

How to determine the right drinker for the job

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With all of the different drinkers on the market, it's not surprising some poultry producers get confused and make the wrong choice. For instance, a drinker designed for broilers will likely fail if used in a broiler breeder/parent stock operation because broiler breeders are more aggressive when drinking. Their strong pecking wears the smaller nipple-type drinker made for broilers to the point where they leak or have excessive discharge when triggered.

In this article, we intend to discuss the different types of birds and the type of drinker that addresses the needs of those birds.

Broilers

Throughout the production cycle broilers are raised on the same drinkers. This requires a drinker with a trigger pin that even a day-old can activate. The water pressure and height of the drinking line should be easy to adjust as the birds grow. And, the system should not leak or discharge too much water.

Anything that interferes with the birds getting all of the water they want and need will negatively affect growth and feed conversion rates.

Commercial layers

Layers (commercial layers 18 weeks and older) need a more rugged, specially designed drinker because they are mature birds throughout the entire production cycle. A problem many producers have experienced is the birds' movement and the operation of feeding and ventilation equipment causes cages and aviary systems to vibrate. This can result in the ball in the drinker rattling off its seat causing the drinker to leak. This results in wet floors, pits and belts — a very

unhealthy environment for the birds. Some producers respond to this situation by using drinkers with catch cups.

At Ziggity, we view catch or drip cups, whether used in a battery cage system or one of the alternative housing systems, an unsuitable choice. Whatever is in the poultry house can, and will, end up in the drip cups, fouling the water. Also, catch cups allow for bird-to-bird cross contamination.

Drinkers for commercial layers need heavier shut off balls. The ball-to-seat contact point should be higher, which means more of the ball's weight is below the seat. This helps prevent inadvertent seepage.

Broiler breeders/parent stock

Broiler breeders — called parent stock in some parts of the world — are large (7.7 lbs. or 3.5 kg) birds. They strike the drinker with such force that they can wear out conventionally sized drinkers within a few short years, resulting in wet pits and slats. The Ziggity Big Z drinker is much larger in size and weight and as a result far more wear resistant. It also features a twin-lock design to keep it secure on the pipe. The hard pecking from these birds would simply knock a standard single-lock drinker off the saddle and cause water spills.

Turkeys

When enclosed watering systems began achieving better results in broiler flocks, turkey farmers asked if that technology could apply to their situation.

However, research revealed that turkeys and chickens drink in very different ways. Chickens from Day One peck at a nipple-type drinker to activate it. Most day-old turkey poults can drink effectively from a nipple-type drinker; but within 10 days, their eye-to-beak coordination begins to fail. Many poults simply cannot connect properly with a drinker's trigger pin. The older the poult, the more pronounced the problem, resulting in poor overall performance.

Turkeys, in general, need a drinker that presents a larger target to compensate for their poor eye-to-beak coordination.

What is needed for turkeys is a drinker as rugged as those used for broiler breeders with a tray connected to the trigger pin. The turkeys drink the small reserve of water that is present in the tray; and while doing so, their necks push the tray to the side. This replenishes the water they have consumed.

Such a semi-enclosed system exposes only small amounts of water to the poultry house environment and that water changes frequently. This keeps the bacterial load to a minimum.

As the birds mature, producers need to change to a system that can survive the aggressive turkey behavior. Ziggity developed the T-Max™ drinker for adult male and female turkeys. Ziggity engineered the T-Max to tip and rotate as the birds drink. This rotating action swishes the water around, self-cleaning the drinker. No manual scrubbing is required. Ziggity also designed the T-Max with a shock-absorbing stem that allows the entire drinker to give. This eliminates breakage and potential leaks. The T-Max is based on Ziggity's poult drinker, the industry leader for many years.

Choosing the wrong drinker for a poultry operation can have disastrous and costly consequences. It would behoove a producer, especially a novice, to study the choices carefully and consult with experts about the type of drinker to employ.