

Is FLEX feathering the nests?

The poultry industry has been watching with great interest as the Hubbard broiler breed has begun to establish itself in South Africa. Having been in the hands of a major integrator several years ago, the French parent company has introduced a new strain, known as the Flex.

The result is that it has entered the SA market with a new product that has been making major inroads into the poultry industries globally, with results that competing breeds are battling to match.

Having re-entered the SA market under the guidance of an experienced and well-respected poultry team, Hubbard South Africa, based in the Curry's Post area of KwaZulu-Natal, combines international expertise and world-class research and development with an absolute passion for bringing a truly independent, dedicated GP breeding stock to the SA poultry industry. And the performance of the Hubbard Flex is certainly making the early adopters sit up and take note.

SA results mirror international performance guidelines

Rowan Holt of Finchley Broiler Breeders has a Hubbard flock that is now at 14 weeks. He's thoroughly impressed with the breed, and says this flock is "phenomenal" and has "performed superbly". His enthusiasm is certainly backed up by the figures: his first-week mortality was just 0.4% (27 out of 6 500), and the flock is now showing 14-week mortalities of only 1.17%.

"I have another flock of another breed, at exactly the same age and stage in the house next door and Hubbard have outperformed it in every respect," says Rowan. "My performance graphs could have been taken out of Hubbard's performance books!"

While Rowan's chicks are in a closed environment house and have managed well on Finchley's state-of-the-art new breeding house system, he says, "The quality of day-olds at time of placement was brilliant. If you get a poor flock to start with the rest is an uphill battle. When you get superb quality chicks like these they perform." He notes that the day-old chicks he received were of a good size and were very active. Now, at 14 weeks, they are calm, look good, show great uniformity and have feathered really well.

New results show further improvements

The latest Hubbard figures released show an improvement of 73 grams at 35 days and an even more significant 126 grams at 42 days. This equates to about 1.5 days' average bodyweight growth, producing bigger birds with better feed conversions. This is in line with industry norms in other breeds, and provides yet more proof that the Flex is a breed for the future.

The South African placements are confirming Hubbard's international research by already showing low mortality rates, good litter quality and solid performance.



Rowan Holt with one of his FLEX birds which are outperforming his other flocks



Jan van Dijk – heading Hubbard's Technical and Marketing portfolios



Careful sexing to ensure the ideal package mix is attained.

FLEX outperforms the rest so far

"I have all four breeds on my farm at present," says Holt, "and at this point the Hubbard Flex is outperforming the other three. And, while the proof of the pudding is always when birds come into production, all the early signs are there for a superior result. We're excited about the potential."

Rowan's flock will come into lay at a good time with the increasing light and warmth of summer, and he is eager to see what happens next.

"There's really good technical support and the guys have done really well. They've brought in a new breed and are backing it up in every respect. They're extremely competitively priced too," stated Holt.

State-of-the-art dedicated GP hatchery complete

With the news of excellent early performance results starting to ripple throughout the industry, Hubbard's independent breeding-stock hatchery is gearing up to handle the increasing capacity requirements.

"We're currently hatching for different customers on different days, with orders set indi-

vidually using dedicated settings. The implementation of our single-stage hatching is able to further reduce any possible chance of breaches in biosecurity and we're enjoying working in an environment that is purpose built to perform at the highest levels of efficiency and hygiene. It's been great watching it all come together," says Jim Gray, MD of Hubbard SA.

The installation of a fourth 'week' of single-stage machines has improved hatchability and, as anticipated, has created enormous flexibility in meeting demand fluctuations without affecting the planned production schedule.

Gray says, "We are extremely happy with the hatchery's performance. It has certainly delivered above expectation and looks set to easily handle the increasing production requirements and flexibility that will be required as our order book keeps increasing."

And if current indications are anything to go by, that order book is certainly set to keep on increasing.

Quality GP stock supply guaranteed

Flex GP stock is available from five countries,

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Extensive training and attention to detail has gone into all staff recruitment



Deliveries are growing as many customers are putting in their second and third flocks

all offering exactly the same strain. The benefit of this for the South African poultry industry is obvious: GP stock can be sourced from any of these locations, depending on disease surveillance results at the time the order is placed.

Not only does this guarantee disease-free stock for the farmer, but it also guarantees an unbroken delivery supply chain - something that has not previously been available to the South African market.

This is of particular relevance right now, with the global incidence of avian 'flu outbreaks. A guaranteed supply chain is not possible when a single-source location is being used, or where stock is purchased through non-independent producers.

FLEX offers a complete quality package

The Flex package offers consistency and reliability at a highly competitive price. The breed is feather-sexable, efficient to grow and can be used over a wide range of bodyweights, depending on the product mix needs.

Flex performance internationally has repeatedly demonstrated one of the best balances of traits demanded by producers involved in

further processing and value-added products. Aside from the improved performance shown, Flex is also considered to be a low maintenance breed.

In the UK, the Hubbard Flex parent stock seems to have more persistency in lay and while other breeds tend to drop off a little after 40 weeks, the Flex just keeps laying. It also seems to maintain shell quality for longer, and gives improved early egg size.

Further comparisons made in the UK with other breeds passing through processing plants show that the Flex also has a very favourable reject rate. This is especially true when it comes to hock-burn and footpad problems. Of course, this is probably not surprising if one considers that this bird is less prone to scour - this, in turn, has a highly beneficial impact on litter quality.

Independent suppliers provide better long-term security

The trend these days in the poultry industry is towards integration, where a large producer will start breeding for himself and then selling the 'excess' to supplement the income stream. While this is of benefit to the integrator, it can spell disaster for the customers who are essen-

tially putting their supply chain in the hands of their competitors - an unusual business dynamic, to say the least!

Hubbard SA does not believe integration is good for the producer or for the industry at large, as it puts unnecessary risk on the industry, both from a supply chain and a biodiversity perspective.

"Many of us at Hubbard have suffered at the hands of the integrators and we are committed to remaining independent and focused on providing superior parent stock backed by solid service and technical support," says Gray.

Technical team expands

Jan van Dijk has recently been appointed to head up the marketing and technical portfolios. He brings with him a wealth of experience, having been in poultry breeding for 14 years and having a passion to serve in an independent operation.

Jan says of the ethos at Hubbard, "It's great working with a team completely dedicated to making the right decisions for the customer. What's struck me here at Hubbard is that everything revolves around customer service and performance and that's refreshing. I guess it's because that's their only source of revenue - happy customers - so this focus remains very clear in all aspects of the business and the decisions taken. It's been great to see that this approach is still valued within the industry.

"I've been in the poultry industry since 1983 and worked with various breeds. I've been really impressed by the Flex performance and ease of management. It's a less sensitive bird, so we're getting lower mortalities than are the norm locally."

Jan has recently returned from operations in Holland, UK and France where he visited many producers who have slowly switched to 100% Flex placements. Hearing their success stories and now starting to see signs of that being evident in the local placements has also been rewarding.

FLEX: A breed for the future?

It certainly seems that Hubbard South Africa is on a path to great things, and that the establishment of the Flex breed couldn't have come at a better time for the South African poultry industry, which is desperately seeking ways to increase its performance, quality levels, and competitiveness.

The last words belong to Jan van Dijk, "It's truly an exciting time and it's going to be great watching the breed evolve over the next few years."

Indeed it is.

For more information ...

If you have any enquiries about the Flex breed itself, or would like to discuss Hubbard's plans in South Africa, contact Jim Gray, on (033) 330 6381 or e-mail Jim on info@hubbardsa.co.za.

