



Donated by Allen & Myra Charleston

FACILITIES – LAND, FENCING & SHELTERS

The first decision you have to make as an emu farmer is what your goals are regarding bird production. That decision will affect your choices in facilities and fencing. For example, if you choose to purchase chicks and run a grow-out facility, you have no need for breeder pens or chick runs.

Your first question is, do I want to keep up with genetics? If you do, you will want to run breeders in pairs rather than group pens.

Land Requirements

Land requirements for emu are minimal. If you are diversifying your farming operation to include emu, you probably already have the basis of the operation.

Emus can be successfully raised in small pens or large pastures – or a combination of the two. Most emu ranches are between 5 to 10 acres. Our birds are on less than 5 acres.

Breeder Pens - 30'x100' is adequate. The pens can be laid out in rows or wagon wheel (see below) shaped; it's a matter of personal preference on the part of the farmer. Having breeder pens is necessary if you plan on keeping up with genetics, fertility rates or selling livestock. This size pen is large enough to run either a pair or a trio.



Colony pens - stocked with between 5 to 10 pair of emu per acre. No way to keep up with genetics, laying or fertility records. However, it is a more natural environment for the birds and some farmers run colony pens during the summer, moving the breeders back into smaller pens when breeding season approaches.

Grow out pens - chicks 2 or 3 months and up of a similar size are kept anywhere from 20 to 50 birds per acre until they are ready to transport to a processing facility.

Wagon Wheel Pen Design

In construction, the nice thing about using a wagon wheel pen design is not only that you can add on additional pens as needed; you save money by only having to run water and electricity to one area.

In our original plan, we started with nine pens. The roof arcing around the pens is actually mounted on the fence posts. We used straw bales and tarps to provide wind breaks and shelter for the emus. The feeders were mounted directly onto the chain link fence.

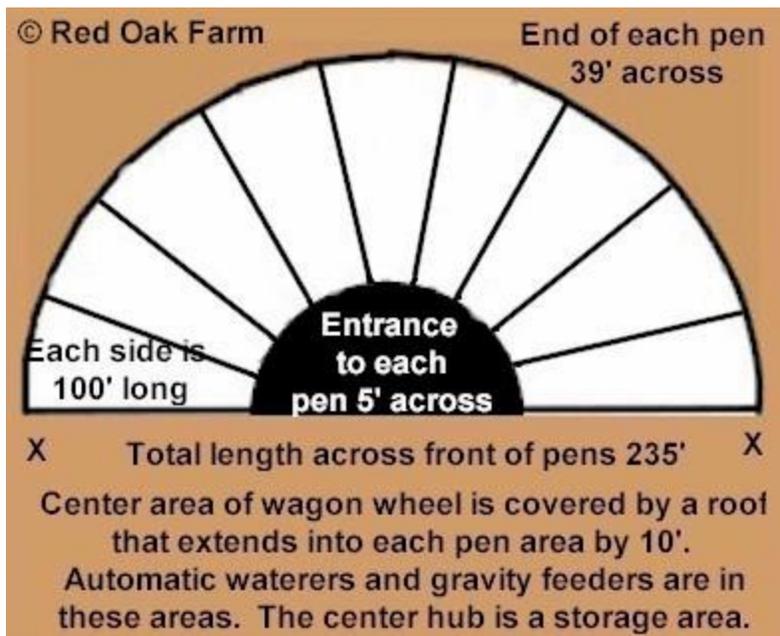


We later replaced this first shelter roof with a center hub roof. It extends 10 feet into each pen and provides us some protection from the elements as we feed or gather eggs. There is also some storage in the



center.

We still use straw bales and tarps to provide wind breaks. The peaked roof stores a canoe and houses barn swallows in the spring and summer. Extra straw bales are stacked on top of a metal storage unit. To the right you can see the hose stretching up to the overhead watering system.



The watering system just uses garden hose with T's and drops to automatic watering systems which are hooked onto troughs in each pen. During the summer we leave the hose hooked up and 'on', but during the winter we fill the watering troughs while we feed. If you had 9 pens running side by side, you would probably use an average of 270 feet of PVC to run water to each pen. We have used 90 feet of garden hose instead.

Chick runs - depending on where your farm is located, chicks from the brooder to 2 or 3 months of age are usually kept in smaller pens with shelter. We keep ours in 5'x10' inside pens during the coldest of our Tennessee winters. The outside runs are 80' long. See also "[From Egg to Grow Out](#)"

Notes on choosing a site:

Good drainage is essential for control of bacteria and insects.

Sloping land is not a problem for emus.

Leave as much natural vegetation as possible for shade.

Fencing

Fencing can be chain link, hog wire, 2-inch by 4-inch non-climb wire, game fencing or even cattle panels with wire on the outside. Although you will find that many emu ranchers use 5', I prefer a 6' fence. I have seen upset emus jump chest high on a 6' fence. Healthy emus can and will get out of a 4' fence.

Do not use barbed wire fence, even a few strands to "finish off" the height! Emu tend to rub against the fence and this will tear up their hides, hurt them and decrease the value of the leather in slaughter birds.

Another thing to remember is that your fence should not have any areas where the bird could stick its head or foot through to get caught. Chicks can be fenced in using chicken wire.

When laying out your pens some things to consider:

- Would an alleyway be beneficial later when [moving birds](#)? (see below)
- Can I move the birds from one pen to another easily? (Example, can the chicks be herded from their runs directly into a grow out pen or will I have to catch and carry them?)
- Can I get the mower/other equipment in through the gates I have planned?
- Should I build a chute to help in loading birds?
- If I expand my operation later, will I be able to run water/electricity where needed easily or will I have to dig up pens?

Our personal choice for our breeder pens was to install a [wagon wheel](#) design (see above). It takes up less than an acre, provides a central point from which I can quickly feed and water birds. During lying season, most of the females lay under the shelter and it is easier to gather eggs as well.

Shelter

Depending on your climate and budget, there are many options for you to consider when choosing shelter for your birds. Chicks under 3 months of age require more protection from the elements than older birds. Given the choice, after they hit the 3-month mark, most emus would prefer to sleep outside under a tree, next to a hay bale or along the fence than “inside” even a 2-sided structure unless the weather is very cold.

As I stated, our farm is in Tennessee. We use pole barns and put out straw bales in the winter for wind blocks. In the spring these are used as mulch. Round bales are used in the grow-out pens as wind blocks. Some people use plastic “huts”/igloo type shelters, lean-tos, pole barns, or tunnel type shelters.

In the northern states some farmers use pre-existing barns or stables to house their flocks through the winter months.

The main thing to remember when using buildings like this is that darkness, poor air circulation and body warmth are breeding grounds for bacteria. Shovel it out folks.

Chicks under 3 months need more shelter during winter months. Many people have successfully converted greenhouses for use as a chick barn. We use a chick barn with 5’x10’ pens leading out to 80’ runs. During the day, if the weather is not too cold, the chicks have access to the outside. We close them up inside at night. We do not put more than 10 chicks in a pen. We have learned the hard way that if we do, one dies. They huddle together under the heat lamps and one will inevitably smother. (And it is always the largest, prettiest one that dies!)

Herding Emus

Imagine that you have 20 cats in your living room. Imagine that they really, really like your living room. Imagine that you want to move them to the bedroom, which is down the hall. What are the chances of you getting all of these cats to move together out of the living room, down the hall and into the bedroom? What are the chances that at least one of them will climb over you to avoid going to the bedroom?

The Emu Zone

Each emu is surrounded by a "personal space" or zone which they do not like to have violated.

- The zone varies in size from emu to emu and with the season. The zone seems to shrink during breeding season for the majority of the males, but increases with the females.
- The zone area will expand when the emu sees the vet drive up.
- The zone area will expand when the emu thinks you want to move him/her out of the pen. It does not matter if the same bird slipped out the gate the day before, had to be captured and put back in the pen - if you want to move it out of the pen, it is going to want to stay and the zone will expand.
- The zone area will expand the second the emu realizes you are not just petting him, but want to move him.
- The zone area will expand if you are holding the rope used to "walk" the birds from one pen to another.
- The zone area will expand if more than one human adult enters the pen.

In order to prevent you from entering the zone, the emu will move away from you. Fast.

Suggestions for Moving Groups of Emus

If you know when you are going to move the birds, you may want to give them Vitamin B-1 (Thiamine) in their water the day before. The calming effect will only last a day and you should not continually dose their water as you don't want them to become accustomed to the higher level as it will quit working. Figure the dosage by package directions. Keep in mind how much water they will drink per day, how many birds are in the pen, etc. If you have an automatic waterer, you will want to turn it off so you can keep up with the dosage.

Between adjacent pens: This is easier with two or three people, but can be done with one, it will just take longer. The evening before you want to move the birds turn off any automatic waterers in the old pen, and dump the water. If you have been supplementing the forage with feed, remove it. Open the gates to the new pen. Go back to the house, have supper, watch TV, fill orders - do whatever you would normally do. The next morning check and see if a miracle happened and they all moved without help. Then sigh and get a sack of feed and go into the old pen. Your helper, should you be lucky enough to have one, can come into the old pen in about 15 minutes. Walk through the gate into the new pen. Pour the feed into the new feed trough where the birds can see what you are doing. Some will have followed you, some won't. Make a big show of turning on the water. If you have a garden hose, spray the water around and start a puddle. Within just a few minutes most of the birds should be trying to get a shower. The majority of the emus will be smart enough to go through the gates into the new pen, but if one is running up and down the fence unable to find the opening, your helper may have to shoo it through the gate. In the event that you don't have a helper, try to figure out a way to hook the sprayer handle over the fence in such a way as to spray the emus wallowing and ease slowly around the group (remember the zone) and back into the first pen. With any luck you can shoo the emu into the new pen without having others rejoin you in the old pen.

From pen into alley: One way to herd the emus out of the pen into an alley is by using shelter shade. The length of the cloth and the number of people needed to handle it will depend on the size of the pen and number of emus. Ideally you would have one person per 6' of shade cloth - walking with their arms outstretched holding the cloth. The space between your body and the next person

should not be greater than 6'. However, it has and can be done with fewer people if the emus are not too wild. The problem is that if there is too great a space between the people, the emus will try to jump or go under the shelter shade. If one emu gets through, others will try the same thing.

Down Alleys: Herding emus down alleys between pens or to a trailer can be done by using fence panels to block their escape. Hold the panel and walk down the alley towards the bird, which will move away from you.

The only thing worse than trying to move yearlings or breeders in a large pen is trying to catch chicks. Imagine something the size of a large chicken running 32 mph away from you and turning on a dime. Geez.

CHICK DO'S AND DON'TS

Do

1. Keep it clean. The incubator, hatcher, brooder, pens, and especially the feed and water dishes.
2. Temperature choices. Have more than one heat source available in case one source fails and to give chicks a choice in temperature.
3. Encourage chicks to exercise in sunlight whenever possible.
4. Keep a med kit on hand and the vet's emergency phone number.
5. Monitor chicks daily for health problems, injuries, etc. Legs and backs should be straight. Watch them run, are the legs crossing? Knock kneed? Are the chicks clear eyed and perky?

Don't

1. Allow slick surfaces in the brooder, hatcher or runs where a chick could slip and wind up with splayed legs.
2. Use a deep watering pan. Chicks can drown easily.
3. Allow spaces where a chick could become trapped or catch it's head or foot.
4. Put more than 10 chicks in a pen until they are moved to grow out pens. They tend to huddle together and will smother each other.
5. Let the chicks become imprinted on you instead of each other. Don't raise a chick alone, raise it with a clutch. The last thing you need in a breeder is for the bird to think it's human and refuse to mate with another emu.