



Goals for Livestock Housing

People raise livestock for many reasons, including meat, fiber, lifestyle, and enjoyment. A key part of responsible animal care is deciding how to house them. Different species have different needs, but all animals share basic requirements.

No matter the species, livestock housing must be designed to protect animal health and welfare. Animals need a safe environment to shield them from predators, harsh weather, and the risk of escape. They also require access to clean water, appropriate feed, and measures to prevent disease. When planning animal housing, several important factors should be considered.

First, confirm that your animal housing follows local and provincial regulations. Rural municipalities may set rules about the number and type of animals allowed, as well as required setbacks from property lines. Provincial laws may also apply, guided by [National Farm Animal Care Council Codes of Practice](#). Additionally, there are provincial laws for manure storage and deadstock management.

Second, ensure the housing you choose supports animal health and safety. All animals need secure, weather-appropriate shelter, reliable access to food and water, and protection from illness. Meeting these basic needs is essential for good welfare.

Third, housing should be easy to keep clean. Good sanitation lowers disease risk, reduces odour, and supports a healthier environment for both animals and people.

Finally, housing must be easy for you to access. Producers must be able to safely feed animals, clean their living areas, collect products such as eggs, and treat sick or injured animals. Thoughtful design makes daily care easier and improves outcomes for both animals and their caretakers.

Stay tuned for new bulletin releases in **July, October, and January.**

Upcoming issues provide practical insights on **parasite management, nutrition, and more!**

Practical Housing Guidance for Small Poultry Flocks

Good poultry housing is the foundation of a healthy, productive flock. Whether you raise a handful of backyard layers or manage a larger mixed flock, the design and management of your housing system directly affect bird comfort, predator protection, disease prevention, and overall performance.

Protecting Poultry from Predators and the Environment

Predator pressure is one of the most common challenges for poultry keepers. Foxes, coyotes, weasels, skunks, hawks, owls, raccoons, and even domestic pets can cause significant losses. Fully enclosed coops paired with covered outdoor runs offer the best protection. Use heavy gauge mesh wire, netting, or hardware cloth on all openings, and lock coop doors securely at night. For protection against ground-dwelling predators, bury fencing at least 12 inches (30 cm) deep and toe it outward 6 inches (15 cm) to prevent digging. Electric fencing can add an extra layer of security, especially for pasture-based systems.

Environmental protection is equally important. Housing must shield birds from heat stress, freezing temperatures, and buildup of harmful gases such as ammonia and carbon dioxide. Ventilation is critical: aim for 1 ft.² (0.09 m²) of vent space per 10 ft.² (0.9 m²) of floor area, with vents positioned above bird height. Even in winter, airflow is necessary to remove moisture and maintain air quality.

Placement, Structure, and Interior Design

Choosing the right location for your coop can make

management easier and improve flock health. Place housing on high, well drained ground to avoid standing water and dampness. Facing the coop south helps capture natural light during winter months, while situating it in a sheltered area reduces wind exposure. Covered insulation and vapour barriers provide additional warmth in winter.

Inside the coop, prioritize materials that are durable and easy to clean. Cement, vinyl, and painted wood surfaces are ideal because they are non-porous and washable. Avoid sharp edges, loose wire or protruding hardware that could injure birds. Design doors and ramps for safe movement, with slow closing automatic doors and traction on ramps to prevent slipping.

Space, Roosting, Nesting and Litter Needs

Adequate space is essential for natural flock behaviour. Poultry keepers should abide by [National Farm Animal Care Council Codes of Practice](#) minimum space requirements for the size and type of poultry you own. As a general guideline, broilers require at least 1 ft.² (0.09 m²) per bird indoors and prefer 4 ft.² (0.37 m²) per bird outdoors, while laying hens need 1 ft.² (0.09 m²) indoors and prefer 8 ft.² (0.74 m²) outdoors. Perches for laying and breeding hens must be designed to provide a comfortable resting space that is clean and easy to access. Provide rounded perches a minimum 0.75 in. (2 cm) in diameter, positioned 16 to 40 in. (40 to 100 cm) off the floor, with minimum of 6 in. (15 cm) of perch space per bird.

Nest boxes should offer privacy and comfort. A ratio of one nest for every 3 to 4 hens works well. Boxes measuring 12.9 in² (83 cm²), placed 1 to 2 feet (30 to 60 cm) off the floor, encourage consistent laying. Adding clean shavings or chopped straw helps maintain egg quality, and closing nest boxes at night prevents birds from sleeping in them.

A clean, dry environment supports bird health. Maintain 5 to 12 centimetres of litter—typically wood shavings or straw—to absorb moisture. Many producers use the deep litter method in winter, adding fresh bedding on top and turning it monthly to prevent caking. Provide dust-bathing areas filled with sand or mulch to help birds control mites and keep feathers clean.

Feed, Water and Lighting

Choose feeders and waterers that are easy to clean and position waterers throughout the coop or run. Allow 1 inch (2.5 cm) of water trough space per bird, or one bell drinker for every 12 birds. For waterfowl, placing waterers outdoors helps reduce humidity and wet litter inside the

coop. Feeder space will vary depending on the size and type of poultry and type of feeder. For round feeders, young chicks require 0.2 in./bird (0.5 cm/bird) while mature hens require 1.1 in./bird (2.8 cm/bird). Refer to [National Farm Animal Care Council Codes of Practice](#) to confirm space requirements for your purpose.

If you keep hens year-round and want to maintain egg production into winter, supplemental lighting is essential. Laying hens require 14 to 16 hours of light daily; a secure 40- to 60-watt bulb is typically sufficient.

Pasture Systems and Storage

For producers using chicken tractors or mobile coops, ensure the structure provides shelter, ventilation and easy access to feed and water. Regular tractor movement prevents manure buildup and gives birds access to fresh forage. Inspect pasture areas for debris and toxic plants.



Housing Rabbits

While outdoor systems offer advantages such as increased space, natural enrichment, and behavioural expression, they must still meet key requirements for shelter, protection, and daily care.

Housing systems for rabbits, whether you use cages, pens, or pasture enclosures, must be designed to promote comfort, safety, and ease of management. Structures should allow for effective observation, handling, and routine care. Everything must be well maintained, with regular inspection schedules to repair or replace damaged components before they pose a risk of injury. Proper

design ensures rabbits can move freely, rest comfortably, and exhibit natural behaviours such as grooming, stretching, and hopping.

Rabbits require sufficient room to allow normal resting positions, stand upright without restriction, and move about without obstruction. Overcrowding leads to reduced feed intake, increased aggression, and higher rates of injury. Providing adequate height and floor space supports both physical health and behavioural health. In outdoor systems, stocking density must be adjusted during periods of high temperature to reduce heat stress.

Special consideration must be given to different classes of rabbits. Bucks, for example, must be housed individually after approximately 14 weeks of age to prevent aggressive behaviour and injuries. In contrast, growing rabbits are social animals and should be raised in compatible groups to support normal social interaction.

For breeding does, proper nesting provisions are essential. Outdoor systems must include well-designed nest boxes with dry, clean, and insulating materials to support kit survival, particularly in colder climates. Young kits are highly vulnerable to temperature fluctuations, so nest boxes must provide warmth and protection from wind and moisture. Ensuring does can retreat from kits as they grow also helps reduce accidental injuries.

Enrichment is especially valuable in outdoor systems. Structural additions like platforms or tunnels can increase usable space while offering shelter and opportunities for movement.

Flooring and bedding also play a major role in rabbit health. Outdoor pens must include well-drained, mud-free areas where rabbits can rest comfortably. Wet or poorly managed ground conditions can lead to disease and foot injuries. Bedding materials should be clean, dry, and regularly replaced. Where solid flooring or ground housing is used, maintaining hygiene becomes even more critical to prevent disease buildup.

Ventilation and environmental control remain important even outdoors. Rabbits are sensitive to both heat and cold stress. Shade, windbreaks, and insulated shelters are essential to protect animals from extreme temperatures. In hot weather, rabbits require protection from direct sun and access to cool resting areas. Monitoring signs of thermal stress, such as panting in heat, is necessary for timely intervention.

Finally, outdoor systems must include safeguards against predators, pests, and environmental hazards. Secure fencing, overhead protection, and strategic site selection, such as well-drained land with natural windbreaks, can significantly reduce risks. Rotational use of outdoor areas can also help maintain vegetation and reduce parasite load.

Outdoor Pig Rearing

Raising pigs outdoors begins with one fundamental decision: will you manage them in a small, enclosed space or give them access to a larger pasture system? This choice shapes every aspect of your management approach, from housing design to daily care and long-term goals.

Before deciding, consider how much space you have, how involved you want to be, and how many animals you plan to raise. These key factors guide your setup and scale.

Small Space Rearing

If you choose small space rearing the goal is essentially to build a well-designed pigsty that provides comfort, safety, and easy management. This approach meets the desire for a hands on, personal experience raising pigs. Keeping pigs in a smaller enclosure allows for closer observation of their behaviours and personalities while at the same time meeting their needs.

Designing an effective pigsty requires careful attention to space allowances, animals' categories and cleanliness. There is no maximum space requirement for pigs, but the [National Farm Animal Care Council Codes of Practice](#) for pigs (Table 1) outlines the minimum space each category of pig should have. These measurements apply to the pigs' resting and movement areas and do not include space for feeders or waterers.

Table 1. Minimum Space Requirements as per the Canadian Codes of Practice

Pig Type	m ² / pig	ft ² /pig
Mixed (Gilts & Sows)	1.90–2.30	20–25
Weaners	0.39–0.46	4.22–4.92
Grow/Finish	0.95–1.27	10.2–13.7
Boars	7.4	80

A practical example of a small-scale setup is a 10 m by 10 m pen. The perimeter should be secured with page wire

fencing standing about 5 ft. (1.52 m) above ground, with an additional 1 ft. (0.3 m) buried below the surface to prevent rooting escape. A gate approximately 3 ft. (0.9 m) wide allows easy access for both people and animals and should open inward for safety and control.

Fence posts should be spaced every 2.5 m, resulting in a sturdy structure consisting of corner, gate, and line posts. To enhance containment, a two-strand electric fence is recommended inside the perimeter, positioned roughly 0.2 m inward. The lower wire should sit at about 1 ft. (0.3 m), and the upper at 3 feet (0.9 m). This discourages pigs from testing the fence and adds an extra level of security. An underground insulated cable installed beneath the gate ensures the electric line remains continuous

Shelter Design

Within the pen, shelter is essential. A 2 m × 2 m sow hut provides shelter for 1 sow and her piglets. Proper site preparation enhances durability and comfort:

- excavate 10 to 15 cm of soil,
- compact the base,
- add gravel for drainage, and
- top it with straw bedding.

Position the hut on slightly elevated ground with a gentle slope toward the entrance to prevent water accumulation. In Manitoba, orienting the entrance south or southeast helps reduce exposure to prevailing winds.



Construction Checklist

- Mark out 10 m × 10 m area
- Clear and level ground
- Install 22 fence posts
- Attach ~45 m page wire and bury 1 ft
- Install gate
- Install ~90 m electric wire
- Add insulators, energizer, and ground rods
- Run underground cable
- Prepare hut base
- Add gravel and straw bedding
- Install shelter

Pasture-Based Rearing

For producers with more space and a desire for larger-scale production, pasture-based rearing offers a flexible alternative. Pastured pigs can contribute to farm diversification, utilize lower-quality feed resources efficiently, and provide a high-quality protein source. However, this system demands excellent fencing and regular maintenance.

Similar to small pens, pasture fencing should include strong page wire approximately 5 ft. high with a buried section to prevent digging. Many producers opt for double fencing with a small gap between layers to discourage wildlife interaction. At least one strand of electric wire, set around 1 ft. high, helps prevent pigs from rooting along fence lines.

Regardless of the system chosen, consistent inspection and maintenance are critical. Pigs are powerful animals and skilled escape artists. Weak spots in fencing will be found and exploited. A reliable rule is: if it seems like a pig could not escape, it will. Strong infrastructure and proactive management are key to successful outdoor pig production, whether on a small homestead or a larger pasture operation.

Manitoba Agriculture presents
Barnyard Talk

Monthly webinars for small-scale livestock and poultry producers and enthusiasts that focus on raising healthy pigs, poultry, rabbits and small ruminants. Specialists and invited guests will discuss a variety of topics including farm set up, housing, nutrition and animals health and food safety.



- Follow the QR code to register for upcoming talks
- Check us out the last Wednesday of every month at 2 pm

Check Out Upcoming Workshops and Webinars from Manitoba Agriculture!

Manitoba Agriculture Summer Pasture Workshops “Beefing Up Herd Health on Pasture”

Topics covered include virtual fencing, pasture mineral needs, cattle health on pasture, remote drug delivery & benefits of implants.

Two locations: **Gladstone on June 2, 2026**, and **Killarney on June 3, 2026**. 9:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., Lunch provided. Registration: Pre-register by contacting Manitoba Agriculture at 1-844-769-6224 or agriculture@gov.mb.ca

CropTalk Weekly Webinars

Manitoba Agriculture specialists and invited guests will speak to real-time agronomic topics to assist growers and agronomists with the 2026 cropping season. Webinars **April – October**. [CropTalk Registration](#)

Weed Seedling Identification Day

Manitoba Agriculture invites you to join them for a fun and informative day to build on your weed seedling identification skills. **Wednesday, May 27, 2026**, at **Ian N. Morrison Research Station, Carman, MB**. See [Weed Seedling ID Agenda](#) for details.

Horticulture School

Sessions include insect pests and diseases of apples, apple pruning/production, high tunnel fertility, and field scouting for insects. Thursday July 30, 2026 at Assiniboine College, North Hill Campus, Brandon, MB. See [Horticulture School Agenda](#) for details and to register.

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Contact us

- Go to manitoba.ca/agriculture.
- Email us at agriculture@gov.mb.ca.
- Follow us on X @MBGovAg.
- Visit your local Manitoba Agriculture Service Office