowls that they breed. We believe that it is critical that the breeder is connected to their flock and has an investment in the birds!

SPN-USA believes that although we have welfare and husbandry standards that all our breeders follow, the very best way for the consumer to know that farms are holding up their end of the welfare accountability bargain is by interacting *directly with the farm!* Our goal is to educate & encourage people to get *reconnected* to their food source and the poultry that they purchase. People in *local communities* who invest in and visit local farms are the best forms of welfare accountability.

These (4) areas are of great importance in our welfare program.

1. **Behave naturally:** We believe it is critical that standard bred, heritage poultry have plenty of space both indoors and out on pasture, throughout their lives.
2. **Ensure social interaction:** We believe their social interaction with other birds is critical for their well-being and productivity.
3. **Comfort and stress:** We believe every breeder must have an *awareness* of what causes stress in their flock and must earnestly work to reduce stress as much as possible.
4. **Physical & psychological well-being:** We believe the highest standards of welfare include the physical and psychological well-being of every bird on the farms of our *certified* flocks.

During the inspection by the SPN-USA Certified Coach, the following guidelines will be applied:

- A. Coaches will use a "*check-list*" that corresponds to the welfare and husbandry standards below to thoroughly inspect the farm. The farmer will receive the necessary check-list as well. Certification is renewed every calendar year in January.
- B. SPN-USA reserves the right to send a *certified coach* to the certified farm at any time. If a visit is unplanned, this is at the expense of SPN-USA.
- C. If the *SPN-USA certified coach* recognizes any welfare or husbandry issue that is not listed within these guidelines, they are encouraged to share the observation with the farmer.

The standards listed below will apply to EVERY certified breeding flock in SPN-USA.

What poultry are eligible to become an SPN-USA Certified Breeder Flock?

- All farmers in SPN-USA will breed, grow and market Standard Bred poultry. Standard Bred poultry are defined by the Standards for which the breed originated. (Example: American breeds must meet the standards of the American Standard of Perfection.) Breeders and growers in SPN-USA are welcome to work with other breeds of poultry from anywhere in the world; as long as the breed has a "standard" so that the breeding birds and their progeny can be properly evaluated. Members are welcome to propose a new breed that is not currently being bred by an SPN-USA breeder.
- All breeder flocks will be certified by a SPN certified coach to insure the flock meets the Standards for the chosen breed. SPN-USA does not allow fast growing, industrialized commercial poultry to be certified.

- The breeder flocks will always breed naturally. Artificial insemination will never be used. Breeder flocks will never be kept in cages or confinement systems. Systems will be evaluated by the SPN-USA certified coach.
- F-1 Crosses, bred with specific purpose, are permitted within SPN-USA. Common examples of that are using sex-linked genes to produce chicks who can be sexed at birth, and breeding meat birds with exceptional carcasses for commercial purposes. Resulting F-1 birds must still grow slowly enough to be humane and not be processed earlier than 12 weeks.

A. Humane Treatment

All farmers must be consciously aware of potential stress on the birds and commit themselves to limit it! Stress breaks down immune systems! Be aware that the following items are common stressors:

- Chasing fowls
- No feed or water
- Changing feeds
- Weather changes – both cold and hot!
- Crowding birds
- Predators

No bird will ever be de-clawed, de-beaked, pinioned or modified in any manner. The use of goggles, wattle trimming, comb trimming, de-spurring, or any physical harm to the breeding poultry is prohibited.

Force molting will never be used. All poultry will molt naturally in the correct season.

All birds will be hatched from standard bred slow growing breeders. ALL meat birds will grow to market weight in no less 14-16 weeks for chickens (with the exception of Delawares--which are permitted to be processed at 12 weeks) and 24-28 weeks for turkeys. Genetically engineered poultry that grow faster than this will not be used within SPN-USA.

No bird will ever be killed at birth because of its gender.

Flock attentiveness: For maximum flock care, you are required to *“walk & observe”* your flock on a daily basis. Our SPN-USA goal, is that the breeder *“loves their birds”* and has a desire to spend time with them daily.

Natural lighting is encouraged in the poultry buildings. Lighting with a timer can be used but all poultry must have no less than 8 hours of darkness daily.

Peer Development: When brooding future breeders, chicks in the same brooder must be the same age. Having birds of disparate age in the brooder is not a kind environment for the chicks. When raising more than a few birds, like we do, males and females must be separated as soon as sexes can be recognized. Having the juvenile males reach sexual maturity in a 50/50 ratio with females who have not reached sexual maturity will lead to bullying and aggressiveness. Save everyone the stress by rearing them separately until a more natural ratio can be introduced after the breeder males are selected.

Different species of breeder poultry should not be fed/raised together! Each species of fowl has very specific nutritional needs for each stage of development. When raised in a mixed species flock, usually compromises need to be made in feeding that are ideal for no one. Size of the birds can also lead to problems, as well as the habits of what certain species do. A prime example of this is when raising ducks with chickens, it becomes very difficult to offer the chickens a clean water source. One exception to this would be if using a few baby chicks for a short time to help turkey poults find food and water in the brooder, but they should be removed as soon as possible.

B. Housing

All housing and shelters for the birds will have good ventilation allowing fresh air. This is critical for the health of the birds.

Breeding birds cannot be raised in confinement. It is critical that birds are not crowded. Space requirements will be as follows:

Chickens with pasture access:

- Floor space--Two square feet up to 12 weeks.
- Adult breeding birds--Four square feet per bird

Turkeys:

- Day old to eight weeks--three square feet per bird
- Twelve weeks to adult--five square feet per bird

Coop height is important to standard-bred breeder birds. There must be adequate room for large breed birds to roost and sit comfortably. Coop height must be at least 2 feet over the height of the roosts to allow birds to leap up when frightened and to ensure heat radiating down from the roof does not overheat birds in summer or over chill in winter.

Roosting poles are required: Every bird must be able to roost! When no roosts are provided, birds begin to develop the bad habit of sleeping on the floor. Over time, floor sleeping can lead to feather damage and respiratory issues, not to mention that floor sleepers are subject to the droppings of the birds on the roost above them. It is preferable to have the roosts removable or able to be moved out of the way so thorough cleaning of the floor of the coop can be achieved.

Chickens:

- .75 ft. per adult chicken--must be installed by 8 weeks of age

Turkeys:

- Two feet per adult turkey--must be installed by 4 weeks of age

Tractor style pens are permissible. All breeder fowl must still have access to pasture. All tractors used for housing breeder birds MUST have roosts installed at the same ratio as above. Tractor height must still allow 2 feet over the height of the roosts.

All houses and tractors must offer proper predator protection for the level of predator pressure in your situation. Predators can wipe out your flock, whether it be from large animals like bears or coyotes, all the way down to weasels and rats. Chicken wire or poultry cloth is not suitable as a main barrier against predators.

Cleanliness of the poultry house is critically important and a plan for cleaning and maintenance must be in place at each farm. When designing the coop and roosts, take care to position the roosts and any ledges inside the house so that roosting birds do not drop feces onto lower roosts, birds or other immobile parts of the structure.

C. Raised on Pasture

All poultry must have real access to outdoors and pastures. In SPN-USA we have a commitment to raising birds outside, not the “industry” standard for free range. In extreme weather the poultry may be kept indoors with no access to pasture. However, because we raise only standard bred poultry, if we have selected the right birds for our climate, our birds can be outdoors almost 365 days a year.

Shade shelters: All poultry species must be able to seek shelter in the shade during hot weather. Chickens thrive in temperatures 30 + degrees below their normal body temperature of 106 to 107° F. Their high internal body temperature helps them withstand temps near freezing. However, they can easily die if their body temperature rises six to eight degrees above normal body temperature. At air temperature of 80°, the chicken’s body temperature starts to rise, and by the time air temperature reaches 100°, birds can die of heat prostration if they do not have access to shade. Obviously the best resources for shade are trees and tall shrubs; but shade shelters, tents, or buildings to provide shade will be required if your yards do not have natural shade.

If you are using tractor style pens, they must be moved regularly and when necessary. How often you will need to move those pens will depend on: 1) if the birds are day ranged or confined, 2) age of the birds, 3) stocking density, and 4) quality of pasture. When a lightly stocked pen contains 4-week-old grow outs who day range inside a roll of poultry netting, it may be able to stay a week in one spot. Looking at the area you have just moved the pen off of is a great indicator. If there is no vegetation left or a layer of manure covers the whole area, more frequent movement is needed. Great care must be taken when moving tractor pens that the birds are not injured.

Outdoor areas for birds need to be well managed. Birds should never be living in standing puddles or mud. While temporary wet and muddy situations can arise when birds are living outside, the flocks primary fenced-in area needs to be designed so that the birds can always have space to move about that is clean and dry.

Ideally, pastures that become over-used need to have down time for restoration and regrowth. The ability to rotate pastured areas for your birds is ideal. With planning, this can be accomplished even on smaller properties, but it is harder to implement after the fact. If you are just starting your poultry enterprise, and have any questions about setting up pasture rotation, ask your coach.

D. Fencing

All pastures will be well fenced for protection from predators and fencing should be checked weekly for trouble areas. Care should be taken that trees and bushes near the fence lines do not allow predators access into, or birds easy access out of, the secure yard.

Recommended fencing style will vary for every farmer. No matter what type is chosen, the goal is to give the birds a safe place to forage, and to contain the birds in the correct pens--to ensure both their safety and the genetics by preventing accidental breedings.

E. Health of the Flock

Good flock management means the farmer has a stable and healthy flock of birds. The birds will have access to dust baths, good strong roosts, protection from predators, places to retreat from other birds and poultry houses with natural lighting.

SPN-USA advocates promoting health rather than treating disease. The use of vaccines will be determined by the farmer and their coach based on local conditions and flock purpose. If you suspect disease, call your county or state veterinarian and notify your coach immediately so they can put you in touch with the SPN-USA veterinary partner. If a veterinarian determines your flock is contaminated with a communicable virulent disease, the flock may have to be destroyed and the breeding program discontinued until the farm has been deemed clean.

Breeder flocks are strongly encouraged to participate in NPIP in every state that maintains a program and be blood tested for Pullorum-Typhoid and Avian Influenza. Testing frequency may vary from annual to quarterly based on your state's administration of NPIP. The ability to sell birds and transport them by air or vehicle is severely hampered if you are not current with the required testing at all times.

Antibiotics can only be used if there is a disease outbreak. The use of antibiotics (including sulfa drugs and ionospheres) to prevent disease or promote growth is prohibited by SPN-USA.

If you have a sick or injured bird, provide a safe place for the injured bird to recover. Return it to the flock as soon as possible because isolation is stressful for chickens. If the bird is severely injured then euthanasia will be used. Whichever method is chosen for euthanasia should be quick and as painless as possible.

Mites and lice can pop up at any time. Having a plan to combat them before you see your first one will save valuable time and suffering for your birds.

F. Feeding

Poultry on our farms will be fed a nutritionally balanced diet that is decided by the farmer, the coach and the nutritional specialist who represents SPN-USA. This will apply to breeders, chicks, turkeys, ducks and geese.

Feeding requirements will vary at different stages of development and different breeds require different feeding amounts. It is critical that each breeder seek to understand the best feeding system for their flock and feed the birds accordingly.

Cleanliness of feed (keeping feed off the floor) is critical for the health of the fowl! Feeders should be raised to the height of the back of whatever fowl are present.

Chickens require three inches of feeder space per bird. One other tip is to make sure you have multiple feed sources when feeding larger numbers of birds. If you have a bird that “guards” the feeder and that’s your birds’ only option, more timid birds may suffer nutritionally. Place the feeders far enough apart that they can’t all be guarded by one wily fowl.

Grit is an essential part of digestion for your birds. Jeff Mattocks has an entire chapter devoted to the importance of providing the right size grit in his book *“Feeding Pasture-Raised Poultry”*. It is one of the keys to your birds’ ability to efficiently digest the feed they receive. Proper digestion is essential for growth, good feed conversion, and disease prevention.

Feeding of spoiled or moldy food or other organic material can cause symptoms as mild as decreased appetite and as severe as death of the birds. The ability to properly store feed on your farm is imperative.

Feeding of stale or overly oxidized feed is discouraged. Feeding fresh feed within 30 days of its milling is ideal.

Feeding your birds is most likely the largest expense you will incur. Therefore formulating a feeding regime that minimizes waste and efficiently supports healthy birds, who lay viable eggs, should be every breeder’s goal.

G. Watering

Clean water is essential to the health of all fowl. It is necessary in digestion, temperature regulation and waste elimination.

Waterers should be cleaned regularly to remove bio-film and stop other contaminants from building up.

Like feeders, waterers should be raised to the highest height where the birds can comfortably drink. This will help keep shavings and debris out of the water.

SPN recommends at least two five gallon waterers per 100 chickens, with at least one inch of water space per bird. 100 chickens will drink six gallons of water daily at mild temperatures. It is imperative that birds are never without water. Lack of water results in an almost immediate deficiency of several nutrients which are vitally needed for production.

There are many different types of waterers: open water bowls, gravity waterers, nipple waterers, and bell waterers run in succession. Observation should be your tool to make sure each bird has access to water at all times. SPN-USA does not recommend using nipple drinkers as the only water source in the brooder or the pasture.

The temperature of the water offered is also critical. Birds need access to unfrozen water during freezing temperatures. Water also needs to stay below 85° during hot weather. Birds can suffer greatly from dehydration even if sitting 20 feet from a full waterer out in the direct sun. Offer water where your birds congregate.

H. Egg Collection & Handling

All eggs will be gathered no less than once a day and better results will be had, if gathered twice a day. Eggs are to be gathered with the least disturbance to the hens.

All breeders will follow their state laws for handling, storage, packaging and sale of eggs.

Clean nest boxes will result in cleaner eggs, which is healthier for both consumption and incubation. Excluding hens from sleeping in the boxes is one of the easiest ways to ensure clean nest boxes. Do not let this bad habit get started in your growing birds!

Egg collection containers need regular cleaning. Treat all eggs the same way you would raw meat. Keep them off eating surfaces and always wash your hands and anything that comes in contact with eggs or collection containers.

I. Breeding

In all breeding systems, sometimes *outcrosses* are necessary. The decision to bring new blood into the breeding system will be made by the coach and the farmer. This must be carefully evaluated as *outcrosses* are unknown and can be very destructive to the strain development.

Removable leg bands may be used to determine selection of breeders. Toe punching of young chicks is allowed.

Breeders must always have a plan to move forward the quality or uniformity of their breeding flock. If you aren't selectively breeding every generation, the quality of the birds will quickly decline.

The breeder must have a system in place, or be able to produce records, to be able to identify the parentage of their birds. Full brother on full sister matings are permissible but not encouraged in SPN-USA. Genetic diversity is required to humanely raise healthy, vigorous, productive birds.

J. Incubation

Every breeder's hatchery must be built for cleanliness and bio-security. Visitors to the hatchery are discouraged but if necessary, bio-security measures will be used.

Eggs for incubation must be stored no longer than they can produce good hatchability of healthy chicks. This timeframe may differ for different species or breeds.

Hatching eggs sold by SPN-USA Certified Flocks must be fresh and of good shell quality.

Pre-incubation storage of eggs will be done in a cool, climate controlled place. Eggs should be "rotated" during the storage period, a minimum of twice a day. More often is recommended the longer they are stored.

We recommend that eggs will be candled no more than 10 days from setting, and record of non-fertile, early death, and fertile eggs will need to be kept.

K. Brooding

Getting chicks off to a good start is essential. Chicks from our Certified Flocks are healthy and vigorous when born. Expect them to be active and raring to go when they are placed in the brooder. Brooding can be done in confinement. The timing of moving the birds out to pasture will vary based on climate, time of year, coop or pen style and breed of bird.

During brooding, it is important to offer chicks a range of temperatures within their comfort zone. That ideal zone is where they are not using energy to gain or lose heat in order maintain body temperature. For the first 12 days, chicks are not able to internally regulate their body temperature. When birds are kept in environmental temperatures above or below their comfort zone, excessive energy must be expended to maintain body temperature, which stresses the bird and can lead to poor health or growth.

Brooders should always be set up and temperatures measured with a thermometer well before your chicks arrive or hatch. However, the best tool you have for measuring correct temperatures AFTER your birds are in the brooder are your eyes and ears. Chicks who all gather together tightly under the heat source and peep frantically are too cold. Chicks all scattered to the outside of the brooder and peeping frantically are too hot.

Brooders must be large enough to allow for a range of temperatures for the birds to self-select. Inability for them to get away from the heat source is not healthy. Just like out in the field, waterers should be placed far enough away from the heat source so that the water offered is not hot.

Day old chicks must have ½ foot of space per chick in the brooder after the first week of life. They will require ever more space each week until they go out on pasture. The best measurement of correct chick density is the quality of the litter. Wet, clumped, or filthy bedding is a sign that something needs to be fixed in the brooding conditions. “*Caked manure*” is never acceptable in a brooder. When using a commercial battery brooder such as a GQF Universal Brooder, stocking density can be a little heavier than ½ foot of space per chick. Make sure that the chicks have easy access to feed and water and that cleaning is done often enough that manure does not build up on the wire of the brooder.

Ventilation for fresh air is very important for the chicks. Air quality for baby chicks must always be checked at chick level, not at human height. Direct drafts must be avoided.

Brooders must be kept clean. Management of the feeders and waterers is key. Raising their height as the birds grow is a great first step.

As stated earlier; when brooding future breeders, chicks in the same brooder must be the same age. Having birds of disparate age in the brooder is not a kind environment.

It is important that an effort be made to offer baby chicks some semblance of day/night differentiation. Too bright of lights, on 24 hours a day, can increase feather picking and aggressiveness in the birds. At the same time, if the environment is too dark, young birds will not grow properly.

L. Grow Out

Move the birds out to pasture as soon as it's advisable. However use caution that the conditions outdoors are appropriate for the age of the chicks and the housing being provided.

It is critical when the birds are first placed in the coop, to make sure the birds are not "piling" up in corners or other nooks in the coop. Twenty, one pound birds can easily suffocate the birds on the bottom of the pile when this happens. The stress of moving the birds, the new environment, and for some birds, the first time they have experienced darkness, are all very real dangers. Manage your brooding in a way that minimizes this danger. Rounding out corners in the coop, and having your birds well acclimated to your handling and presence can go a long way here.

Certified Breeder Flocks must have a plan and infrastructure to grow out replacement birds regularly. As stated above; Breeders must always have a plan to move forward the quality or uniformity of their breeding flock. If you aren't selectively breeding every generation, the quality of the birds will quickly decline.

All participating farms in the *Sustainable Poultry Network USA* must abide by these welfare and husbandry standards. This inspection will be included when the *flock* is *certified*. After it is approved, it will be monitored a minimum of once a year and can be visited by the inspector without prior arrangements for a visit. The inspector will be an *SPN certified coach*.

If there is violation of the *Standards* listed above, the following steps will be taken:

- 1) The Farmer/Owner will be verbally warned and instructed of the *standards* violation. Normally violations will be recognized during the scheduled coaching consultation. The coach reserves the right to determine the severity of the violation and will determine the follow-up steps. Our primary coaching goal is provide the breeder with the necessary steps to improve the welfare, husbandry and environment for the bird/flock.
- 2) If necessary, a written warning of the specific violation will follow the coaches' consultation. Upon receiving the written warning, the farmer/owner has 30 – 90 days to correct the violation. The time line will be determined by the extent of the violation. The *SPN certified coach* will determine the amount of time that the farmer has to correct the violation. The coach will also determine if a follow up visit is necessary – if so, the flock owner is responsible for the expenses of this additional farm visit.
- 3) Any violation that includes SUFFERING of the bird must be addressed immediately. The assigned *coach* is to determine if the bird(s) are suffering. The coach is empowered to make the decision *immediately*, while he/she is on the farm. His/her decision is final.
- 4) If the deadline of the violation is not met, a second member of the *SPN-USA coaching team* will personally visit the farm for a final inspection. If the violation is not remedied at that point, the farm is removed from the *Sustainable Poultry Network USA*. The removal means that ALL membership benefits are removed, which includes forfeiting of your membership fee.

Compiled and edited by Jim Adkins & other *SPN-USA farmers & representatives*.

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