



CARLA WEINBERG

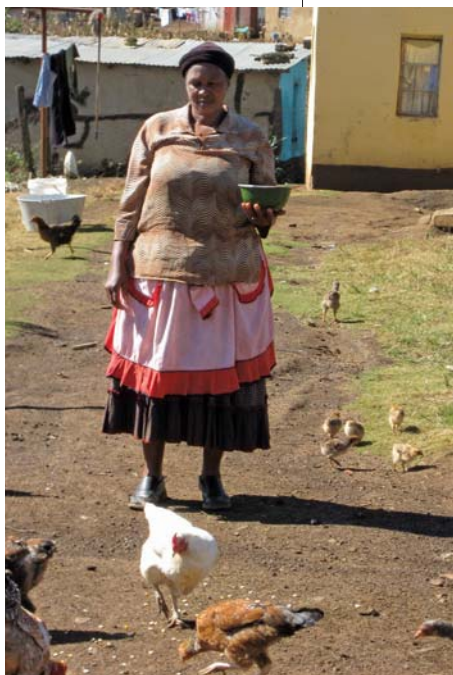
DR ED WETHLI

"At this stage, all participants had improved the housing for their chickens and the birds generally looked healthier," says Dr Wethli.

But the best news of all was that participants were now eating much better! Before the project started, each household would eat one chicken every three or four months; now they were eating an average of one or two a month.

**'JUST ONE YEAR AFTER THE COURSE, PARTICIPANTS HAD, ON AVERAGE, MORE THAN DOUBLED THEIR FLOCK SIZES.'**

Each household was now also eating an average of eight eggs a month. In addition, the extra chickens were bringing in cash. It was estimated that an average family with five hens and one



cock could produce 10 chickens from each hen every year, or 50 chicks a year. Before the project started, families were lucky if a hen raised one or two chicks from a brood of 12.

**TOP LEFT:** Octavia Dlamini and her new chicken house. A simple structure will keep the bird safe from predators and increase egg production.

**ABOVE:** Margaret Phungula with her household flock.

"If the family eats one chicken every two weeks, they still have 25 chickens which can be sold at R60 each, which means R1 500 per year," says Dr Wethli.

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**ABOVE:** Learning from others. Twenty farmers from the chicken improvement project visited the Mdukatsani Rural Development Project in the Msinga area near the Thukela River in November 2010. Here, Florence Ngcem relates her experiences.

#### FAST FACTS

- The 'village chickens' found on rural homesteads have a high mortality rate and produce few eggs. As a result, the birds are an under-utilised source of food.
- These birds have the genetic potential to become much more productive if they are managed well.
- The Umzimkhulu village chicken improvement project has turned village farmers into active chicken producers through teaching basic chicken management.

## Management interventions to improve chicken production

During their week-long course at the KZN Poultry Institute, participants study:

- **Disease control** – how to reduce mortality from Newcastle disease, fowl pox and other poultry diseases.
- **Parasite control** – how to reduce the effect of parasites such as fleas, lice, ticks and intestinal worms.
- **Improved housing** – how to construct simple structures with nests where the birds can spend the night. These reduce predation and make management easier.
- **Protection of chicks** – methods of reducing mortality, especially during the first four to five weeks of a chick's life.
- **Supplementary feeding** – young chicks require a balanced diet. Farmers are encouraged

to grow suitable crops for their chickens.

- **Management of eggs** – how to ensure that more eggs are available for family consumption as well as for sale.
- **Selective breeding** – how to recognise superior, healthy cocks and hens, how to breed them and why it is essential to cull inferior types. Participants are strongly discouraged from using exotic breeds – local chickens are best for local conditions.
- **Record keeping** – how to keep simple records of vaccinations, egg-laying, hatchlings and other details.
- **Marketing** – if a household starts producing enough chickens, there might be an opportunity to sell these to consumers or city butchers.

• **Source:** Dr Ed Wethli



← “That’s excluding any bartering or egg sales.”

Clementine Chiya, the project vice-chairperson, says she had not realised how productive the chickens could be. Her flock has doubled from about 30 birds to 60, including chicks.

“We now collect eggs every day and I slaughter a chicken every Sunday. I don’t normally sell chickens, but if someone wants to buy one, I sell it for R50 to R60. This project has improved my life,” she says.

Clementine gives her flock a little extra food, mainly yellow maize and eggs. The course participants were taught to boil and chop up unhatched eggs – shells and all. This is put down in the evenings to encourage the hens to come home to roost and to give the chicks extra nutrition.

### MINIMAL COSTS

Feeding and caring for the chickens is designed to cost as little as possible and be completely sustainable.

“The farmers should provide a basic chicken house and pay for the few low-cost inputs, such as vaccines (about R100 a year) and possibly some chicken feed to reduce chick mortality,” says Dr Wethli. “But selling three to four birds can cover these annual costs.

“It’s hoped that these farmers will continue their good work, encouraging other farmers in the area to become involved and contribute towards rural food security.”

In particular, Dr Wethli would like to see the project started in other parts of South Africa.

• Contact Dr Ed Wethli on 083 758 1510, or email [edwethli@gmail.com](mailto:edwethli@gmail.com). ■FW

### LIVESTOCK

## Healthy udders mean more milk

How to treat skin problems, frostbite and lumps.

Diseases of the udder can lead to a lower milk yield and need swift treatment. Last week, we focused on mastitis. In this issue, we discuss several other problems.

### SKIN PROBLEMS

Skin ailments can have various causes:

- **Mastitis.** In severe cases, the skin of the udder and the teats can peel off, resulting in raw, red, seeping sores.
- **Home-made teat dips.** These should be avoided as they can cause skin inflammation. Use only proper, registered teat dips.
- **Udder oedema.** An ‘oedema’ is a swelling that occurs when fluid collects in the skin tissue. If it occurs on an udder, the udder will swell and rub against the

cow’s inner thighs. This can cause the skin to peel off, leaving raw lesions (surface injuries).

### FROSTBITE

The skin of the teat can become rough and crack if wet teats are exposed to cold winds or frozen bedding areas. It could lead to frostbite, which discolours the skin and makes it swollen and leathery.

To prevent frostbite during very cold weather conditions, make sure the cows’ teats are dry before the animals enter their kraals or sheds, or before they go out to graze. Make sure that all bedding areas are completely dry.

### LUMPS

- **Lumpy-skin disease (LSD).** This causes lumps



on the animal’s body, including the udder and teats. It’s a controlled disease – in other words, it can be managed with medication. If you suspect your cow has it, report the problem to your state vet or animal health technician. Infected animals should not be moved to other areas.

LSD can be prevented by vaccinating all cattle older than six months and then every year thereafter.

### WARTS

These often occur on teats and are spread by direct or indirect contact. Although they are seldom serious, they can interfere with milking if they develop near the teat orifice. In this case they should be removed. Cattle can be vaccinated against warts.

### CANCER

This can also cause lumps on the udder. So it’s a good idea to ask a vet’s advice if you see any unexplained lumps.

- Sources: Udder and Teat Lesions, by MSK Mashishi (Directorate Communication, department of agriculture, in co-operation with ARC-Onderstepoort Veterinary Institute); Observations on Teat Lesions, by Ralph J. Farnsworth, University of Minnesota.
- For further information, contact your nearest animal health technician or state/private vet. ■FW

**ABOVE RIGHT:** Lumpy skin disease can cause lumps and lesions on the udder and teats. Cattle can be vaccinated against LSD. DH DE LANGE ELSBURG /GEORGE VETERINARY SERVICES

## Blue udder disease

The official name for this very serious disease is *Klebsiella* mastitis. The udder and teats turn a blue-black colour and the skin peels off, milk production drops to almost nothing and the cow suffers from shivering, diarrhoea and painful, swollen joints in the hind legs. The animal may die within a day or two.

*Klebsiella* mastitis is resistant to antibiotics, notes Dr Inge-Marié Petzer, Department

of Production, Animal Studies, Faculty of Veterinary Science, Onderstepoort, University of Pretoria, in an article on [www.dairyconnect.co.za](http://www.dairyconnect.co.za).

Prevention is your only option. Dr Petzer suggests the following measures:

- Keep a cow’s immune system strong by ensuring that it has enough vitamins, selenium and zinc in its feed. (Ask your animal health technician

or vet for advice on a balanced diet.)

- Keep the cow’s lower rear legs, feet and udder clean. “If the bedding, walkways and holding pens are clean, the cows stay clean,” says Dr Petzer.
- Bedding should be stored dry before use. Most germ growth occurs in the first 24 to 48 hours after putting bedding in a stall.
- Add lime to the bedding. This reduces the spread of germs.