

Tom

Hen

Poult

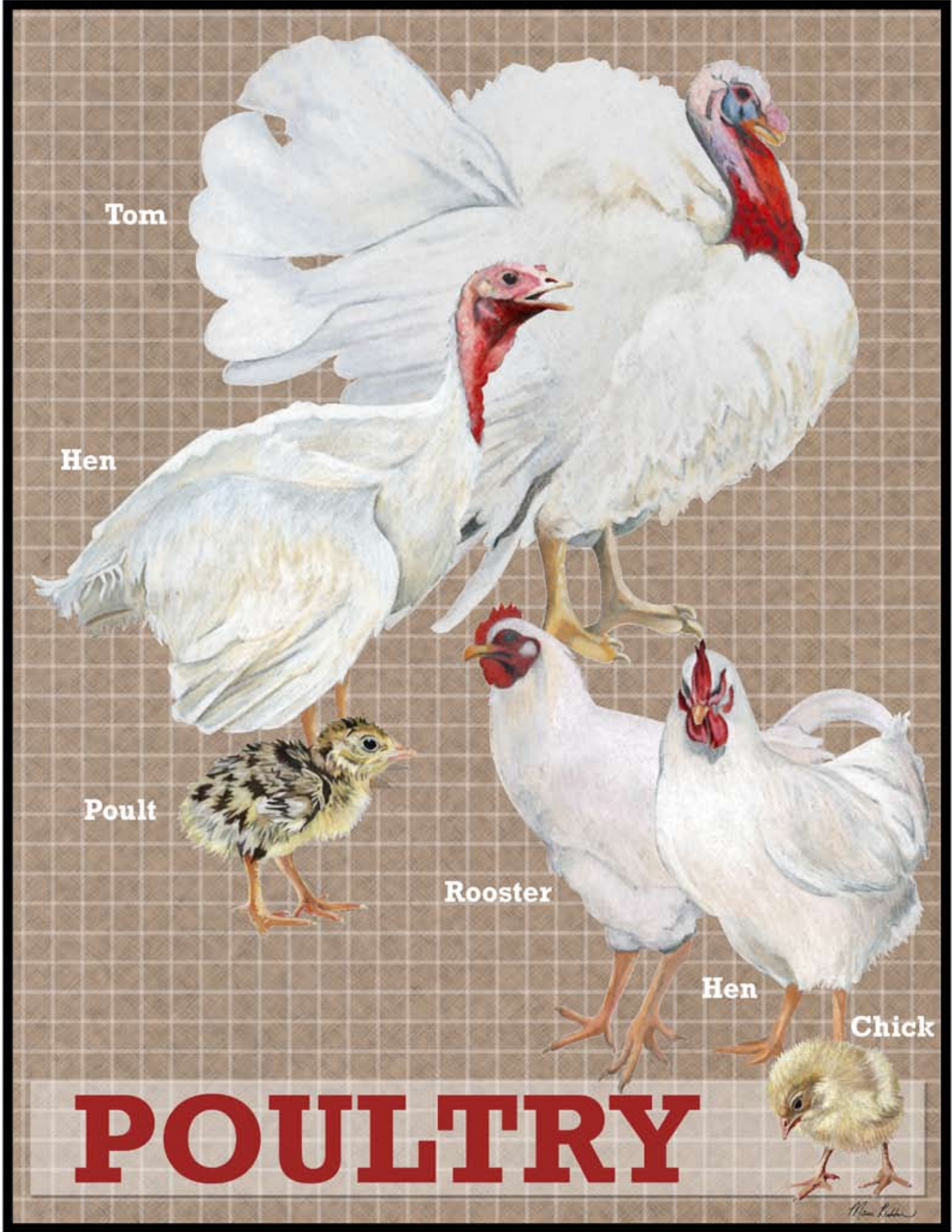
Rooster

Hen

Chick

# POULTRY

*Alan Miller*



# POULTRY

## Background Information

Poultry are birds raised for their meat or eggs. The species includes chickens, turkeys, ducks and geese. Most of the poultry produced throughout the United States are either chickens or turkeys. The only major meat animal native to North America is the turkey. Minnesota, North Carolina and Arkansas are among the top turkey-producing states in the United States. Midwestern states produce most of the eggs we eat and the southern states produce broiler chickens for meat production.

## Chickens

A male chicken is called a rooster and a female chicken is a hen. Their offspring are called chicks. Broilers are either male or female chickens that are raised for meat. They hatch in three weeks from fertile eggs in hatcheries. They are fed until they are six to seven weeks old and have a market weight of four to five pounds. Some chickens, called roasters, are fed for 10 to 12 weeks and weigh eight to nine pounds before they are ready for market.

Broilers and roasters are raised in modern, large buildings called broiler houses. They have water and feed such as processed corn, grain sorghum and soybeans available at all times.

Layers are hens which produce eggs for food. Eggs produced by a laying hen (or layers) do not contain an embryo. From hatching until five months of age, young layer chicks are called pullets. Pullet farms raise chicks until they begin laying eggs at about six months of age. Then the hens are moved to a laying hen facility where they produce eggs for one to two years.

A hen lays about 300 eggs in one year. Then some hens go through a period of rest called molting which lasts about two months. After molting, a hen will lay eggs again for about nine months, but will produce fewer eggs.

Hens are kept in laying cages to keep them and their eggs clean. The cages usually are tipped slightly so the

eggs roll onto a moving belt that automatically collects the eggs. Grains such as processed corn, milo, soybeans and oats are fed to layer hens, but they also are fed extra calcium to make the egg shells strong. Hens are taken out of production when they are nearly two years old.

## Turkeys

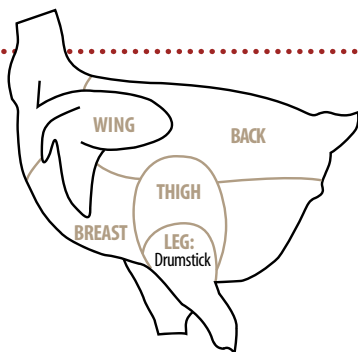
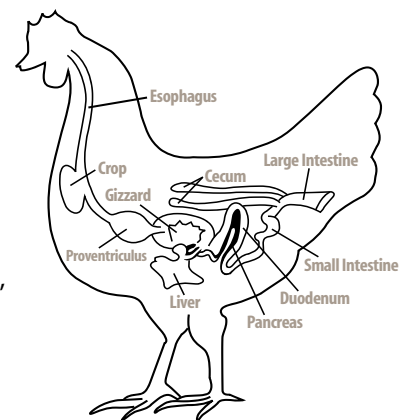
A male turkey is called a tom and a female turkey is a hen. Turkey hens that are used to produce fertile eggs begin laying eggs at about seven to eight months of age; it takes 28 days for a turkey egg to hatch. Young turkeys are called poults.

Newborn toms and hens are separated and placed in brooder houses for six to eight weeks, where they have food and water provided at all times. Then they are moved to outdoor pens in warm weather or to grower houses where they are fed until they go to market.

Often brooder and grower houses can hold about 10,000 birds at one time. Toms are ready for market when they are between 20 to 24 weeks of age and weigh 24 to 26 pounds. Hens are ready for market when they reach 16 to 18 weeks and weigh 10 to 14 pounds. Like broiler chickens, turkeys are fed grains such as processed corn and soybeans.

## Digestive Tract

Chickens and turkeys do not have teeth; they use their beaks to pick up food. They swallow pieces of grain and store it in the crop. The grain then goes through the proventriculus (stomach), and into the gizzard where it is ground into small pieces. Next it moves through the small and large intestine where nutrients are absorbed. The waste is then excreted.



## Products

Broiler and roaster chickens provide food such as drumsticks, wings, chicken breasts and chicken nuggets. Eggs from laying hens are used as ingredients in such foods as cakes and cookies, or they can be scrambled, fried or hard-cooked. Turkeys provide such food as sandwich meat, drumsticks and turkey breast. Along with providing meat, ducks and geese provide down used to make bedding and clothing.