

Out of Zambia – into Africa!

Africa still provides opportunities for poultry and recently International Poultry Production looked at what Ross Breeders Africa are doing to take the Ross 208 broiler into this interesting and challenging market place.

Ross Breeders Africa have a strategy to take the Ross 208 across Sub-Saharan Africa by working with partners in the different countries and, in so doing, to develop that country progressively up the poultry pyramid.

This starts by originally supplying day old broiler chicks to local farmers and once demand has been created to move the production of these day old chicks to that country by establishing a hatchery and supplying the hatching eggs.

Then, in time, when the output of that hatchery justifies it, a local breeding flock is established to provide that hatchery with the eggs it requires.

Ultimate goal

The ultimate goal is to set up a grandparent operation in the country to provide the breeders that produce the eggs that the hatchery hatches to provide the day old broiler chicks.

Currently, the prototype is already on the ground in Zambia where Ross Breeders Zambia operates the whole structure from grandparents down to day old broiler chicks.

Ross Breeders Zambia currently has some 20,000 grandparents and 140,000 parents on the ground in its two rearing

Breeder farm isolation gives biosecurity.



Another shipment hits the road.

and two laying farms near the country's capital of Lusaka.

These are located at Mimosa and Chainda and are close to Lusaka's international airport which greatly facilitates the exporting of day old chicks and hatching eggs.

Unlike many similar scenarios in earlier years on other continents, Ross Breeders Africa works on the basis of establishing real partnerships in the countries that they send product to.

A good example of this is in Mozambique where Ross Breeders Africa are setting up a breeding project with a locally established business in Nampula.

This will be the first breeder farm and hatchery operation in that area and it will initially market day old broiler chicks to local small scale farmers.

Ross Breeders Africa already have a

commercial breeding operation in Botswana and plans are in the pipeline to upgrade this with the establishment of a grandparent flock in that country.

Another grandparent project is planned for Kenya and, from a biosecurity point, this will reduce risks.

Currently, Ross Breeders Africa exports parent stock chicks and/or hatching eggs to Kenya, Uganda, Nigeria, The Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mozambique and Botswana.

Links into Africa

So, why is there the need to establish grandparent operations in more than one country?

"Obviously, national pride in the country concerned is an issue," Raymond Laing of Ross Breeders of Africa told International Poultry Production.

"But, the other very important reason is that countries vary with their air links to other countries and, so, if we have grandparent operations in more than one country we have many more links into Africa as different countries have different air links."

In addition, the company has its own Cessna aircraft which can be drawn upon if required to deliver day olds or hatching eggs where there is no commercial airline option available.

Africa is still a bird rather than a meat yield market and so the good liveability of the Ross 208 coupled to its very acceptable commercial performance makes it an ideal bird for Africa.

Currently Ross Africa's customers are

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very satisfied with the Ross 208 and results of 1.75kg at 35 days with an FCR of 1.72 and an EPF of 276 are being achieved.

At the breeder level the Ross 208 is again a good performer. Good flocks in Africa are achieving over 180 eggs per point of lay hen housed over a 40 week laying cycle at an average hatchability of 82% of eggs set.

So, why was the Ross 208 chosen? Some of the answer to this question lies in the above statistics, but in addition the 208 was chosen after looking at all the breed options available internationally and locally in South Africa.

In this study the 208 came out on top because of its performance at both breeder and broiler level coupled to the fact that this bird is easy to manage and also copes well with adversities, of which there are many in Africa. In Africa these can be nutritional, environmental or health related or a combination of all three!

The hub of Ross Africa's operation is the breeding and hatching operation in Zambia where some 210,000 broiler chicks per week and 6,000 parent stock

day olds can be produced each week. In addition, Botswana produces another 300,000.

These numbers can be augmented from production at County Bird in South Africa who are an associated company of Ross Breeders Africa and are located in the Bloemfontein area of that country.

Benefits of good bird health

Bird health is a real issue in Africa and this is where Ross Breeders Africa have real benefits to pass on to their customers.

"Our breeders are Mycoplasma gal-lisepticum and synoviae free and so we do not have to vaccinate to protect them against these diseases," company veterinarian, Dr Daniel Chitauro, told us.

"In addition, we are free from avian influenza, Newcastle disease and Salmonella enteritidis and we have seen no clinical evidence of infectious bronchitis for a long time.

"This is because of the excellent health status of poultry in Zambia coupled to a good climate and a first class government veterinary service."

In addition to monitoring and maintaining the high health status of the company's Zambian flocks, Dr Chitauro also services customers across the region.

The specialist poultry laboratory at Avimmune in South Africa acts as a reference laboratory for all monitoring tests and especially those for Salmonella enteritidis. This reference role is important as it is a key aspect in the company's comprehensive quality assurance programme.

All testing and certification for export purposes is controlled by official



Chick pulling.

Zambian Government veterinarians who also undertake independent testing of the flocks for salmonella.

Another facet of this is that all hatching eggs that are exported come from flocks with known, tested and proven hatchabilities.

So, what about the future? The goal is that Ross Breeders will become the major supplier of broiler breeder stock in Sub-Saharan Africa and to do this they are prepared to invest in at least nine African countries with their local partners and West Africa is also in their sights.

Africa is a continent of dreams and disappointments but with the firm foundations that Ross Africa has in Zambia, Ross should have no problems in realising the former. ■

