



Salatin allows about an acre for every 500 birds, moving his portable pens daily.

INVENTOR SAYS YOU CAN NET \$30,000 IN 6 MOS. ON JUST 20 ACRES

“Range Raised” Chickens Thrive In Moveable Pens

“We’ve been doing this on a commercial scale for 10 years and I actually started developing the idea as a teenager about 20 years ago,” says Joel Salatin, an innovative poultry producer who’s come up with what may be the first viable system for safely and efficiently raising chickens and turkeys on open range.

There’s been so much interest in Salatin’s system that he has started hosting field days for as many as 200 to 300 people at a time who travel to his farm in Virginia from all over the country to learn his methods. Most simply hear about the idea through word of mouth.

“The biggest problem with raising birds outside are predators and the weather. Our portable pens solve both problems so that our mortality rate is actually lower than confinement broilers since the birds are in a much healthier environment,” says Salatin. “And the taste and performance of the birds is light years ahead of commercial confinement operations. We use no antibiotics, hormones, synthetic vitamins, and so on. The availability of grass and the fresh air and sunshine allows us to produce these broilers on 30 percent less feed than confinement birds and we have market-ready birds that dress out at 4 lbs. in 8 weeks.”

Birds are housed on pasture in mobile 10 by 12-ft. wood frame pens that stand about 2 ft. high. They’re screened over with chicken wire with about one third of the roof covered with sheet metal that provides shelter from bad weather. One side of the pen is also closed in with plywood. If it rains or gets cold, the 75 to 80 birds in each pen huddle together in the closed-in, protected area.

Salatin moves each pen to a fresh piece of pasture every day. He slips a wheeled dolly under one side of the pen and pulls or pushes from the other side. That keeps birds from permanently damaging the grass so that it will grow back for another feeding and it also keeps them very clean. There’s a small trough feeder in each pen and a waterer hangs from the roof of every pen. Waterers are hooked up by hose to a 5-gal. plastic bucket which rests on top of the pen.

“The pens give us the efficiency and safety of confinement but the vitality and vigor of open range. Chickens receive a fresh ‘salad bar’ every day and have a much more hygienic environment than in a confinement barn. We put birds out on range at 2 weeks. Before that they’re in our brooder house

where we can put heat on them,” says Salatin, noting that he allows about 1 acre of pasture for every 500 birds.

Key to success of Salatin’s operation is his marketing system. He sells direct to customers who come to the farm the day birds are butchered. “We do not bag, freeze, cut up or deliver. About 70 percent of our customers come from within 50 miles, with 30 percent coming from farther away. We send out a newsletter each February to our list of customers and ask them to notify us if they want birds that year. Then we set up a rotating schedule for the entire growing season and send customers a notice telling them what day we’ll be butchering their birds. We’re starting new batches all the time and the system is set up so we only raise and butcher as many birds as we have orders for.”

Salatin raises an average of about 7,000 birds a year. He doesn’t call his birds “organic” because he uses commercial feeds that he doesn’t grow himself and he doesn’t charge premium prices for his birds. “Because of the low overhead of the system we use, we sell at \$1.25 per pound, which is competitively priced with larger birds in the supermarket. We’re not looking for the ‘health food’ clientele like many of our luxury-priced organic competitors. We just want customers who want the best possible chickens at a good price,” he says, noting that the result of that approach is a product that’s easy to market. All sales result from word of mouth. He doesn’t do any advertising.

Salatin says a couple working 50 hrs. a week on 20 acres for 6 months per year can net \$25,000 to \$30,000 with his system, with a total investment - not including land - of \$10,000 to \$15,000. “I know of no other more golden opportunity in agriculture today,” he says.

The system could also be used for layer hens, by adding nest boxes to the sides of the pens, as well as for turkeys. In fact, when Salatin first started working with the idea as a teenager, he was raising rabbits in his portable pens.

Salatin has put together a detailed booklet with diagrams, blueprints, and all production and processing details. Sells for \$15 (postpaid).

For more information, contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Joel F. Salatin, Polyface, Inc., Rt. 1, Box 281, Swoope, Virg. 24479 (ph 703 885-3590).



Hesston stopped making Stakhands 7 years ago but now a former employee is bringing them back.

KANSAS COMPANY BRINGS BACK OLD HESSTON 6-TON MODEL

Hay “Stack Wagons” Making A Comeback

Big hay stack wagons, popular in the 1970’s and early 1980’s, are making a comeback, according to Cencorp Inc., Hesston, Kan., which recently began remanufacturing the old Hesston Stakhand 60B, a 6-ton model.

Cencorp bought the rights to manufacture all Hesston Stakhand products and is exclusive manufacturer for the entire product line, including stack haulers and feeders as well as wagons.

“As far as I know, we’re the only company that still makes big stack wagons,” says Earl Friesen, who was a Hesston employee for 23 years. “Hay stack wagons were very popular before the majority of farmers switched to round bales. Deere, McKee, Haybuster, and Farmhand all stopped making stack wagons in the 1980’s. Hesston was the last company to get out of the business when they stopped making the 60B in 1985.

“We’re reviving the idea because of demand from farmers dissatisfied with round bales. Stacks don’t compact as tightly as bales so they breathe better, allowing you to

bale hay up to 23% moisture without worrying about mold, compared to 18 to 19% moisture for round or square bales. Also, stacks absorb much less moisture than round bales because they have a 4-in. thatch cover on top.

“Our 60B is built almost exactly the same as the Hesston model and has the same bright red color. The only change is that the unloading system has been simplified. It’s pto-operated instead of by an electric clutch. The wagon makes stacks that are 8 ft. wide and 20 ft. long. It has a pto-operated, 6-ft. wide pickup in front that’s equipped with 24 rotary paddles. The paddles create a vacuum that pulls hay out of the windrow and blows it back into the wagon. Next year we plan to offer the 30B, a 3-ton model, as well as stack haulers and feeders.”

Sells for under \$35,000. For more information, contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Bucklin Tractor & Implement Co., Inc., Box 127, West Hwy. 54, Bucklin, Kan. 67834 (ph 316 826-3271 or 800 334-4823).



Water is supplied by 5-gal. bucket on top of pen. Salatin lifts out trough feeder, right, before moving pen with a special-designed dolly.