

Planning a Market Broiler Competition for Your County Fair



Market broiler competitions are popular at county, regional, and state fairs. A broiler is a fast-growing chicken that converts feed to meat efficiently. Exhibitors receive chicks to take home and grow, and then enter selected birds in competition to be judged on production value.

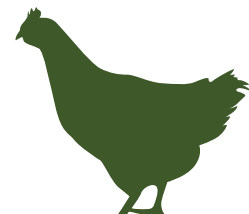
These breeds grow to market weight in 5 to 7 weeks. All competitors receive their chicks on the same day, from the same source. Because bird age and genetics are identical, results are based on the competitor's skill in following proper care and management procedures for growing the animals rather than finding better animals at the start.

A market broiler competition is a good way to introduce youth to animal husbandry techniques. Birds grow quickly, so they are able to see any small change in feed or management within days. Chicks are inexpensive and consume far less feed than other animals. Birds do not need much room to grow or require expensive facilities.

The project can be completed in less than 7 weeks and is good for younger competitors with shorter attention spans. With a positive experience, contestants may go on to enter larger events. Including a pen of broilers in the auction at the end of the fair attracts bidders who may not be able to buy larger animals. Besides bringing new people to the fair, the overall benefit is teaching kids where their food comes from and how to care for animals.

On the following pages you will find tips for planning a market broiler competition in your county.

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Planning

Any event involving animals requires planning. One of the first things to consider is what you will do with the birds after the event. Broilers are grown for meat. They do not forage well and make poor breeders and egg producers. It is best to have the birds processed as a group, either at home or at an approved poultry processor. In some Kansas counties, you may be able to find a small processing facility to do the work on contract. Set this up ahead of time. The event manager should also check with local authorities to make sure contestants can keep poultry at their homes. Some cities and towns have banned poultry completely, while others exempt 4-H and FFA youth from regulations. Check first to prevent misunderstandings.

Choosing a Project Leader

As with any youth activity, this project requires strong leadership. For a market broiler competition, the leader does not have to be a poultry enthusiast but should be willing to ask experienced growers for help. The leader should plan educational presentations open to all exhibitors. The extension poultry specialist or former state fair competitor might be able to conduct a meeting.

Selecting a Judge

Finding market broiler judges can be difficult because these birds are judged on different criteria than exhibition breed poultry. Exhibition breed judges may not be trained to evaluate market broilers or turkeys and market poultry judges may not be qualified to judge exhibition classes. The judge's capabilities should be discussed before the show. Try asking former members of the K-State Poultry Judging Team. They know market poultry requirements and have competed at the national level. Many have been involved in state and local market poultry competitions.

Housing Market Broilers at the Show

Market broilers are heavy birds that are prone to heat stress. If the show allows a pen of three, make sure to provide adequate pen space. Kansas is hot and dry during the summer. Birds should have fans and cages with enough room to spread apart. Do not keep broilers on wire floors, which can lead to foot problems and breast blisters. Line wire cages with several inches of pine shavings. Place them over plywood with a wooden band of 1 x 4 feet to keep shavings from falling out.

Show Management

Poultry leaders should decide how birds will be managed by the show. Broilers should not be displayed as long as exhibition breeds. If cage space is limited, ask to show broilers for 1 or 2 days, and check them out before exhibition breeds are checked in.

To avoid heat stress, broilers should be judged when it is cool. If possible, check birds in during the evening and judge them the next morning. Some shows check in, judge, and check out all in the same day. Check out may occur the day after judging, but the show can be extended for several days if facilities have good ventilation. Broilers should have access to fresh water at all times. Some shows add vitamins to the water to reduce stress. Antibiotic use should be examined to make sure drugs have been approved for meat-type poultry.

Though broilers are grown with feed constantly available, feed intake can be restricted to avoid heat stress. Feed should be withdrawn 4 hours before transport. It can be withheld about 2 hours before the show so there is less food in the crop to interfere with judging. Show management can remove feed just before lights out the day before judging and resume feeding after the show. Fresh water should *always* be available. Transporting birds to a show can be stressful and dangerous, especially when it is hot. See MF3286, *Safe Transport of Poultry and Gamebirds in Kansas*, for more information.

Sources for Broiler Chicks

All market broilers should come from the same breeder flock or hatchery, and chicks should always be the same age. Sources should be verified. Birds that are slightly older can grow larger and finish better because of age. The most reliable verification method is a nonremovable wing band. Many hatcheries sell broiler chicks but you should look for a hatchery that specializes in chicks for market poultry contests. Chicks can be ordered without wing bands or with wing bands for a small fee, which is recommended.

Most hatcheries will not ship fewer than 25 chicks by mail. County show organizers should consider placing a group order and having it shipped to a central location where contestants can pick up the number of chicks they want. Less than 15 chicks per entrant is risky. A few chicks may be the wrong sex or develop problems. Chicks can be ordered mixed (straight-run), all male, or all female. If placing a small order, the poultry leader should choose one sex or the other and accept only that sex at the show.

Pullorum Testing Not Required

Exhibition poultry in all shows in Kansas must show proof of a negative *Salmonella pullorum* test. Production birds such as market broilers are exempt from this requirement so testing is not required.

Selecting the Grow-Out Period

Broilers grow rapidly. A typical ready-to-cook broiler reaches market weight in a little under 7 weeks and continues to grow for a few more weeks. A supermarket roaster is an 8- to 10-week-old broiler. Older and heavier market broilers have more difficulty with heat stress. For shows that take place during warm periods, reduce the bird growth period to 5½ to 6 weeks. Birds will weigh about 4½ to 5 pounds at the time of show and should have adequate feather cover. Shorter grow-out schedules should be considered for all fairs held during the summer months.

Conducting the Show

Market broilers are shown as a group of two, three, or even five. The judge determines flock uniformity, a leading criterion for broiler production, by viewing multiple birds. Events involving heavier birds such as roasters may require pairs of birds to ensure adequate cage space.

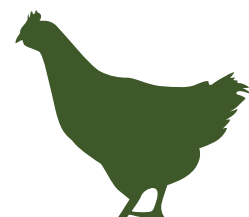
Market broiler competitors must be present. At some shows, the judge moves down the aisle from cage to cage. At other events, contestants move their entry to a central judging cage and present it to the judge. The show superintendent usually sets up two judging pens — one for judging and the other for getting the next entry ready. Family members and friends often help handle the birds.

Bird Handling and Judging

Birds should be handled properly. Handling procedures should be included in the instructional material and announced by the superintendent or judge at the start of the exhibition. Broilers should be held upright with both feet held securely in one hand with a bend at the elbow. The bird should be presented for handling as it is being judged and returned upright as quickly as possible.

Judging Criteria

Market broilers are judged on production characteristics, not exhibition quality. Uniformity, conformation, fleshing, and finish are the most important criteria. To learn more about judging market broilers, see *Judging Poultry at the County Fair* (MF3285).



Checklist for Conducting a Market Broiler Competition

1. Identify a leader.
2. Determine how the broilers will be handled after the competition.
3. Find out if poultry are allowed in your city or county.
4. Gather educational material.
5. Draw up a set of rules and regulations.
6. Make sure you have access to cages and a place with a good environment for the birds.
7. Seek approval from the fair board or show superintendent.
8. Hold meetings to educate the exhibitors.
9. Choose a starting date and place a chick order.
10. Plan the show.
11. Book a judge.
12. Determine prizes or auction strategy.
13. Conduct the show!

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Kansas State University Agricultural Experiment Station and Cooperative Extension Service

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