

GUIDELINE FOR USING THE BASKET SYSTEM.

1. Purpose

The purpose of using the basket system is twofold:

1. to protect the chickens against predation;
2. to ensure that the small chickens get sufficient of balanced feed and fresh water.

2. The basket

The basket should be made of local materials and the cost should not exceed MK 40.

The basket used in Malawi is hemispherical and has a diameter of 80 to 100 cm and a height of about 80 cm. However, other forms can be applied as long the following functions are fulfilled:

1. the small chickens are kept in confinement;
2. it shall be light in the chickens area and easy to watch the chickens;
3. it shall be easy to protect the chickens against rain.

Note: A confinement arrangement, e.g. inside a fenced area, can be applied as long as the above mentioned three functions are fulfilled,

3. Before the chickens are placed in the basket

The basket shall be placed in place protected from wind and rain. The floor (soil) shall be covered with preferably paper, but also other litter material can be used such as woods dust or shavings, straw or husk. Plastic covers should be avoided.

In case paper is used it should be a small amount of feed spread around. Otherwise feed shall be available on a plate. Fresh water shall also be available.

4. The first week

Just after the eggs are hatched the mother hen together with her chickens is placed in the basket. One hen can take care of about 15 chickens. In case two hens hatch within the same weeks and the total number of chickens is below 15 then it can be recommended to place all the chickens in the same basket together with the hen with the best brooding abilities. The other hen will then start laying earlier.

It is important that the chickens and the mother hen are kept together in at least the first week. The chickens learn to know their mother and visa versa, but more important the mother hen will warm the chickens when needed. Therefore, in cold period the mother hen may stay longer together with the chickens.

Fresh water and feed shall always be available.

5. Second week

Normally the mother hen is allowing scavenging for its feed outside the basket after one week – saved feed is saved money. In case the weather is cold or raining the chickens and the hen shall be together for at least 10 days. However in most cases the hen can scavenge at midday.

6. Third to 6 weeks

The mother hen is scavenging outside the basket the whole day. From the fourth weeks the chickens are allowed to run in and out of the basket, but only when it is safe for predation. In case no adults are around the chickens shall be kept inside the basket.

Feed and fresh water shall be available inside the basket and the floor shall be clean and covered with some litters.

7. From 6 weeks and onward

The chickens are allowed to scavenge the whole day, but feed shall be available under the