

Ramblings - The Chicken or the Egg? Or a Duck?

When we started raising chickens at the farm, we were set on the “free range” approach, where native chickens would range freely within (photo below) the netted area, seek cover in the hen house, and roost



on their eggs on specially made nests (left photo). They would be fed the usual chicken feed, but not the enhanced commercial variety with all those additives for fast

growth. This was an all organic operation. They were supposed to eke for grub and other natural food in the area as supplements. This went on for about a year. We even figured out an ideal ratio of female chickens to a male rooster, and made sure the roosters didn't battle it out as if they were in a cockpit. We retained a certain percentage of eggs for hatching, and used the rest for the breakfast table; after all fertilized eggs were more delicious, and the lecheflan made from the yolks were much more yellow.

Alas, on the long run it didn't quite work out. In the first place, free range chickens grew very slowly. And when culled, the meat was tough. Even if this operation was more a hobby than a commercial venture, we figured it would be better to just buy chicken meat in the supermarket, even if not “organic”.

So we changed the approach. We started raising broilers. This time, we looked more into the economics. For a thousand pesos, we get about 27 day-old chicks. Feed them the enhanced commercial



feed for the first two months while keeping them in the chicken pens (left photo) instead of free ranging them. Then, a departure from the normal commercial approach: stop all the high-powered commercial feed, and shift instead to more natural copra meal and “tahop” or rice husk for the next 2 months. The chickens grow, but not as fast, but when ready for culling, we at least are sure they are more “organic”. This system went on for over a year or two, with us buying batches of broilers depending on our projected needs. After factoring in all the costs of feed, the operation seemed viable; better than supermarket chickens.

However, lately, the chickens haven't been growing that well. Our agri-vet consultant confirmed that the recent available batches of broilers were now of a different stock and not that good. Time for another approach.

Our neighbor “Joe” in Tanjay is the biggest “balut” supplier in town, even ships his product to Dumaguete. His incubators have an emergency power supply (the cell tower in town sits on his property) and from what I understand, part of the deal is that in the event of a brownout, the emergency power that kicks in to supply the antennas also supplies his incubators. Anyway, as a neighbor and old friend, he offered us the following deal: we buy our initial duck eggs batch from the usual sources in the outlying farms; he will incubate them for free until they hatch; those eggs that don't hatch he will give back to us; he will keep the hatched chicks for 2 days, then we get them to raise in our farm. Finally, as they mature as ducks and start laying eggs, we become another of his suppliers. Eggs are bought/sold at P5 each.

So with a thousand pesos, we bought 200 eggs from an outlying farm. We gave them to Joe, and after a week he returned about 50 eggs to us which he said were unfertilized, and would never hatch. We boiled them and they became “penoy”, of which I ate quite a number and gave away the rest. The remaining balance eventually hatched into almost 100 ducklings, but unfortunately, per Joe, an attack by rats disseminated the batch to 73, yellow, cuddly critters that looked like toy rubber duckies, that our



soon-to-arrive grandchildren would surely love to play with. On left shows the 2-day old duckies in a box used to transport them to the farm.

But first, we had to prep the farm. We had culled the last of the remaining chickens, and started building a duck pond within the netted enclosure, right photo. An access ramp completes the pond.



The following photos show the progress of the new venture.



Day 3, transferring the chicks into what used to be the chicken pens.



A week later with high protein feeds, still in the chicken pens. Note naked bulb as a heater.



On third week, the duckies are taken out of the pens and allowed to roam within the hen house.



Fourth week, now out in the grass.



Unlike chickens who go their merry way independently, ducks follow the leader. No one yet has jumped into the pond.

The math is a no brainer. For the initial P1000, we got 50 penoys, and 73 duckies. Compare that to 27 broiler chicks. If it doesn't work out, we'll have another tilapia pond.

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