

Standards for free-forage heavy broilers

quality for taste and health

"Every creature is what it eats." This old and simple truth, and the observations of countless generations are foundations of the forage grazing method. Forage provides for the health and vitality of poultry. It produces a meat and fat quality which is extremely tasty and healthy and which markedly exceeds that of the intensive holding and feeding of so called "conventional" agriculture.

The standards are simple and allow farmers to use their experience of local conditions to optimise the system.

Forage grazing requires minimal investment in shelter and feeding systems thus lowering costs.

Forage grazing can be used as a key marketing point by outlets wishing to provide an alternative to intensive meat production and achieve better prices by advertising "Free- Forage Broilers".

Breeding and breeds

1. The following breeds and crosses produce excellent meat quality in forage grazing:

1.1 Forez Naked Neck „Cou Nu“

a French breed, neck completely bare with the exception of a tuft of feathers in the middle, set apart from the rest.

feather-free to lightly feathered breast ridge, slow growing, active, resistant and healthy, quick to explore pasture, excellent free-range qualities,

firm, low fat meat, pale to dark short-fibred meat, which has good taste, is juicy and tender

Hens reach 2.5 to 3.5kg

Cocks 3.0 to 4.0 kg

1.2 ISA J 957 white, "MM"

Hybrid with white feathers

are medium feeder "MM" suitable for broilers, they combine the quick growth of super-heavy hybrids with the robustness and vitality of slower growing hybrids.



They are suitable for more intensive feeding as well as free-range and organic holding. They combine the following meat qualities:

fine skin, meaty taste, fine fibred, low water and fat ratios.

Reach 2.5 to 3kg in 10 to 12 weeks, over longer periods over 4 kg.

1. ISA S 457 red, "Red Bro"

Hybrid with brown feathers,

robust broiler with good vitality and free-range qualities

slightly slower growth than ISA J 957

combine the following meat qualities:

fine skin, natural meat colour, meaty taste, fine fibred, low water and fat ratios.

Reach 2.5 to 3kg in 11 to 14 weeks, over longer periods about 3.8 kg.

Large breeders now offer free-range suitable, slower growing hybrids. They are more suitable for free-range systems than the faster growing varieties.

2. Rearing

Free-grazing poultry should be kept together with pigs. This can be seen as symbiosis as the pigs protect the poultry from predators such as foxes, martens and hawks and through their grubbing in the soil expose fodder which would otherwise not be available. Another effect is that the poultry has a far greater action radius when held with pigs. The pigs benefit from the "skin treatment" which the poultry offers when removing insects and skin particles.

The animals need to get used to each other, so the chicks can be kept in a small aviary, above the pigs for the first 3 to 4 weeks. Dependent on the development of the birds, they can then be introduced to the pigs. To give the poultry enough space to avoid the pigs, it is better to allow them to meet on pasture.

The holding takes place on runs, which allows a frequent change of pasture, thus avoiding over-grazing. The runs should have a poly culture of grasses, herbs and clovers. Hedges and trees provide protection from hawks when the poultry is further from their shed. At the same time, they provide forage and the possibility of sand bathing, litter scratching and rest.



Mobile shelters, water and feed troughs help to avoid overgrazing, over fertilisation and the increase of disease and parasites.

Dependent on the region, the intensity and the target weights, the pasture period is from April/May to November with two to maximum three groups possible.

3. Feeding

Initial raising: A chick mash from a regional organic producer is recommended, in which the feed components are known. During the next phase of about a week, the grain mixture which will be used on-pasture should be added.

Pasture phase: The feeding is intended to help stimulate the use of green forage, roots and the intake of worms, slugs, larvae etc. which shed feeding cannot provide. Proteins and de naturalised extracts do not provide an adequate replacement for "living" animal protein.

A grain mixture is offered in mobile round and rectangular troughs.

Conventional pre-mixed feed mashes are not allowed. There is a danger of providing an open door for unwanted components and possible harmful substances.

4. Health, treatment and inoculation

Free-Range holding is the guarantee for healthy animals.

Cleanliness is a necessary precondition. Animals and their waste should be regularly checked for illnesses and parasite infection. Information on endo-parasites (worms) can also be attained on slaughter.

Inoculations are generally not necessary for free range holding. This should be checked with the local vet. As a rule, day old chicks are inoculated against the most common illnesses.

Ailing animals should be separated from the flock. Carcasses should be inspected and sent in for examination if necessary.

5. Hygiene

There is a danger in paddock holding, in particular with pigs and poultry, that through over-grazing illness and parasites can develop. This is particularly true in the areas around sheds, feed and watering places, which are used intensively, and which soften after extensive rain.

The only way to avoid this is through frequent change of pasture, which allows the soil to recover, and adequate acreage.



For this reason important equipment is made mobile, so that whenever necessary, the animals and their equipment can be moved like a wandering circus, from field to field.

Troughs should be cleaned at least once a week.

Fixed sheds should be cleaned with a power washer and disinfected with lime.

6. Meat quality

Recommended final weight: ~ 2.5 – 3.5 kg living

equivalent to: ~ 2.0 – 2.5 kg slaughtered

Age: approx. 90 - 110 days (dependent on intensity)

To show the difference between the usual "chickens" and the "pasture cocks" in consistency, taste and health-value, it is better to allow the animals to get older and heavier – to allow them a lot of light, fresh air and naturally grown forage.

This is similarly true of free-forage broilers.

The meat should range from light coloured (breast) to a strong meat colour (leg). A compact consistency, with fine fibres, juicy with good juice holding qualities are typical of pasture held poultry.

Organic producers are, of course, bound by the EU-Organic-Regulations and their organic associations.

