

Timely Euthanasia of Compromised Chicks

Chicken farmers are committed to producing high quality, safe and affordable food while ensuring high welfare and health for their flocks.

Despite the quality procedures and diligence at the hatcheries and in early brooding in the barn, there will always be a small proportion of chicks that are unable to thrive. These chicks can act as reservoirs of bacterial and viral infections.

One of the most effective tools available to the farmer is the early culling of unthrifty, ill or injured chicks. The greatest positive impact is achieved when culling is performed immediately after those chicks are identified.

In many cases, an effective culling program can improve animal welfare, food safety and minimize or replace the need for antibiotic therapy. Reduced use of antibiotics may benefit flock health, and can minimize the risk of antimicrobial resistance, which is a priority for agriculture.

It may be necessary to euthanize chicks for a variety of reasons, all of which impact the health, welfare and productivity of a flock. The following is a guide to identify compromised chicks in the first 10 days of life.

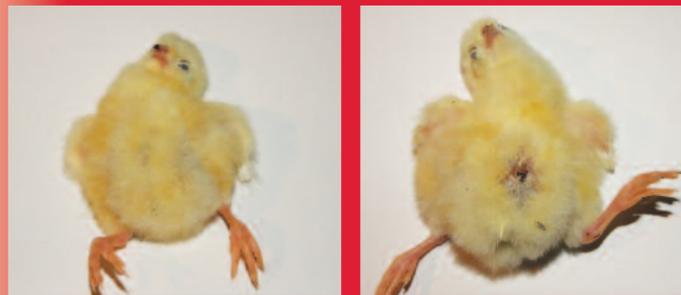


Starve Outs / Unthrifty Chicks



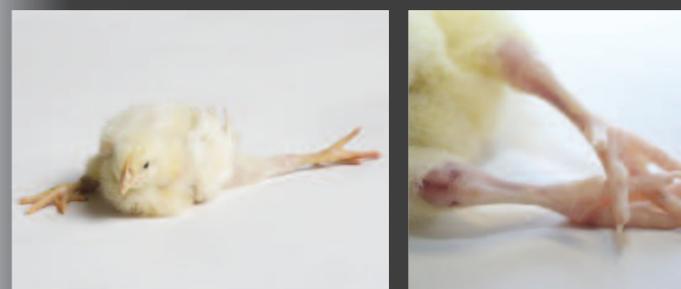
For 2-3 days after hatch, chicks can meet all their nutritional needs by absorbing the nutrients from their yolk. To grow, thrive and successfully compete, chicks must transition to feed and water supplied in the barn within this 2-3 day period. Failure to transition will result in a weak chicken which is not likely to recover. These chicks should be euthanized.

Yolk Sac / Navel Infection (Mushy Chicks)



As chicks internalize the yolk from the egg, the navel is left as the last point where the body wall seals off. If the yolk is contaminated before internalization, or if bacteria enter the chick through the navel before it closes, the yolk acts as a nutrient source for bacteria, resulting in an overwhelming infection. Antibiotic treatment often keeps chicks alive but fails to resolve the original infection. Loss will occur when treatment is removed. Euthanasia will reduce suffering and limit the amount of bacteria shed into the environment.

Injury



Chicks may be injured through the hatching, sorting, transportation and brooding processes. Injuries can result in wounds and lameness, which are painful to the chick. Due to resulting infections and the inability to compete for feed and water, injured chicks should be euthanized immediately.

Disease



Diseased chicks/poults are more susceptible to other disease challenges which will have detrimental effects later in the flock. Euthanizing these chicks early will reduce the possible spread of disease to healthy birds.

Deformed, Abnormal Chicks



Chicks that are improperly formed, abnormal or unable to perform normal activities such as walking, feeding and drinking should be euthanized. These chicks will not compete well, will become small and weak and their welfare will suffer if they are not culled.

If you are concerned, contact your veterinarian.

