

Welcome to Chick Farming!

Congratulations on your new baby chicks!

These are a beautiful mix of breeds and colors, which means you'll enjoy a variety of egg colors—from deep browns and reds to pastel greens and blues.

Important Note on Sexing: These chicks are vent-sexed to be females, but occasionally a rooster may slip through (accuracy is typically 90-95%). If you end up with a rooster (identifiable later by a larger comb, bigger size, and crowing), we're happy to take it back or swap it for a hen. Just email us at farmclub@greatcountryfarms.com to arrange a drop-off or exchange.

Your chicks are just a few days old and very delicate. They require constant warmth and dryness in their first weeks. By choosing to care for them, you're taking on a rewarding responsibility! For any questions or concerns, reach out to us anytime at farmclub@greatcountryfarms.com.

What We Provide at Pickup

- A small temporary travel box
- A 1-gallon bag of chick starter feed (lasts about 2 weeks)

If you haven't purchased one of our chick care kits, here's our recommended shopping list to prepare in advance:

Recommended Shopping List

- 8-hole round feeder (or similar chick-safe feeder)
- Mason jar poultry waterer (gravity-style to prevent drowning)
- Heat source:
 - Heat lamp with 6' cord and 250W red bulb (safer and less disturbing at night; use 100W for indoor setups)
 - OR a safer alternative like a heat plate/mat (mimics a mother hen—highly recommended to reduce fire risk)
- Kiln-dried pine shavings (best bedding—absorbent, safe, and controls odor; avoid cedar, as it's toxic)
- Space heater (great for maintaining overall room temperature)

Tip: Heat plates (available on Amazon or farm stores) are excellent and much safer than lamps.

Setting Up the Brooder

Chicks need a "brooder"—a cozy, draft-free home—for the first 6-8 weeks. Options include:

- Large plastic tote
- Cardboard box
- Hamster/guinea pig cage

Provide enough space for eating, drinking, sleeping, and some movement (about 0.5-1 sq ft per chick initially, increasing as they grow).

Bedding: Line the bottom with 2-4 inches of kiln-dried pine shavings for absorbency and easy cleanup. (Avoid newspaper alone long-term as it's slippery; paper towels work for the first few days if needed.)

Feeder and Waterer: Place in one area. Use chick-specific designs to minimize waste and prevent drowning/soaking.

Heat Source:

- Create a warm zone in one corner.
- Standard guideline: Start at **95°F** for week 1 (measured at chick level, 2-4 inches above bedding), reduce by 5°F each week until fully feathered (around 6-8 weeks).
- For heat lamps: Hang securely 18-24 inches above bedding; use a red bulb and clamp safely to avoid fire hazards.
- Preferred: Use a heat plate—chicks huddle under it like under a hen. No fire risk!
- Keep the brooder in a warm room (e.g., bathroom or laundry) with ambient temp 70°F+. Use a space heater if needed.

Observe Behavior for Temperature Checks (Best Indicator!):

- **Too cold:** Chicks huddle tightly under heat, peep loudly, pile on each other.
- **Too hot:** Chicks spread out away from heat, pant, look lethargic.
- **Just right:** Chicks actively explore, eat, drink, play, and nap spread out.

Crowding/Piling: Often means too cold—increase heat or room temp.

Daily Care Tasks

Assign one main "chicken farmer" for consistency.

1. **Water:** Check twice daily (or more). Always fresh, clean, room-temperature. Wet chicks can chill quickly and get sick.
2. **Feed:** Keep full with chick starter/grower feed (non-medicated is fine). We sell extra bags of our local feed.
3. **Bedding:** Spot-clean daily; fully replace pine shavings 1-2 times per week (or as needed). We sell extra shavings at the farm market.
4. **Monitor Health:** Happy chicks are active, curious, and vocal (soft peeps). Watch for signs of issues (see below).

Growth and Long-Term Care

- At 8 weeks: Chicks enter the "awkward teen" phase and need more space.
- Feathering complete around 6-8 weeks; they can move outside if temps allow.
- Egg laying starts at 5-6 months.
- Many families return grown chicks to us if space/HOA is an issue—we'll integrate them into our farm flock!

Return Option: Bring teens/adults back in a secure cardboard box. We'll handle the rest.

Common Ailments and Prevention

Pasty Butt (Pasted Vent):

- Common in young chicks: Poop blocks the vent (fatal if untreated).
- Check vents daily.
- Treatment: Gently clean with warm water and a soft cloth/paper towel. Dry thoroughly; apply a dab of petroleum jelly or coconut oil to prevent re-sticking.
- Prevention: Keep warm/dry, fresh bedding. Some add 1-2 Tbsp raw apple cider vinegar (with "mother") per quart of water for the first week (may help gut health).

Hypothermia/Chilling:

- Keep dry and warm! Wet bedding or spills are dangerous.

If a chick seems ill (lethargic, not eating), isolate and contact us ASAP—we can take them for care.

Safe Playtime and Handling

Chicks have fragile, hollow bones—handle gently!

How to Hold:

- Use **both hands**: Scoop gently from below, cupping the body.
- Support the bottom with one hand; cover wings with the other to prevent flapping/jumping.
- Hold close to your body for security.
- Supervise children closely; sit on the floor to avoid drops.

Outdoor Time:

- Start at 1-2 weeks (on warm days): 15-30 minutes in a secure, enclosed area.
- Supervise for predators (hawks, cats, dogs).
- As they feather, longer times are fine—they'll test wings and may "fly" short distances!

Frequently Asked Questions

1. **Are these chickens raised for meat?** No—these are laying breeds, raised solely for egg production.
2. **Do I need a rooster for eggs?** No! Hens lay unfertilized eggs daily/almost daily without a rooster (no chicks from those eggs).
3. **Are they guaranteed female?** Supposed to be, but rare mistakes happen. Return any roosters to us.
4. **What is "pasty butt" (or "sticky butt"), and how do I treat it?** Pasty butt is a common condition in baby chicks where droppings stick to the down around their vent (the opening where poop exits), hardening and blocking it. If untreated, it can be fatal as the chick can't eliminate waste. It's often caused by stress (like shipping), temperature issues, or dehydration. **How to spot it:** Check each chick's vent daily—look for dried poop buildup under the tail. **Treatment:** Gently soak the area with warm water (using a cloth, Q-tip, or under lukewarm running water). Softly remove the blockage without pulling down feathers. Dry the chick thoroughly and return to the warm brooder. Apply a small dab of coconut oil or petroleum jelly to prevent re-sticking. **Prevention:** Maintain proper brooder temperature, keep bedding dry, and consider adding a teaspoon of apple cider vinegar to their water. For step-by-step photos of the condition and cleaning process, see this excellent guide:
<https://the-chicken-chick.com/pasty-butt-in-chicks-causestreatment/>
5. **Where can I get more expert advice if my chicks have health issues?** We're always here to help and can take back any chicks that need extra care, but for detailed veterinary advice on chicken ailments, symptoms, and treatments, visit the Chicken Doctor—a free online resource run by experienced poultry keepers and vets:
<https://askthechickendoctor.com/>. You can search symptoms or ask questions there for additional support. They are great for the long term care for chickens as well.

Thank you for choosing Great Country Farms! We're here to support your chick-raising journey. Enjoy the peeps and future eggs! 🐤