

Pastured Poultry for the Backyard

by Matt Stevenson

Laying hens and broilers are an excellent and easy way to produce high quality protein right in your backyard. Managing your chickens in a grazing system reduces the amount of supplementary feed necessary for consistent production. Furthermore, a solid body of evidence indicates that meat and eggs from pasture based birds have higher omega-3 fatty acid content, higher conjugated linoleic acid, and even lower cholesterol than from birds in confinement. Perhaps most important, at least to me, is that fresh eggs and chicken just taste great!

Based on CTAHR livestock extension agent Glen Fukumoto's work with pastured layers and broilers ([Small-scale Pastured Poultry Grazing System for Egg Production, LM-20](#); [Pastured Poultry Production, LM-1](#)), we held a workshop on Kauai for beginners interested in raising chickens in their backyard. Thirty participants learned about animal nutrition, physiology of chickens, grazing management, breeds, and other considerations. We finished the workshop by constructing a grazing cage and visiting the home of a family who has adopted the layer hen system described in Fukumoto's publication.

One clear need that came out of the workshop was for more information on the quality and suitability of various locally available feeds for layers and broilers. Local poultry producers already implement several interesting approaches to alternative feeds including raising worms or maggots as a protein source or using coconuts and cull fruits for energy. The quality and consistency of these feeds and the quantities in which they can be used should be evaluated. When we know what goes in, we will have a better idea of what will come out.

Owing to the large response and apparent interest in continuing this workshop, I will be holding this workshop again on Kaua'i in late April or in May. Also, Glen and I are interested in presenting this workshop on the other islands. So look for workshop announcements in the future if you are interested in learning more about pasture based chickens in Hawaii.

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A grazing cage under construction at the Pastured Poultry for the Backyard workshop held on Kaua 'i.