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Hot Weather Tips for Your Fine, Feathered Friends

They say, if you're raising poultry, it all comes down to feed, water, heat and light. But in the summer, beating the heat is equally important. Water and proper shelter can play a big role in your flock's health and welfare. Here are some tips to help you and your flock survive the summer months.

- Birds require unlimited access to fresh, clean water, especially in the hot summer months.
- Birds—even free-range birds—need access to shade in the summer. If there is none, you'll need to create it by building a structure.
- Placing your poultry in a well-ventilated area will reduce the incidence of heat stress. In a chicken coop or chicken house in summer, make sure nothing obstructs the flow of fresh air, and don't allow ammonia to accumulate.
- A misting fan or fogging system in a well-ventilated area can help birds cool themselves.
- Position water containers in the shade. If water is too hot (or too cold) chickens will not drink enough to keep egg production up.
- Adjust waterers to shoulder height. This will help keep the litter dry.
- If food, bedding or feces gets into drinking water, change it.
- Ducklings and goslings need access to fresh, clean drinking water. However, they love to play in water and will quickly soil it. Use a water dispenser that allows only their bills to enter. Put distance between their feed and water dispensers to prevent cross contamination.
- Grown ducks need access to water at least one or two inches deep in order to groom themselves.
- Ducks and geese do not require swimming water, but they must always have fresh drinking water available.
- Baby turkeys sometimes need extra coaxing to drink water. One trick is to put a few bright-colored marbles in their water. When they peck at the marbles, their beaks will slip into the water. Pretty soon, they'll get the hang of it. Remove the marbles before the birds get enough to swallow them.
- Digestion generates body heat, so feed poultry during the coolest times of the day.
- Severe heat stress can affect egg quality, egg size and hatchability. It can also increase the rate of mortality.
- Heat-stressed birds consume less feed, so meat-type chickens (i.e., broilers) will grow more slowly and hens will produce fewer eggs—even more reasons to add adequate shade and ventilation.
- Birds don't have sweat glands, so they cool themselves by panting. Panting can be a sign of heat stress, and the act of panting can alter a bird's electrolyte balance. If you suspect heat stress, talk to your veterinarian about adding electrolytes to your birds' water.
- One of the best ways to prevent heat stress is to prevent overcrowding. To instantly reduce the heat, reduce the number of birds in the house.
- Avoid unnecessary activity. Summer heat places enough stress on birds. Take care not to disturb them during the hottest time of day.
- Signs of an unhealthy chicken:
 - less active than the rest of the flock
 - the comb is pale and limp (the comb is a good barometer of health)
 - breast is concave and the keel bone becomes prominent
 - liquid diarrhea (versus a semisolid green and white splotch, which is normal)
 - unusual breathing or wheezing (some panting is normal in hot weather, but not to excess)

If one of your chickens exhibits any of these symptoms this summer, talk to your veterinarian.

- Poultry experience a major moult (shedding feathers) in late summer. It consumes a great deal of energy, so they may devote most of their calories to replacing their feathers and maintaining body temperature instead of producing eggs. Be sure to provide a good quality feed during this time.
- Germs multiply even more quickly in the summer heat. To keep your flock healthy, disinfect incubators, feeders, water containers and other equipment periodically, particularly between broods.

Have a great summer!