Delaware
« Approximately 70 percent of cash farm income comes from meat chickens.
« Delaware ranked 8th among the states in pounds of chickens produced in 2015 with 1.76 billion pounds.
« The average live weight of a Delaware-produced broiler chicken was 7.2 pounds.

Maryland
« Approximately 35 percent of cash farm income comes from meat chickens.
« Maryland ranked 10th among the states in pounds of chickens produced in 2015 with 1.73 billion pounds.
« The average live weight of a Maryland-produced broiler chicken was 5.7 pounds.

Virginia
« Approximately 21 percent of cash farm income comes from meat chickens.
« Virginia ranked 11th among the states in pounds of chickens produced in 2015 with 1.47 billion pounds.
« The average live weight of a Virginia-produced broiler chicken was 5.6 pounds.

Chickens, chickens everywhere!
In 2016, more than 594 million chickens were produced on Delmarva, amounting to 4.1 billion pounds of meat and a wholesale value of $3.2 billion.

The broiler industry started right here on Delmarva.
And it got going by accident — all the way back in 1923.

That’s when Cecile Steele of Ocean View, Del. ordered 50 baby chicks for her farm, planning to keep them for their eggs. The hatchery made a mistake and sent her 500 instead! She decided to raise the extra chicks to sell for meat. After 16 weeks she sold the chickens for 62¢ per pound. That’s about $5 per pound in today’s money! She decided to order more chicks, and by 1928 her farm was raising 25,000 chickens. Since the 1920s, Sussex County — the birthplace of the industry — has remained the number-one meat chicken producing county in the country.

Delmarva’s poultry companies: growth and consolidation
In the early days, poultry growers did business with many different companies. Farmers had to purchase chicks from a local hatchery and feed from independent feed mills. Their grown chickens were sold to buyers, called “brokers,” who in turn sold the birds to a processing company. In the 1950s and 1960s, mergers allowed chicken growers to enter into a contract with a single poultry company. That company owned the hatchery, provided the feed, paid the farmer for his or her work to grow the chickens, and processed the meat for sale to the public. This merging of operations is known as vertical integration, and companies owning all phases of chicken production are called “integrators.”

Over the years, there were many poultry companies operating on Delmarva. Today there are five integrators in the region: Allen Harim, Amick Farms, Mountaire Farms, Perdue Farms, and Tyson Foods. Each one operates its own hatcheries, feed mills, and processing plants, and has its own network of growers it contracts with to raise chickens.
The life of a Delmarva chicken

Every Delmarva chicken begins life in an egg. After being laid, the egg spends 21 days at a hatchery. Once the baby chick hatches, it is sorted and delivered to a farm. For the next 6 to 9 weeks the baby chick will grow in a large, high-tech chicken house at a family farm. Feed and water are provided automatically. The temperature is kept just right. When the chickens are fully grown, they are taken to a processing plant and then find their way to our plates!

Sustainability and chicken

The chicken industry is one of the most regulated in the country. Growers follow nutrient management plans, install planted buffers around their houses, and work to be good neighbors to those around them. Water quality in the Chesapeake Bay and other waterways is improving, which environmentalists say is a credit to the care farmers show for the land.

You can draw a baby chick!

Start with an egg shape, and in 3 easy steps you can draw your own chicken. Just add two eyes and a beak. Then draw a wing, followed by two legs. Watch out, Michaelangelo!

Did you know...

A chicken grown for meat is called a broiler. Delmarva-raised chickens are eaten in more than 30 states and in many countries around the world. Hormones are never given to chickens. Good breeding, growers’ care and proper nutrition account for bird size.

Delmarva Poultry Industry, Inc.

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