

Featherman

Automatic Feather Picker

Owner's Manual

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Featherman Equipment

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Featherman Plucker Manual

Congratulations on your purchase of a new Featherman Plucker! You are now on your way to an exciting and possibly life-changing experience. The pastured poultry business was the foundation stone in our natural meat business that allowed us to exchange a 540-acre farm (family owned) and work that was never done for a 64-acre farm of our own and a feeling of freedom like we had never imagined. Your chickens will sell themselves and your customers will be asking you for more products. Or, like some, with your new equipment you can start a processing sideline or even go into it full time. You can make a handsome profit easily doing work that would take others many hours. Plus you can have the satisfaction of helping others reap the rewards of pastured poultry.

Guarantee

Your entire machine is guaranteed for one year from your purchase date. Should any problems occur due to faulty parts or manufacture will replace the parts or replace the machine.

Maintenance

Since the plucker always waits on the scald, it is resting at least half the time. Our motor manufacturer tells us our motors will last forever in that kind of use. (To add life to your motor, start it unloaded, then add birds as recommended in Procedure).

The only maintenance we recommend is a thorough wash-down after use. It is normal for feathers to catch under the fingers. The only way to remove them is by hand.

Operation

After the removal of all packaging materials including the protective plywood on the base, your Featherman is ready to plug in and go. Use 110 volt current (unless you specifically ordered a 220 volt model) and be sure to keep the cord in good shape and out of standing water. Hook up a garden hose (cold water) to the spray ring. Simply open the valve to spray.

Features

- Solid and durable, high density plastic tub and motor housing are attractive, easy cleaning and USDA food grade approved.
- Rubber padded, no-slip feet.
- 1 HP motor and 10:1 speed reducer
- Light weight for easy transport and low cost shipping.
- Fingers are softest fingers made in America giving the gentlest pick possible.
- Unique feather chute keeps work space clean, speeds clean up.
- Spray ring washes feathers down automatically.
- Knee-high, water-proof on-off toggle switch handy to operate with foot or knee yet concealed to prevent accidental starting.

Basic Processing Procedure for Chickens

Handling

Always handle birds as gently as possible. Distraught birds will be harder to pick and bad handling will cause bruising. Hold by a leg or around the body, not by the wing.

Restraining

We recommend the use of kill cones and manufacture a perfectly round, stainless steel, cone. Unlike flat-sided cones, birds cannot back out of the round cones during bleed out.

Killing

Slit the carotid artery with a very sharp knife. This takes practice to avoid cutting the trachea (windpipe) or severing the spine – either of which causes trauma to the bird and will result in an inferior bleed out. A proper cut will not be felt by the bird (and is an appropriate time to give thanks to the bird).

Bleeding

Bleeding will take about two minutes. Contraction of muscles as they are oxygen starved is normal but care must be taken to avoid dislocated or broken wings or legs in this process. Watch for this and adjust the restraining technique if necessary. Collect the blood and compost it.

Scalding

Scalding is the critical step in processing and requires either a lot of experience or sophisticated equipment. The Featherman Plucker will give you squeaky clean birds with no pin feathers when you master the scald. We manufacture the Featherman Scalding to take the guesswork out of this operation but it is possible to have a perfect scald with very little investment. Find the largest, heaviest scald container you can heat it with propane or other fuel (cheaper, quicker, and less expensive than electricity). We recommend scalding at 145 degrees F. for a minute. Batches of birds will vary slightly so be prepared to adjust accordingly with temperature and/or time changes on the scald. Change water when it is dirty. If your scald is too long or too hot, skin will tear; if it is too short or too cold, feathers will stick. Our plucker's soft fingers give the industry's widest margin in scald temperatures, giving you more undamaged birds. Still, be careful not to over-scald. You can actually cook the breast meat. (Outdoor-raised birds are less likely to have this happen.)

Dunking

You may rig up a dunking apparatus, stir with a paddle, or simply dip the birds by hand. Be sure to add some soap (like a dish detergent) to the water. This will help water penetration to loosen the feathers. We manufacture a dunking apparatus to ease this job.

Plucking

Drain the birds of excess moisture, turn the Featherman on and drop the birds in. Open one of the valves on the "Y" to let the water spray. Check in 20 seconds. Give more time if necessary. Turn machine off, turn water spray off and remove birds. Because of its gentleness you will not damage the birds by leaving them in the plucker too long.

Poor Scald

Should you get a bad pick (always due to a scald error) don't be afraid to scald and pluck again. You still probably won't get all the feathers out, but you will save time over picking by hand.

Finishing the Birds

There is no substitute for sharp knives and experience. You will be amazed at how many birds per hour an old hand can do compared to a greenhorn. Quality standards should be your first priority before speed however. As you gain experience you will be able to keep up the quality and do over 20 birds per person per hour. (The very experienced can do 30 to 40 birds per person per hour).

Clean Up

The Featherman is made to be washed down. A pressurized spray down is all that is required. Take care to avoid wetting the motor assembly unnecessarily. A few feathers will catch between the fingers and the plastic. This happens with all pluckers and is not a concern. You may remove if you like but it is not necessary. The Featherman is made of USDA-approved materials and has been passed for use in USDA-approved facilities.

More Information

Don't hesitate to contact us or the dealer you purchased from if you have questions, glowing testimonies, or if you find an area that needs improvement. We continue to fine tune and know that there is always another creative idea out there.

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The Featherman History

We began raising chickens reluctantly in 1994 after our beef and lamb customers had been asking us for chickens for several years. We were well aware of the pastured poultry model but couldn't encourage any of our neighbors to raise chickens for us. Finally, we bit the bullet and ordered 100 chicks, built a little pen and scrounged for used equipment. We were lucky (we thought) to attend the close-out sale of the last poultry processing shop in the area. From them we purchased crates, a big drum roller-style tabletop plucker, and two large aluminum scald pots. We used a fiberglass Scalding with electric heat elements and started our education. Selling the birds was by far the easiest part of the whole affair.

The next year we found a hatchery that gave a great discount on 1000 birds so we called up half a dozen friends from our Green Hills Farm Project grazer's group as well as a few neighbors and instantly we formed a cooperative effort. We built pens together, found a large stainless steel plucker five hours away and bought it for \$750, made our own dunking apparatus, got a grant for a mobile processing unit and spent many hours putting the processing pieces of the puzzle together.

We raised some beautiful birds with friendly competition and we all shared in the processing, though we kept the unwieldy "mobile" unit at our place. It required 220V electricity hook-up and just didn't travel too well on the road. We found that our fancy plucker, designed for 12-15 birds, didn't do a very good job on just four. They didn't tumble. We tried everything before we decided we needed to pluck 8 at a time. We re-built our dunking shackles but our home-made Scalding barely kept up with the demand. Worse, the temperature would go up and down like a yo-yo, so we had to be very patient. The strain of lifting 8 birds was also too much for our dunking motor and we had to help it a little manually, like lifting sixty pound barbells ten times 2 or 3 minutes! The romance wore off quickly and all but two of the families dropped out despite great sales and happy customers. Our farm was committed and pressed on, doing 160 birds a day by ourselves. It took from daybreak till 1pm and we were exhausted. Aching backs from all the lifting forced our brains to find a better way; we drove our birds 10 miles to an Amish family that was butchering chickens.

Later, after inspecting some expensive processing equipment, our Amish butcher, Ernie Kauffman, built the first homemade tub-style plucker to replace his drum-roller model. It worked so well, we drafted and mailed out plans. Many of those homemade machines are still in use. An inventive grazer friend saw the plucker on a visit and started the Jako line of tub pluckers and scalders based on it. Another plucker made from Ernie's plans inspired Herrick Kimball's fine Build-It-Yourself manual and many happy "Whizbang" plucker builders.

In 1999 while on a trip overseas, we visited the huge Hong Kong farmer's market where each day thousands of chickens come to the market alive, are killed and scalded collectively in one big room, then carted to tiny stalls, each of which had a little two bird plucker, miniature replicas of ours. Through contacts and with a lot of hair-raising experience, we imported a container of them, the Featherman Jr. and sold them all within a year. Importation was such hassles we redesigned and manufactured a better machine ourselves, the Featherman you now have.

We've combined a lot of thought and experience into this machine to make it work efficiently, economically, and for a long time. We hope you enjoy your journey with poultry as much as we have ours.