

COMMERCIAL CHICKEN MEAT PRODUCTION

Several large companies produce chicken meat in the United States. The top five are:

- Tyson
- Pilgrim's Pride
- Sanderson Farms
- Perdue Foods
- Koch Foods

These companies all hire many people and are a great career opportunity you should consider!



All of these companies are VERTICALLY INTEGRATED and use CONTRACT PRODUCERS.

Vertical integration means that the company owns almost all the different aspects stages involved in producing chicken meat. This includes the hatchery, feed mill, and processing facilities. In some cases, they also own the breeding stock. All these facilities need employees to keep them running smoothly.

The main thing that the companies do not own are the farms. The companies contract with FAMILY FARMS to raise the REPLACEMENT BROILER BREEDERS, to produce the HATCHING EGGS, and to raise the BROILER CHICKS until they are ready for market. Chicken meat production is usually only one of the many different agricultural enterprises on these family farms. Many of these families would not be able to keep farms that have been in their families for generations without their poultry contracts.



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Chicken meat production starts with the BREEDER COMPANIES supply replacement broiler breeder chicks to the COMPANY. These breeder companies have been used advanced genetic selection tools to develop strains of meat chickens that have fast, efficient growth rates. It is because of these improved GENETICS that meat chickens can grow rapidly with reduced feed requirements. NO HORMONES OR STEROIDS ARE NEEDED!

These broiler breeder chicks are raised on contracted FAMILY FARMS until just before they are ready to lay eggs. The females (pullets) and males (cockerels) are raised separately because they have different management and nutritional requirements.

The grown replacement broiler breeders are then transported to the contracted FAMILY FARMS that manage them to produce fertile eggs that can be shipped to the hatchery. The chickens are kept on the floor because mating between the males (roosters) and females (hens) must occur in order for the eggs produced to be fertile. The company owns the breeder chickens, but the farmer owns the land and breeder houses. They get paid for the hatching eggs produced.

The breeders are fed highly nutritious feeds to make sure they are able to meet their genetic potential. The feed mill is owned by the company and is highly mechanized. They employ nutritionists, as well as workers to run the computers that direct the mixing of the feed. They also hire marketing people to purchase all the different feedstuffs that are included in the a complete chicken breeder feed.



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The FERTILE EGGS laid by the BROILER BREEDER FLOCKS are sent to the company-owned hatchery where they are put in large INCUBATORS. The hatchery has several employees involved in making sure that they get the best hatching rate possible.

After 21 days of incubation, the BROILER CHICKS hatch out. The chicks are then shipped to the GROWOUT FARMS in air conditioned trucks. These growout facilities are family farms that are under contract to raise the chicks to market age. The company owns the chicks and the feed they receive, but the farmer owns the land and growout facilities. The farmer also pays for the electricity, gas, and water needed to raise the chicks. They are paid for the weight of chickens produced.

The broiler chicks are raised on the floor. In the United States, no cages are used in the the production of meat chickens. The houses the chickens are raised in climate controlled environments to make sure the chicks have the best environment for growth. They also receive a highly nutritious feed.

The company employs field technicians to help the growers manage their flocks.



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Once the chickens are ready for market, they are loaded up and shipped to the company-owned processing facility where the chickens are humanely killed, plucked (feathers removed), eviscerated (internal organs removed), and the head and feet removed.

Although the processing facility is highly mechanized, it does employ many workers. Quality control monitoring is constantly performed.

The chickens are processed under the eyes of the inspectors supplied by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). This insures that the chicken that reaches the market is safe to eat.



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The finished chicken carcasses are then chilled to cool them rapidly. The temperature can be reduced rapidly in chill tanks or the carcasses can be air-chilled in the refrigerated room.

The carcasses may then be cut up into parts or are packaged whole. The company logo is put on the packages and kept cold. The chicken meat might be shipped to fast-food restaurants like Kentucky Fried Chicken, to general restaurants, or to grocery stores. The chicken may also be sent to further processing plants where they might be made into ground chicken, chicken nuggets, chicken patties, etc.

