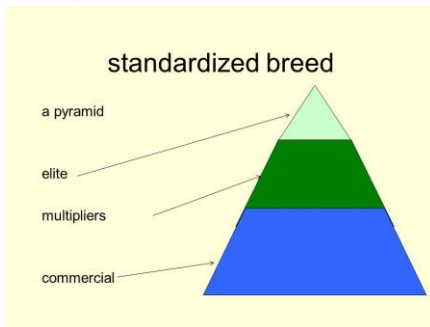


## The Poultry Pyramid

*"The textbooks describe livestock industries as pyramids. Elite breeders, multipliers, and commercial end users are shown from top to bottom in the pyramid, and genetic improvement flows down through the sectors. The end product provides the financial basis for the industry and directs selection decisions at the top. Those decisions are made by an elite few, highly-skilled breeders. The elite breeders keep their best for themselves, or for sale to other elite breeders for an accelerated dollar. A select second cut is made available to the multipliers, again at a higher price than the end product. The rest are never made available for breeding. Period. The reputation of an elite breeder depends on their selling only the highest of quality. Generally, to earn that label, an animal must have survived many rounds of culling--and preferably is already proven, with progeny (or progeny data) available to view.*



*Multipliers are in the business of mass production. It may be on a small scale, but their role is to make animals that are functional, but fall short of elite breeders' standards, widely available. Selling hatching eggs, chicks or started birds serves this purpose."*

*Joe Emenheiser, Apr 2, 2014, Showbirdbid*

The livestock pyramid effectively illustrates the contrasting, but complementary functions of the "breeder" and the "multiplier" in the poultry sector. While all three layers of this pyramid are essential for sustaining the hobby and ensuring a continuing interest in poultry-keeping, there are fundamental differences in the terminologies. When we refer to someone as a "Breeder" we are speaking of a person who is dedicated to improving their breed and has demonstrated a long-term commitment. Many years of experience are needed to build the knowledge and skills required to become a breeder.

Elite Breeder is the title reserved for those at the top of the pyramid. In the poultry community, I picture an Elite Breeder as being one who is dedicated to preserving their chosen breeds, as well as supporting the poultry hobby as a whole. These people are respected in the poultry circles and their birds take top honours at major shows. These are the folks who serve on breed clubs, become active members of the APA and ABA and put together poultry shows. They might become a poultry judge, or inspire others through youth programs or mentorship opportunities.

We could create further subcategories within the breeder class. There are those who are more than casual breeders, but do not aspire to reach the elite pinnacle. They are skilled and stay focused, putting time and effort into continual improvement in their flocks. They are conscientious and will make a lasting impact on their breed. The poultry pyramid would crumble without these lesser-known poultry men and women who work quietly and competently without much recognition or fanfare.

Regardless of the level of achievement or prominence the breeder has reached, it is important to understand that there are distinct differences between breeders and multipliers. When we use the term “breeder”, we are referring to those who are committed to **breed improvement**; the multiplier is focused on **breed propagation**.

Breeders take great pride in what they sell, and when it comes to their finest birds, they are selective in whom they sell to. They have put many years into developing their strain; sometimes decades. They do not want to see their superior birds go to those who do not respect (or understand how to preserve) the bloodline. They cringe at the thought of their years of meticulous genetic selection becoming diluted and polluted for purposes of mass production.

However, as mentioned, even the most seasoned breeders are usually willing to sell their second best to someone who expresses enthusiasm, a genuine desire to learn, and the ambition put some work into the breed. Even second-cut birds will provide a valuable starting point to build a new flock or enhance an existing one. This sustains the downward flow of superior genetics in the pyramid.

Selling chicks and hatching eggs is the role of the multiplier; very few accomplished breeders buy or sell this way. Breeders must feel confident that every bird they sell is a correct and worthy example of the breed, and a reflection of the level of quality he or she can stand behind and feel proud to call his/her own strain. Selling chicks or eggs takes away the ability to select the top performers, which are essential to maintaining an outstanding strain.

The multipliers comprise the important second section of the poultry pyramid. This is the means by which chickens become widely available to the end user in backyard flocks, farms and acreages. Where the serious breeder will specialize, the supplier might operate as a hatchery. They might carry a few breeds or a dozen. Suppliers mostly deal in chicks and hatching eggs, but may offer started birds or laying hens. Sometimes there is overlap within the pyramid when capable breeders sell chicks or eggs from a secondary flock to generate income to support their breeding efforts. This gives the consumer more choices, and more convenient ways to buy chickens.

Some egg and chick sellers produce offspring to sell from a small group of purchased stock, which eliminates most of the selection and mating decisions. Others do raise their own replacements and will have choices to make as they set up breeding pens. But their goals, process and outcomes are centered around meeting customer demands, and are quite different from those of a master breeder. The selection criteria are much more stringent for a breeder developing or maintaining a high-performance strain. This could be summed up by saying that the breeder is driven by a desire to achieve a standard of excellence; the conscientious supplier strives to satisfy customers. Both are worthy objectives.