

AusAID renews support for improved village poultry production in Southern Africa

In July 2009 the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID) provided US\$579,920 to the International Rural Poultry Centre (IRPC) to implement the “Strengthening rural livelihoods and food security through improving village poultry production in Malawi, Mozambique, Tanzania and Zambia” project. The project will be implemented over 12 months to July 2010 and will contribute to achieving the Millennium Development Goals by improving livelihoods, increased gender equality, food security and poverty alleviation in Malawi, Mozambique, Tanzania and Zambia through Newcastle disease (ND) control and the improvement of husbandry practices and the prevention and control of other diseases of importance in village chickens.

This project expands on the effective work completed under the Southern African Newcastle Disease Control Project (SANDCP) through strengthening the capacity of the Governments of Malawi, Mozambique,

Tanzania and Zambia to develop and implement efficient and sustainable ND control and village poultry extension programs to improve the welfare of rural communities.

The project approach will include four components:

1. Community ownership and partnerships: aims to develop effective and sustainable community participation and ownership of a ND control program.
2. Communication and education: to provide effective training, education and awareness raising of relevant community members, community vaccinators, NGOs and extension and veterinary staff in relation to ND control and poultry husbandry.
3. Vaccine production and vaccination: the provision of technical inputs and support of capacity building required to establish and support the development of the I-2 ND vaccine and a sustainable ND control program for village chickens.
4. Effective project management.

Dr Rosa Costa
AusAID Project Leader, Maputo



Photos taken by Kate Holt, Photojournalist – 6 & 7 April 2009

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Americans' hedge in the crisis: Chickens

4 August 2009, *International Herald Tribune*
By WILLIAM NEUMAN

As Americans struggle through a dismal recession, many are trying to safeguard themselves from what they fear will be even worse times ahead. They eat out less often. They take vacations closer to home. They put off buying new cars.

Lloyd Romriell, a married father of four in Annis, Idaho, recently received seven grown chickens and a coop from a relative. The hens lay about two dozen eggs a week.

"It's because times are tough. You never know what's going to happen," Mr. Romriell said. Although he manages a feed store, he had not kept chickens since he was a child. "If you lose your job tomorrow, you've still got food." As a backyard chicken trend sweeps the United States, hatcheries that supply baby chicks say they can barely keep up with demand. Do-it-yourself coops have popped up in places as disparate as New York City, the suburbs of Chicago and the rural West.

In some cities, the chicken craze has met with resistance, as neighbours demand that local officials enforce no poultry laws. In others, including Fort Collins, Colorado, enthusiasts have worked to change laws to allow small flocks (without noisy roosters). For some, especially in cities, where raising chickens has become an emblem of extreme foodie street cred, the interest is spurred by a preference for organic and locally grown foods. It may also stem in part from fear, after several prominent recalls, that the food in the supermarket is no longer safe.

But for many others, a deep current of economic distress underlies the chicken boomlet, as people seek ways to fend for themselves in tough times. Even if spreadsheets can demonstrate that raising chickens at home is not cost-effective, it may instill an invaluable sense of self-reliance.

"I'm not into that organic stuff," Mr. Romriell said. "I think people in bigger cities want to see where their food comes from, whereas us out here in the West and in small towns, we know the concept of losing jobs and want to be able to be self-sustained. That's why I do it." Commercial hatcheries, which typically ship baby chicks around the country by airmail, say they are having one of their best years, on top of exceptionally strong sales last year. Most of the birds go to farm supply stores, but many hatcheries are increasingly making small shipments directly to people who want just a few birds for a backyard flock.

The U.S. Postal Service said that in the first six months of this year, it had shipped 1.2 million pounds, or 544,000 kilograms, of packages containing chicks (mostly chickens but also baby ducks and turkeys), a 7 percent increase from the comparable period last year. That volume equals millions of birds, as the average chick weighs slightly more than an ounce, or 28 grams.

Marie Reed, a sales representative for Ideal Poultry, a large hatchery in Texas, said that managers of rural feed stores that sell the company's birds told her they had seen a spike this year in demand for baby chicks, along with an upturn in sales of garden seeds and ammunition.

"People are buying up guns and chickens and seed," Ms. Reed said. "That tells me people are wanting to depend on themselves more." Yet, even as many people see raising chickens as a hedge against hard times and a way to get tastier eggs and meat, they often acknowledge that it is not really a way to save money on food.

"You can buy eggs in the grocery store cheaper than you can raise them," said David D. Frame, a poultry specialist who works with the Utah State University Extension. "You're not saving money by doing it." He said that feed represented 75 percent of the cost of raising a bird. Commercial poultry operations that buy huge amounts of feed at wholesale have much lower costs per bird than the backyard chicken enthusiast can typically achieve.

Jasmin Middlebos, 36, a librarian who lives with her husband, a sheriff's deputy, and their three children in a rural area outside Spokane, Washington, began raising chickens last year. She now has 26 birds, which produce as many as two dozen eggs a day. (In hot weather, production can drop by half, and in winter it can stop altogether.) In September, she began selling some of the eggs she gets \$2 to \$3 a dozen and started keeping track of her income and expenses.

Since then, Ms. Middlebos said, she has taken in \$457 from egg sales and spent \$428, mostly on feed. That left \$29 in the Mason jar where she keeps her earnings, to spend the next time she buys feed. But that accounting does not include the cost of buying the birds as chicks \$1.50 to \$4 each, depending on the breed or the \$1,500 she spent converting the old shed in her yard to a henhouse.

Continued - Americans' hedge in the crisis: Chickens

Ms. Middlebos said that she was pleased to be covering her immediate costs but that she viewed her small flock more as a hedge against an even deeper recession.

"Because our economy is going so bad," she said, "I feel like I have a trump card in my hand." In New York City, where it is legal to raise chickens, Declan Walsh, 41, has been doing so in his backyard in the Red Hook neighborhood of Brooklyn for several years. Mr. Walsh, the director of community outreach at John Jay College of Criminal Justice, has 25 hens and, to cover his costs, sells eggs to a local restaurant for \$6 a dozen.

But this year, Mr. Walsh, who is married with three children, is trying something new. He spent about \$300 to build a coop and a fenced-in chicken run on a vacant lot and is raising 49 broiler hens for meat. A share of the birds will go to the lot's owner and others who are helping him. The economics are very different from raising egg-layers. Broiler birds eat far more than the laying hens, and the organic feed he gives the broilers is expensive (the layers often eat kitchen scraps). He estimates that once he has slaughtered the birds, he will have spent about \$8 a chicken, including the cost of the bird and its feed. In contrast, he pointed out that, in a promotion, a restaurant chain was advertising whole cooked chickens for \$1.99

"I don't know that, for small-time folks, you're going to be able to beat the factories," he said, referring to large poultry producers. "But it definitely will taste better." Chicken hatcheries say that it is typical in a recession for their business to do well. But some hatchery veterans say they have never seen a year like this one.

Nancy Smith, whose family owns Cackle Hatchery in Lebanon, Missouri, said there were times during the last year, as the economic news grew worse and worse, that her customers seemed to be "in a panic mode" to buy birds they could begin raising at home. "I see it as a sense of security," Ms. Smith said. "If they don't have the dollars that week to get the meat they need at the grocery store, they can go kill a chicken."

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"Forage" versus "Scavenge"

Rural village "free-range" chickens are known by a number of different names including indigenous, family, traditional or just local chickens. They are also called scavenging chickens. I would like to suggest that "foraging" is a better word to use: the dictionary says that "scavenging" means to clean or remove refuse/garbage or to search for or collect anything usable among discarded materials, while to "forage" means to rummage or search (for something – fodder). It seems to me that the latter covers more accurately what village chickens do. Besides, a scavenger in the wildlife context has a rather negative connotation. So should we continue to call them scavenging chickens, foraging chickens, or both?

*Ed Wethli
South Africa*

Articles for publication in our rural poultry e-Newsletter can be sent to:

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Thoughts from India

"Like many other things in the world, chickens are as simple or as complicated as one wants to make them. It is for the first time that I am working out the 'plans' for a project focusing on chickens. On the other hand I have lived with, reared, experimented with and learned the art and science of poultry-keeping all my life. It was when I was seven years old that my mother gave me two chicks, all to myself. But they came along with a word of advice that I shall never forget. She had said: "In this family, we do not believe in giving pocket-money to the children. These two birds are given as seed-money. You can take good care of them. Get all the eggs, hatch, multiply and make all the money you want". And indeed it worked. I generated all the money I needed for my books, stationery, gifts and pocket money out of that capital. How could I ever forget those two, pretty little chicks and all what I learned from rearing them, their chicks, their grand-chicks and so on?"

In every NGO and Donor agency that I worked with, in every village in every country that I have visited or worked in, I would go looking for chickens, in their myriad colours and sizes, learning about them and the people who kept them. It was my interest in livestock that led me to set up an organic farm. Among the several types of animals and birds, my chickens and ducks were my favourites. I enjoyed collecting specimens from all over. When I came to know about the fast-vanishing breed of Kadaknath chickens (from Central India), I spent nearly two years before I could lay my hands on the first two chicks. Then over the next three years, I had over two hundred of them!"

Joseph Keve, August 2009, India.

A chicken in every pot Rural poultry farmers need government support

There is a photo of an elderly woman standing in front of her thatched house with a good number of multi-coloured local chickens pecking around her. The woman is Barack Obama's grandmother, but this is a common scene in rural Africa as well as in other developing countries. These village chickens make up 75.5% to 90% of the total poultry population in some of these countries (the percentage is a lot less in South Africa because of the extensive commercial sector, but they are nevertheless ubiquitous in rural areas).

Sikhebe Majozi has a large flock of around 60 chickens. His wife walks in their yard in the Msinga area of KwaZulu-Natal, feeding them as they come home to roost at night. Their chickens have no house to sleep in so they overnight in trees. To help them when nesting Majozi puts tin and plastic drums in the trees. There are a lot of the drums and they look like a new type of fruit.

These village chickens (also known as scavenging, indigenous, family, traditional or just local chickens) are an extremely important, but underutilised, protein resource for rural families, especially these days when food is so expensive, food security has become the buzz word and when there are so many village people who are sick.

Besides the chickens being used for eating, and sometimes selling, they are also important in the socio-economic life of rural communities, being used as gifts and for traditional and ceremonial activities.

Village chickens are the true "free range" chickens in that they wander around wherever they choose. They find most of their own feed, they are good at hatching and mothering young chicks, and they have the ability to survive under harsh conditions. They cost the farmer nothing to keep alive, but their productivity is very low.

Entire flocks are often decimated by Newcastle disease. However, there are steps that can be implemented which would considerably improve the production levels of these chickens and which require little monetary outlay, only some time and attention. For example, vaccinating chicks against Newcastle disease, introducing internal and external parasite control and reducing chick mortality and selective breeding.

Village chickens have a genetic potential to respond favourably to better management conditions.

What village farmers need is to be transformed from passive to active chicken producers using basic chicken-management knowledge and skills. Of course, sustainability is a key consideration.

A chicken in every pot Rural poultry farmers need government support - *continued*

Such productivity improvements offer the potential to uplift the nutritional levels and living standards of rural people, especially the women who, with the children, are mainly responsible for looking after the chickens. Growing vegetables is recommended for people who suffer from HIV and AIDS. However, while this is commendable the importance of proteins in a diet is often neglected.

The Mdukutshani Rural Development Project works with dozens of rural farmers in the Tugela Valley in KwaZulu-Natal. Majozi is one of these farmers. These farmers have successfully implemented some of the methods that have been suggested to improve chicken rearing, which includes introducing a record-keeping system.

Unfortunately, this project is probably one of only a few similar projects. What is required to get a nationwide campaign off the ground is for the Department of Agriculture to get involved, particularly with regard to vaccinating against Newcastle disease. The department should also provide its officers with appropriate training. This would be in line with the recommendations of the recent report "Who Will Feed the Poor? The Future of Food Security for Southern Africa" by the Southern Africa Trust.

Neighbouring countries such as Mozambique and Tanzania are producing a heat-stable Newcastle disease vaccine, which does not require a cold chain and is thus more useful under rural conditions than the conventional vaccines. These countries have national vaccination programmes in place which have resulted in significant improvements in village chicken productivity. We need something similar here. Training and extensive work among villagers is also essential. In addition, this work would be of benefit to commercial poultry producers in that the chances of their flocks becoming infected by diseases prevalent in village chickens would be considerably diminished.

Written by Ed Wethli (opinion & Analysis)

Dr Ed Wethli is a poultry specialist with over 30 years' experience in rural and peri-urban small farmer development.

KYEEMA Foundation Board update, 2009

In August 2009, the five members of the 2 KYEEMA Foundation Boards met in Sweden for the Annual General Meetings (AGM) of the boards. Why Sweden – because KYEEMA Foundation was officially registered in Sweden in January 2008 and we have two very dedicated Board Members based there in Professor Hans Hedlund and Jessica Rothman. We are also registered in Mozambique and operate our southern Africa regional programs from our Mozambique office. Tanya Radosavljevic is doing a wonderful job managing these operations.

At the AGM we reviewed all our projects in implementation and updated our plans for the following year, and look at new ways we can help the poultry small holder networks and smallholders themselves. We particularly looked at ways the Swedish poultry industry may be able to work with us for future projects.

It has been a big year for KYEEMA Foundation, with four new projects started for three different donors in Southern Africa (AusAID), Mozambique (AHEAD), Angola (EC) and Indonesia (AusAID). We now have teams based in Mozambique, Angola and NTT Province in Indonesia, as well as support staff based in Brisbane, Australia and of course Sweden.

The International Rural Poultry Centre, a fully registered entity within KYEEMA Foundation, is managing three of these new projects, which are all based around providing technical assistance for production and field distribution of I-2 vaccine for Newcastle disease prevention.

2010 promises to be an exciting year and we are looking forward to the new challenges ahead!



Best wishes for 2010! From the KYEEMA Team
www.kyeemafoundation.org

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