

from North Carolina State University at Raleigh / Extension Poultry Science

Ranging Turkeys — Planning and Management

Approximately 70 percent of all turkeys produced in North Carolina are finished to market weights within fenced pastures or ranges. Turkeys usually are moved from the brooder house to range at 8-10 weeks of age, age at movement being affected by season and location within the state.

Factors Influencing Range Planning and Management

Because of variations in soil type, drainage, climate, presence or absence of timber growth and other factors, no single range management program can be used by all of the North Carolina's turkey growers. However, there are basic factors in planning and managing turkey ranges which are applicable to all North Carolina turkey growers.

Selection of Range Site

Selection of the most suitable range environment is extremely important. In selecting an area on which to range turkeys, you will want to consider the following points:

(1) **Soil Type and Drainage.** Soil type will be dictated to some extent by the geographical area in which the turkeys will be located. The very sandy soils found in the southern and north-eastern sections of North Carolina are well suited for ranging turkeys. In these areas, ranges can be constructed on terrain with little or no slope.

In the western and northern Piedmont sections of North Carolina, ranges must be constructed on sloping ground. In these areas, the heavy clay content in the soil makes ranging on flat terrain undesirable because of drainage problems. In areas with heavy clay soils, a ground cover such as fescue or orchard grass for the open areas will help both to stabilize the slope and to prevent mud holes.

Quick and complete drainage of turkey ranges is essential regardless of geographic location

within the state. For this reason, one may wish to consider leasing land or contracting ranges in areas that are better suited for ranging turkeys. If the deciding factors are poor range conditions or economics of hauling feed, usually it will pay to haul feed 30-40 miles to secure better ranging conditions.

(2) **Natural Cover.** The presence or absence of wooded growth or natural cover will influence range site selection. Ideally, the range should have both open and shaded areas. Partial shade is extremely important for turkeys ranged during hot summer months. Shade will help to reduce the energy requirement for cooling the turkey's body. Since 85 to 90 percent of total feed consumed is fed while the turkey is on range, shade becomes an important factor in improving feed conversion and weight-to-age ratios.

Wooded areas, particularly evergreens, also will provide some degree of protection from snow, ice or wind during the winter months. Permanent range shelters are recommended for winter range; however, if they are not provided, the range must include wooded areas which offer some protection from snow, ice and wind.

(3) **Space Requirements.** The minimum area required to range turkeys will be governed by soil type and degree of drainage. Additional range space above the minimum will result in healthier birds and more efficient management. Additional space will allow you to move birds and equipment as weather conditions and/or disease outbreaks dictate.

On very sandy soil, up to 1,000 turkeys per acre is acceptable while on clay or clay-loam, 250-300 turkeys per acre would be adequate. The degree of surface contamination by the turkeys is reduced with additional space. Range sanitation also can be improved by disking or plowing open areas, particularly if pens are to be occupied more than once each year.

(4) **Physical Layout of the Range.** Physical arrangement is an important aspect of range planning. Physical layout should be made with two factors in mind; first, the well-being of the turkey, and second, efficiency of management.

Remove all debris, stumps and limbs from the range area. Pens should be constructed in such a manner that turkeys and equipment can be moved up slope and excluded from previously occupied ground. Arrange so that surface water does not drain from one occupied pen to another.

If the range is heavily wooded, clear lanes for

feeders and waterers. These lanes should be wide enough to allow efficient movement of the feed wagon.

Roadways should be constructed in such manner so as to help prevent surface drainage from pen to pen. Ideally, a roadway should encircle the range so as to provide visual access to all pens.

Some preliminary planning and surveying is necessary before range construction begins. This planning will provide a better range environment for the turkey and **MORE PROFIT FOR YOU.**



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