

Delivering better early chick quality

Much has been said and claimed in recent times about some of the 'new breeds on the block'. So, International Hatchery Practice visited Crown Chicken in Norfolk, England to find out how much substance there was to these recent revelations.

Crown Chicken produces some 400,000 broilers a week, three quarters of which it processes itself and the remainder is supplied to other processors in East Anglia.

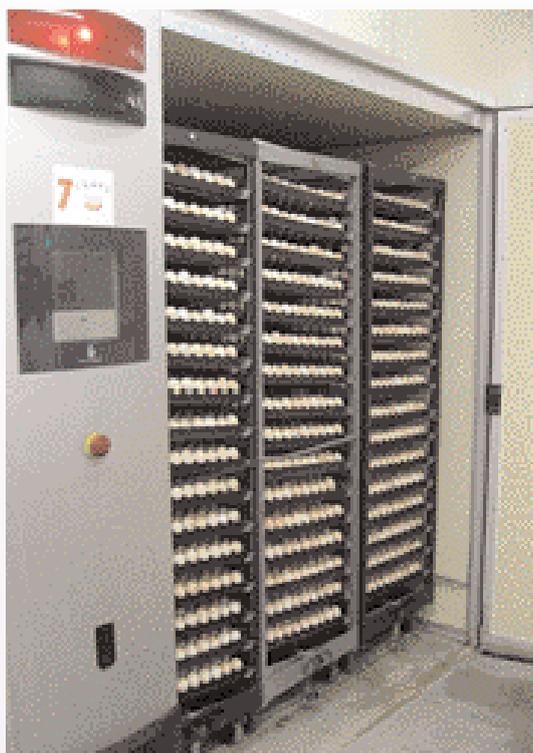
Strong foundations

The company was founded in the 1960s by the well known British poultry entrepreneur B. J. Gooderham and subsequently became a part of The Anglian Food Group which, in turn, was acquired by Hillsdown Holdings.

In 1993 the then management effected a management buy out from Hillsdown Holdings. In addition to broilers, Crown has a feed milling division, which supplies other broiler organisations, as well as pigs, ducks and turkeys.

Currently, the company produces 100% of its own hatching egg requirements and these eggs are processed through the company's own hatchery which was re-equipped with Petersime Air-Streamer machines a year ago.

This was found to be a very worthwhile



The Petersime incubators are performing well.

investment as hatch of eggs from young flocks rose by 1-2% and that from older flocks by 3-4%. Overall, average hatchability is over 83%. Current production equates to just short of half a million hatching eggs a

week. Some three years ago Crown trialled three batches of Hubbard Flex broilers and they were very pleased with the results.

As at that time they were having some issues with their then current breeds, Crown decided to place a flock of breeders so that they could evaluate the Hubbard Flex in more depth and as a total package. So, a flock of 15,000 Hubbard Flex breeders was placed in March 2005 and by December of that year they were processing broilers from that flock through their own processing plant.

Very quickly they liked what they saw and further flocks of the Hubbard breeder were placed.

Data analysis

Currently, the Hubbard Flex accounts for some 50% of the throughput at Crown and a decision on whether to further increase this will be taken shortly after all available data has been fully analysed and the company satisfied that their early impression of the Flex is well founded.

The Hubbard Flex appears to have more persistency in lay and, while other breeders at Crown tend to drop off a little after 40 weeks of lay, the Flex just keeps laying and

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Inside Crown Chicken's hatchery.



Another delivery of chicks.





One of the broiler farms that takes Crown's chicks.

Continued from page 7 maintains shell quality longer. Other breeds might be slightly better in early lay, but when one looks at egg numbers to 60 weeks there was little difference between the main breeds used at Crown.

In addition, the Flex is giving a better early egg size which, in turn, is reflected in the resulting early lay day old chicks.

The broiler chicks Crown produce go on to a variety of local farms that range in house size from 6,000 to 48,000 bird capac-

ity. Typically, broiler flocks are placed as hatched at a stocking rate which will ultimately deliver 38kg liveweight per m².

Depopulation occurs at an average of 38.0 days. Recently, a farm of two 14,000 broiler houses gave an average weight of 2.39kg at an FCR of 1.71 and a mortality of just 2.62% for the Flex at 41.1 days.

Typical early performance results in a 160-170g seven day weight with good uniformity coupled to a livability of 99.3-99.4% to seven days. ■

