



**ANIMAL CARE AND WELL-BEING  
FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS:**

# POULTRY



**Q. Why are the beaks trimmed on those chickens?**

**A.** Some chickens' beaks are trimmed to prevent them from pecking themselves or other birds. The very tip, which can be sharp, is removed to keep the birds healthy and safe.

**Q. Why are some chickens missing feathers?**

**A.** Chickens can lose their feathers for many reasons. If a chicken is more than 1 year old, it may be molting, a natural process in which chickens lose all their feathers and grow new ones. In addition, the feathers may be damaged or fall out if chickens rub up against their cages. Sometimes they pull out their own or other chickens' feathers. This *feather pecking* can be a behavioral problem.

**Q. What is that thing hanging from the turkey's neck?**

**A.** Turkeys have some interesting features that other poultry species don't have. The flap of skin on the turkey's neck is called a *throat wattle*. Turkeys also have round bumps on the featherless part of their necks called *caruncles*. The throat wattle and caruncles of male turkeys can turn bright red when they become aggressive or excited.

**Q. Do all chickens lay eggs?**

**A.** *Hens*, or female chickens, lay eggs. Male chickens, or *roosters*, do not lay eggs. Also, just as there are different breeds of other animals, there are different breeds of chickens. Some chicken breeds are raised mostly for their eggs, while other chicken breeds are raised for their meat.

**Q. What are the bands on the birds' legs?**

**A.** These *leg bands* identify the birds. Many of the chickens at the fair look similar, so it is important to be able to tell them apart. The leg bands mark each bird to help keep track of them.



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### Q. Why are the eggs and chickens different colors?

**A.** Different breeds of chickens will look different and lay different colored eggs. The eggs will all taste the same even though they can look different. All eggs start out white, but as the egg travels out of the hen, different colors, or *pigments*, may be deposited on the shell before it is laid. One easy way to guess what color egg a hen will lay is to look at her ear lobe – if it's white, she will probably lay white eggs.

### Q. What is the stick in the chicken cage?

**A.** Some cages have a stick or other object called a *perch* or a *roost*. Chickens use the perch to sit on and perform a behavior called *perching*. Most chickens will perch at night while sleeping. Perching is an important behavior for chickens because it helps to keep their bones strong and healthy. They also learn how to jump between different heights, a normal behavior for these birds.

### Q. How can you tell if your bird is sick?

**A.** Sick birds look different from healthy birds. They are *listless*, which means they have little energy. You will also notice changes in their behavior. They'll spend more time resting and sleeping, and spend less time cleaning their feathers, or *preening*. Because sick birds spend less time preening, their feathers are more ruffled and do not look as smooth and clean as those of healthy birds. Some sick birds try to find a place where they can be far away from other birds.

### Q. Why are some chickens in cages alone and others together?

**A.** If a chicken was raised with another chicken that came to fair, they might be housed together. If the bird was brought to the fair alone, it might be housed alone for safety. As with people, not all chickens get along, especially if they are newly introduced. Housing them alone but in a place where they can still see, hear and smell other chickens helps to keep all the birds healthy and less stressed.

### Q. Why are the chickens digging in the dirt (or dust)?

**A.** Chickens use dust and dirt for bathing and keeping their feathers clean. Dust bathing is a type of grooming or cleaning behavior that chickens and other animals perform. This process helps to make sure the feathers provide a good layer of insulation to keep the chicken warm or cool depending on the season. It also removes parasites, such as mites, that might be living on the chicken.



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