

Chubby Chick to double in five years

Chubby Chick is one of the success stories of the South African poultry sector and this success is reflected in the fact that over the next few years it intends to double its production to over a million birds a week.

What makes this expansion all the more interesting is that throughout this growth phase Chubby will be supplying a significant proportion of its production to Woolworths, South Africa's most demanding supermarket chain.

To find out more about this expansion and, in particular, what it means at the hatchery level, International Hatchery Practice recently visited Chubby Chick at Potchefstroom in South Africa.

The company was started by the current managing director's father, Deon Fourie, in 1955 in a garage in Potchefstroom.

Eight years later the business moved to Wilgeboom on the edge of Potchefstroom where the business focused on chicken production, a pork butchery and transport. At that time Deon was in business with several of his relatives.

On the death of his father in 1969 John Fourie and his brothers took over the business, but as time progressed John acquired his brothers' interests and also purchased the two contract growers who were then supplying the company. Thus, by the late 1980s the company owned all its production facilities and ever since then it has been totally integrated.

Since that time some may say expansion



The new hatchery at Potchefstroom.

has been slow but it is done in a unique way – all expansion is funded from within and this retains control in the family's hand but also means that costs are less.

The relationship with Woolworths started at the outset, back in 1955, when Deon Fourie started to supply that retailer's Potchefstroom store.

Quite quickly this supply contract increased to include Woolworth stores in neighbouring towns and in 1969 Chubby started supplying the Woolworth outlets in the large Johannesburg area.

Today, John is still at the helm but much of the day to day running of the business is in the hands of his two sons – Deon, who is

responsible for agriculture, and Johnathan, who is responsible for production.

Currently, the company operates two breeder rearing farms, two breeder laying farms, two hatcheries, nine broiler farms, three free range farms, a processing plant and a rendering plant.

Traditionally, the company has always used the Ross bird and currently uses the ascites resistant Ross 788, although the Arbor Acres bird is also being trialled at present. Currently broilers are killed at 1.8kg and typically have an FCR of around 1.68 although FCRs as low as 1.56 have been achieved in the test house.

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Finishing touches are made to the new hatchery building.



The new hatchery has been sited next to the old one.





The setter room ventilation sleeve being fixed.



The air treatment equipment.

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 With a stocking rate of 20 birds per m² the company regularly achieves EPEFs of 275 up to 290.

The original hatchery is now equipped with Petersime 576 setters and Petersime 192 hatchers and sets just over 300,000 eggs per week. The second hatchery, which was built in 1996, is equipped with Petersime 1152 setters with accompanying Petersime 576 Vision hatchers. This second hatchery sets some 350,000 eggs per week.

As far as the company is concerned these ambitious plans to double capacity will mean 32 additional laying houses, 24 breeder rearing houses and 120 new broiler houses, together with a new processing plant and a new cooking plant.

The new hatchery will have approaching double the capacity of the existing facilities. Deon Fourie told us the decision was 'to stay with a winner' and so this hatchery was also equipped with Petersime machines. Deon was referring not just to the Petersime machines but also to the quality of service they have received over the years from Petersime's local agent and distributor, Spartan Equipment.



Note the drains and ventilation in the corridor.

In addition, the handling of eggs will be straightforward as there is only one setter tray to consider. This means an interesting change for the company as this new hatchery will be the first in the company to use Petersime's single stage AirStreamer setters.

Needless to say, the opening of the new hatchery will be a quantum leap in chick

production, but this has been planned for at breeder level and there will be no problem selling the surplus chicks to local small producers. This has necessitated a new laying farm that will come into lay in the autumn.

Then, as broiler production increases within the company, these chicks can be diverted to internal use.

The intention is to take the new hatchery up to capacity as soon as possible and the oldest of the three hatcheries will initially be mothballed and then used to hatch extra eggs as and when required.

When one looks at Chubby one sees the strengths to be gained from long term relationships.

At the market end the company has had a successful long term relationship with its major customer Woolworths and throughout the production chain at Chubby similar relationships exist, including those with Petersime and Ross as incubator and breeding stock suppliers.

The indications are that this policy will continue to serve Chubby well as it progresses through this exciting new chapter in its history. ■

The end result.



One of the broiler farms.

