

The pioneering challenges of an inexperienced workforce in Namibia

As the economies of southern African countries improve, their need to produce more meat rises. The best way to satisfy this is with poultry meat and it is preferable for them to produce their own rather than to import. For this reason there are on-going or planned projects in countries like Mozambique, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Botswana and Namibia. International Hatchery Practice recently visited one such project in Namibia.

Central position

Namib Poultry is situated in the centre of Namibia as this makes it easier to supply the whole country. Their breeding operation is based on a 5,000 hectare site and currently has six breeder farms, each holding 15,000 broiler breeder hens plus 10% males. Also on this site are seven broiler units, the hatchery and the processing plant.

The hatchery has been designed so it can easily double its current 250,000 chicks a week output (see photograph of setter room). Eggs are received daily on setter trays as there is a centralised egg store at the hatchery. Eggs are graded to Cobb standards on farm and receive a second check in the hatchery. However, as they are trayed on farm there is no major second handling of the eggs.



Eggs in the store ready for setting.

The company has integrated management information that co-ordinates all management data throughout the company. The policy is to only set eggs >48g or >49g if there is an egg bank. The goal of the hatchery is to get chicks on to the broiler farms as early as possible in the day so that the chicks then have the whole day to settle in.

Currently, fertility is running above 96% with hatch of fertile over 88%.

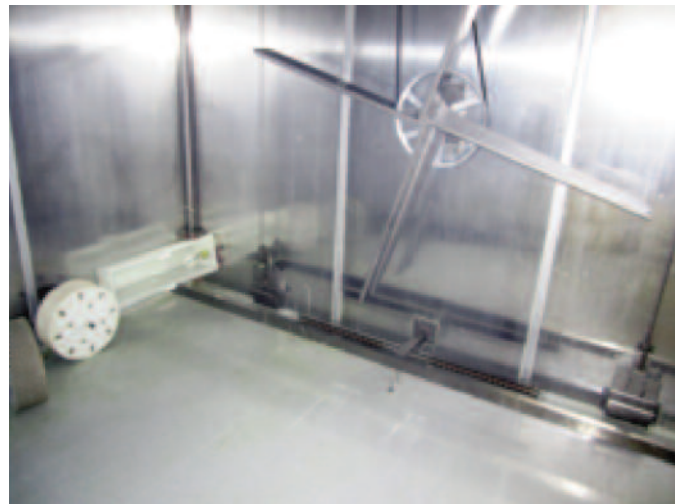
The first hatch was on 19th March 2012.

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Below left, the computer control and, below right, the setter room. Far right, the cleaning equipment is colour coded. Each area of the hatchery has a designated colour.





Left, the hatcher room and, right, inside a hatcher where the design facilitates easy cleaning. Below, it is easy to see what is happening inside the hatcher (note traditional pen and paper is operating in parallel with the computerised system).

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When it came to equipping the hatchery, Namib Poultry chose to work with Dutch incubation specialists Pas Reform.

This decision was based on previous experiences the management had had with Pas Reform, the service provided by their South African agent, the fact that both do not 'supply and run', the quality of technical support available and the quick responses received to any questions.

Staff training

Pas Reform took key staff to Holland for training with the equipment and then continued with on-site training until they were satisfied that the staff could operate their machines.

Most of the staff were new to incubation as there were no workers in Namibia with hatchery experience and this presented a real challenge. Typically, the women worked with the eggs and chicks because they paid more attention to detail and the men took on the more onerous, physical jobs.

One person had an agriculture degree and



he became the supervisor and the best recruits became team leaders (foremen).

As one would expect in such a scenario there were some casualties but, overall, Pas Reform and Namib Poultry management soon created a reasonable team.

In such a situation it was important to have a computerised control system which only allowed one or two people the right to alter machine settings.

This was compounded at the outset as imported eggs had to be used until the company became self-sufficient in hatching eggs. These eggs had a 2,000km journey as they were not allowed to come through Botswana, which was the shortest route.

Design challenge

Another challenge was to design the equipment for maintaining the internal environment in the hatchery as it had to cope with outside temperatures that ranged from -6 to 45°C with one day recently showing a difference of 40°C (-5 to 35°C).

On arrival at the hatchery, hatching eggs are stored after cleaning at 18°C and 65-70% relative humidity.

In the setter area there are nine SmartPro 115,200S setters of the latest design (without a corridor) and these transfer eggs into 12 SmartPro 19,200H hatchers.

The SmartPro setters then provide a very stable environment during the first week or so of incubation and this gives the embryos the best possible start to their incubation cycle. ■

Left, the spray vaccination unit and, right, one of the mobile fans which circulates air in the chick holding area.

