The Good and the Bad when raising your Cornish Rock (Cross)

The Good and some history.

The Cornish Rock cross is a fairly, uniform breed of chicken designed and bred specifically for its meat content.

It is a “cross” between two breeds, the Plymouth White Rock (PWR) and the Cornish.

The PWR was recognized as a distinct chicken breed and admitted to the American Standard of Perfection as a pure breed chicken in 1888.

The Cornish was recognized in 1893, The variety used for the pairing is the double, breasted, white variety.

(Dutchess County 4H introduced the “Heritage” class into its 2021 livestock sale and used the Plymouth White Rock for this new category)

This cross was designed for the meat industry as “the bird of tomorrow”; They grow fast and eat a lot of feed; In fact, they will eat as much food as put in front of them. It has been my observation that they always seem famished.

There is debate among growers as to whether to take food up at night or feed continuously. That is up to you the grower to decide. Whether you take food at night and feed for 12 hours on and 12 hours off will affect the growth rate of your meat birds and a schedule should be worked out beforehand. If your birds seem to be growing either too slowly or too quickly this system can be adjusted.

In order to be evaluated on show day, your birds need to be between a certain weight limit that you will find in the livestock fair book under the poultry section. It is up to you to research and determine a growing plan for your project, the birds, and to document this in your record book. Your 1st entry in this process should be the starting weight of your chicks upon receiving them. Your record book is where you will keep your records for things like how much weight your birds are gaining, how much money you are spending on feed, as well as the additional costs involved in the care of your project. Your record book will be due on the date of the livestock sale which is always the Saturday of fair week following opening day.

These crosses are typically grown for 8 weeks and then processed within the meat industry. 4H can also grow “roasters”, which are typically 12 weeks.

The Rock crosses take to confinement very well and can be grown in tighter living conditions than a standard heritage breed would be comfortable living in.

They produce a large amount of tender white meat in a short amount of time with minimal effort.

These birds can be raised on pasture; some believe it produces a happier bird. I, personally, have not noticed a significant difference as to whether this exercise effects the tenderness of the meat; It seems unchanged by the pasturing.

They seem to have a sweet disposition, rarely aggressive to other chickens if fed well and rarer still to be aggressive towards humans.

The Bad…. but not really, with proper planning.

Since this breed was designed for the quick growth of meat, they eat a lot of feed. Because they eat so much, they produce more manure and when confined to a pen Daily cleaning of the litter is highly recommended to keep your birds in good health; You do not want your livestock sale bird(s) to be laying in its own excrement and since they do not roost due to their weight, a clean pen is a must.

I cannot stress cleanliness enough. Many problems can be avoided just by keeping the litter clean and dry.

The water needs of the cross is also increased and this produces a wetter feces.

A good solve for this has been to raise them on a lifted “Tractor” so the feces can fall below the birds pen. I would recommend this, especially if pasturing is not an option.

Pasturing poultry requires the DAILY movement of the tractor on to fresh pasture. If this is not done daily, not only will your birds be kept on soiled ground which can increase your chances of physical problems like calluses on the hocks which are unsightly, you will most likely burn your pasture since chicken manure is very “hot”.

These birds can also be raised on open pasture without a tractor, although because of predation, I would not recommend it as they cannot fly from danger as they begin to grow large.

What to expect on Show day:

All birds are fully inspected upon arrival to the fair grounds to be free of parasites such as lice and mites. If your birds have these present you will not be able to bring your birds into the poultry barn and unfortunately, will be unable to compete in the competition.

There are protocols that the groups will cover as the time gets closer to fair regarding preventitives as well as washing and grooming.

Livestock evaluation:

Depending on class, your birds will be evaluated for general fitness, potential meat quality, and breed standard.

If your birds are chosen to move onto livestock sale you will be granted a cage to display your bird for the fair week and will participate in the care of your bird(s) for the duration of fair.

You must commit to your availability in the transport of your birds to the processor on the following Monday, or the transfer of your birds to the buyer following the sale.

If you do choose to participate in the sale there will be additional obligations, not too many, to the Livestock committee itself which oversees the 4H and now FFA Livestock sale.

I encourage you to do your own research regarding the care and maintenance of this breed, the Cornish Rock, as well as the commercial Turkeys, The broad breasted white. We will also have a heritage option for both the Chicken, and the Turkey available for livestock sale.

Why not do both, if you can, and compare. It would make a fantastic project.