A Basic Guide to Layer Farming

Using the

Inkukukaya 25-Bird Layer Coop
Prior to the Placement of Layers

- Ensure that the coop is clean and disinfected.
- Place the coop under cover in a cool, dry and shaded area with the best possible air flow. Ideally your structure should have open sides to help with the air flow, which is critical with layers in the heat. It is very important that the birds never get exposed to direct sunlight, as this could result in the death of the birds.
- This can be a simple structure with a tin roof, and shade-cloth/hessian walls.
- Place a sheet of plastic, or use old chicken feed bags to cover the floor under coop. This will make the removal of the manure much easier.
- Place the coop on bricks +/- 20cm above the floor to allow the manure to fall through the floor and improve the air flow to the chickens.

- Alternatively you could construct a basic stand for the coop to sit on. This could be made from steel or timber.
- Ensure that the Coop is at an angle for the eggs to roll easily towards the egg catcher. The back of the coop should be approximately 3cm higher than the front of the coop. If the angle is too shallow, the eggs will not roll towards the eggs catcher, and if the angle is too steep, the eggs will roll too fast towards the egg catcher and could roll off and onto the floor.

- Place the LARGE yellow feeders/drinkers on the lower level of the outside of the coop. Keep the feed and water on different sides of the coop to prevent feed from getting flicked into the water.

- Ensure that feed and water are available at all times.
- DO NOT move the coop once the birds are in place.
Laying hens are called Pullets. It is best to buy young hens called Point-of-Lay pullets, which are 18-19 weeks old and are almost ready to start laying. The pullets should start laying within the first two weeks.

The best layer breeds to buy in South Africa are Hyline Brown, Hyline Silver/White, Lohman Brown or Amberlink. These are all hardy breeds.

Buy good quality hens which have been fully vaccinated against all known poultry diseases. All reputable pullet suppliers will be able to give you a copy of their vaccination schedule.

Pullets should be sold off as culls between the ages of 78-82 weeks. If you keep the pullets for longer it will become uneconomical, as it will cost more to feed the birds than the value of the eggs that they lay.

Orders for your replacement pullets should be placed 3-4 months before you need them to ensure supply.

The money you get from selling off your culls can go towards the cost of purchasing new pullets.
Production

- Pullets are normally in full production by 22 weeks.
- The first eggs laid are usually small, but will gradually get larger in size.

- The number of eggs laid will normally be at a peak between week 24 and week 50, after which production will start to taper off.
- Pullets ideally need 16 hours of light per day in order to reach maximum production (90-95%), however, this has been achieved in the Inkukukaya Coop without additional lighting.
- If you have electricity you can put a light on in their structure for 2 hours before sunrise and 2 hours after sunset. One or two bulbs should be sufficient.
- Each pullet should lay approximately 320-340 eggs in one year with additional lighting. Pullets may lay slightly less than this without additional lighting.
**Feed**

- Pullets must be fed a layers mash which is specially formulated to provide all the nutrients layers need in the correct quantities. Most co-ops should sell layers mash. Never give them broiler feed.
- Buy the best quality feed as it has been proven that cheap feed = reduced production. You get out what you put in!
- Pullets will eat between 120-130g of feed per bird per day, this will vary with the climate. Pullets tend to eat less during the warmer weather and slightly more during the cooler weather. 25 pullets will require 3kg and 3.25kg of feed per day.
- Do not overfill feed through as this will lead to unnecessary wastage rather fill up their throughs more regularly
- Ensure that your feed is stored hygienically, away from damp and direct sunlight. It is not advisable purchase feed more than one month in advance.

**Water**

- Chickens should always have access to as much fresh, clean water as they want.
- Pullets will drink 250-300ml of clean water per day. This will vary with the climate – they will drink more during the hot summer months and slightly less during the cooler months. For example, 25 Layers will drink between 6.25 and 7.5 litres of water per day.
- Warm water or brackish water will affect the bird’s water intake. Never give your birds water to drink which you would not drink yourself.
- Chickens need water to eat – without it, they will stop eating, and a hungry chicken will not lay eggs or put on weight.
- It is very important that your birds never run out of water, as this will stress the birds and affect production.
Composting the Manure

- The manure that falls through the floor of the coop can be collected and composted for use on crops, vegetable gardens, and pastures or even sold as organic compost.
- You cannot put fresh chicken manure onto your vegetables or crops straight away, or you will burn or kill the plants – the manure needs to be composted for at least 3 months (sometimes a little longer in cooler areas).
- Put the chicken manure into a pile and add the same amount of soil. Any scrap grass, leaves or vegetable scraps can also be added to compost. If the mix is dry, add some water and mix well.
- Leave the compost pile for 2 weeks, and then mix. Move the manure from the bottom of the pile onto the top. Sprinkle some water on top if the mixture is dry. The compost pile needs to remain damp, but not wet.
- Mix and add water (and any grass/leaves/veggie scraps) every week for the remaining 10 weeks.
- Once the mix gets a “sweet” and not stinky smell, it is ready, and can be spread and mixed into your vegetable garden.
- This compost will improve soil quality and help increase yields.
- DO NOT add new chicken manure to this pile, rather make a new pile next door.
Record Keeping

- Record keeping is very important with pullets as production changes will often be the first indication that there may be a problem with your pullets.
- Keep daily records of the number of eggs laid, making notes of any weather extremes or anything out of the ordinary.
- Try to collect your eggs at the same time each day for more accurate record keeping.
- Every week you should calculate the weekly production percentage and plot this on a production chart, which will show whether or not your birds are laying within the normal range for their age.
- To calculate your weekly egg production %:
  1) Add up the number of eggs laid from Monday to Sunday
  2) Divide this number by 7 to give you the daily average
  3) Divide this number by the number of layers you have and then multiply by 100 to get the %.

For Example:

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1) Add the above numbers together: 151 eggs
2) 151 ÷ 7 days = 21,57 eggs average
3) 21,57 ÷ 25 hens = 0,86 × 100 = 86,28%
4) You can then plot this on your production graph against the age of your hens.

- If production is lower than it should be, this could indicate an issue with feed, water, disease etc. and should be looked into.
- See the following pages for copies of a Layer Production Record Sheet and a Layer Production Graph, both of which you will be able to download and print off our website www.inkukukaya.com