

At best, bamboo baskets covered with dry grass or banana leaves are placed under the housed hens to serve as nests, and the trees that grow on premises serve as their perches. Despite all these, a native chicken lays about 40–60 eggs in a year. However, recent findings showed that when properly managed and fed with the right quality and amount of feeds, the native hen can produce as much as 130–200 eggs in a year (Roxas, 1997).



For more information, please contact:

The Consortium Director

Western Visayas Agriculture and Resources
Research and Development Consortium
(WESVARRDEC)

University of the Philippines in the Visayas (UPV)

General Luna St., Iloilo City

Tel. No.: (033) 335-0630

Fax No.: (033) 508-9965

E-mail: wesvarrdec_upv@yahoo.com

Website: <http://www.wesvarrdec.org>

Dr. Patricio S. Faylon

Executive Director

PCARRD, Los Baños, Laguna

Tel. Nos.: (049) 536-0014 to 20

Fax Nos. (049) 536-0016/536-7922

E-mail: pcarrd@pcarrd.dost.gov.ph

Website: <http://www.pcarrd.dost.gov.ph>

The 'Darag' Native Chicken



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Philippine Council for Agriculture,
Forestry and Natural Resources
Research and Development (PCARRD)
Department of Science and Technology

Background

Zoologically, the native chicken belongs to the genus *Gallus* of the family Phasianae. The domestic chicken is simply called *Gallus domesticus*.

The wild ancestors of the domestic chicken probably originated in Southeast Asia, and four species of these wild jungle fowls are still known in the area. These are: *Gallus gallus*, the red jungle fowl; *Gallus layette*, the Ceylonese jungle fowl; *Gallus sonnerati*, the gray jungle fowl; and *Gallus various*, the black or green jungle fowl.

However, the red jungle fowl has the widest distribution of the wild species and may well be the chief ancestor of the modern breeds (Nesheim et al., 1979).

Description

The early domesticated native chickens still resemble their wild ancestors in many characteristics. The wild adult male has a shiny red plumage with light brown hackle and black tail feathers while the female has flat yellowish-brownish plumage. The native chicken's combs are of single type, and the color of their shanks ranges from yellow to gray. The combined effects of mutation, natural selection, selection for cockfighting, and the indiscriminate crossing with the exotic stocks led to the evolution of the so-called indigenous chickens.

Some of the Philippine native chickens that are raised in the backyard of many farmers in the rural areas still resemble their wild ancestral



type. They are nervous, flighty, but the female has strong maternal instincts. They are hardy and can reproduce and survive with minimal care and management (Arboleda, 1987).

In the Philippines, native chickens constitute a large portion of the total chicken population. For many years, these chickens have been part of the natural setting and provide additional sources of income for so many rural farmers (Lambio, 1993).

The 'Darag'

'Darag' is a general term used for the Philippine native chicken strain indigenous to and most dominant in Western Visayas. It evolved from the Red Jungle fowl (*Gallus gallus bankiva*).

The male locally called 'labuyo' has red wing and hackle and black feathers and tail.

The female, also called Darag, is typically yellowish-brown.

The comb is single, the earlobe is whitish and the shank is gray for both male and female. The adult male weighs an average of 1.3 kg while the female weighs an average of 1.0 kg.



The Stages of Development

1. Mature Darag hens, called breeders, lay the eggs.
2. Eggs will hatch from 18–21 days.
3. Chicks go through brooding stage from the first week to the 20th day.
4. From 21 to 45 days, chicks go through the "hardening" stage. During hardening, chicks are prepared for the rugged conditions of the environment, thus, improving their livability.

5. "Hardened" chicks are then left to grow in the field.
6. At 75–120 days, the chickens are mature and ready for slaughter.

Benefits

Slowly, the value of native chicken is being recognized. In addition to its common contribution in the form of eggs and meat, a source of additional income to the rural farmers during lean months of the year, and as object for recreation in the form of cockfighting, many people in the urban areas are now looking at the native chicken as a source of nutritious food.

City residents who lead a more sedentary life prefer food that are low in cholesterol. Their preference is now shifting to the eggs coming from native chicken which, being small, are also believed to supply a small amount of cholesterol. Aside from that, native birds and eggs are tastier and more savory than the improved breeds. This explains why, kilo for kilo, native poultry products are more costly than the exotic breeds (Cocjin, 1989).

In 1998, PCARRD finally characterized the Philippine native chicken as the common backyard fowl, which is a mixture of different breeds. They are small, active, sensitive and capable of great flight when frightened. The hens are fairly good sitters and mothers, but unlike the native cocks that are being raised for cockfighting and fed with best feeds and sheltered comfortably, the native hens are not good in nests.

