

How to get a top efficiency score from your broilers

An increasing number of broiler growers routinely break the European production efficiency factor (EPEF) 400 barrier, *Philip Clarke* finds out how they do it

A few years back, broiler genetics company Aviagen launched its Ross 400 club, designed to recognise those producers who are achieving a European production efficiency factor of more than 400.

As each month goes by, a few more producers achieve that landmark of flock performance, and last November one grower even topped the 450 mark.

But there is no doubt that an EPEF of 400-plus remains a significant challenge. Here, farmers and consultants reveal how it's done.



JIM VARNEY

HARRY SHEPHERD is one of the rising stars of the broiler sector, having built his first shed for 38,000 pre-sexed broilers in 2013. He has already exceeded the EPEF 400 mark on three occasions, including a score of 430.

Getting chicks off to a great start is crucial, he says. "I get the floor temperature up to 32-33C for the first two days, give them plenty of feed and water and ensure an even spread. There is no doubt that they

are attracted to the barriers [he separates out the cockerels], so I make sure there is extra feed in that area."

Thereafter, it's all about attention to detail – for example keeping drinker height at the right level. "Up to 10 days old, I keep them at eye level, but then I raise them quite high, so the water goes nice and easily down the throat, rather than on to the floor. This avoids wet litter and makes for a healthier bird."

Feed is also important, and Mr Shepherd has recently changed the diet, reducing the level of wheat in the finisher rations from 10% to 7.5%, and taking it out altogether in the withdrawal period. "A lot of wheat was passing straight through the bird in the later stages. It was expensive and was getting wasted."

He has also adopted the Flockman system of controlled light and feeding, and this is contributing to better EPEF scores, he says.

"Many in the industry think so long as the birds have plenty of food and water they will be fine. But with Flockman, the birds are much more active, running around when the lights come on, which makes them healthier and gives them stronger legs.

"When the feeders come on, they stuff themselves, then sit down to digest it. The big difference is that I am getting far fewer heart attacks compared with ad-lib feed, which means better liveability, healthier birds and better FCR."

TOP TIP

Ensure drinkers are at exactly the right height to prevent spillage