



• SINCE 1923 •

WHY YOUR CHICKENS NEED MORE PROTEIN IN WINTER

For those learning to keep chickens, the winter months are a time of change for your feathered friends in the coop.

During wintertime, a chicken's dietary requirements change as they molt and prepare for colder temperatures and shorter, darker days. Whether you own a farm/ranch or keep a coop in the backyard, your chickens need more protein in winter. They will expend a considerable amount of energy to stay warm, and will therefore, eat more feed. Because of this, it's important to feed your flock a quality, higher-protein feed from November to March.

Here are a few tips for feeding your birds in winter that will help them be healthy, happy and productive.

WHY DO YOUR CHICKENS NEED MORE PROTEIN?


Protein is a vital nutrient for poultry and other classes of animals. During the winter months, the additional amino acids play a significant role in maintaining daily egg production, adaptation to the environment and feather growth for warmth, along with other biological functions. Added protein helps younger birds with muscle and skeletal development, and your whole flock when they're molting (re-growing feathers). Molting is driven by the season and usually occurs in the fall when the hours of sunlight decrease. This feather loss first happens when your chickens are approximately 18 months old and then occurs annually.



Increasing protein in your chicken's diet helps them better prepare for winter as they re-grow quality feathers.

In short, additional protein helps keep your chickens warm in the winter months, keeps their body condition up, and improves their overall health. Plus, chickens eat to meet their daily nutrient requirements. If you're providing a higher protein, nutritionally balanced feed, your chickens will decrease total feed intake. When they're consuming less feed, your flock has more time to pick at treats, and, as an added bonus, you don't need to buy as much.

Look for the percentage noted on the front of each bag of IFA poultry feed. This number lists the protein level inside the bag.



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TIP: Chick grit, scratches, and similar supplements should be fed like treats, and should never make up more than 10% of your flocks' diet.

HOW CAN TREATS & SUPPLEMENTS HELP IN WINTER?

Along with higher protein feed, supplement your chicken's diet with high carbohydrate treats such as scratch, or whole grains and corn. This is especially good in the evening or on cold days in the winter months. Treats help keep the bird's metabolism running at a high rate and increases body temperature.

Mealworms and our IFA Flock Block are great treats as well. Mealworms are a popular option and an additional source of protein. IFA Flock Block contains whole seeds that help keep the birds warm as they continue to digest through the cold nights. Both options help break up the boredom among chickens, giving them something to peck at rather than each other.

Supplements also provide another source of nutrition, many with a specific purpose.

- Grit aids in the digestion of feed sources, such as corn and scratch, helping to break down corn and other grains.
- Oyster Shell helps maintain the proper calcium levels so the eggs being produced have a hard and healthy shell.
- Probiotics and vitamins in your chicken's water helps maintain and/or increase egg production, growth and overall health.

Keep in mind, when you're providing treats and supplements, they should account for less than 10% of your laying hens overall diet. The layer feed provides levels of vitamins and minerals that scratch grains and mealworms simply don't contain.

SHOULD THE PROTEIN LEVEL CHANGE AFTER WINTER?

Customers often ask if you should switch back to a lower percentage of protein in the spring, but we don't recommend it. Egg production will increase as the days grow longer and warmer, so your hens will need the protein to continue producing efficiently.

The final choice is up to you. A decision to drop the protein level will likely lead to your chickens naturally eating more feed to make up the difference. Observe their daily activities and feeding habits, and, as always, continue to monitor your chicken's overall health.

For additional information, visit your local IFA Country Store and talk with one of our knowledgeable employees. It's our goal to help you keep your chickens healthy and thriving through the winter months and all year round.

If you have more questions, visit your local IFA Country Store. Ultimately, whether you like to keep your pets outdoors or indoors, we want to help you provide the best possible care for all of your animals this winter.

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