Al and Rochelle Gathje raise chickens in their rural residence backyard.

Their three children are learning the responsibility and rewards of raising animals.

Backyard Meat Machine Feeds Family, Friends

Al and Rochelle Gathje call their backyard chicken coop a "meat machine". It produces a steady stream of chickens and eggs for the family dinner table.

Twice a summer they pack 40 roosters into freezers for themselves, their friends and neighbors. They also produce plenty of eggs for their growing family. Best of all, their three young children are learning the responsibility and rewards of take care of animals.

"The kids do the feeding, fill the waterers, collect the eggs and catch any birds that get out," says Rochelle. "We sold one batch of chickens just by word of mouth and are using the money to start college funds for the kids."

Al used his woodworking skills to put together the coops in the backyard of their rural residence.

The chicken coop is an 8 by 8-ft. pen that's 4 ft. tall at the front and slopes to 3 ft. at the back. The cedar frame is covered with chicken wire. Cedar reduces weight and holds up well to the weather. Clear plastic roofing panels protect the birds yet still let in light. Skids made from pressure-treated 2 by 4's make it easy to move the pen around. The open bottom lets the birds pick and scratch, clearing out weeds and bugs as they go. A 3 by 3-ft. door on the front side is big enough for the kids to get in and fill the feeder and waterer, while hinges on the roof's front side let Al or Rochelle lift it up from the back for easy entrance.

"The pen gives each rooster about 1 1/2 sq. ft of space, which seems to work pretty well," says Al. "Having access to the weeds seems to help with their tendency to peck at each other."

By the time the chickens are four weeks old, the Gathjes are moving the pen every other day.

Last year the Gathjes got their first batch of 40 White Rock chicks in late May just as school ended. By mid August, they were gone, and a second set of chicks had arrived. The second batch is fast growing Cornish Rock chicks that reached 5 to 6 lbs. at 8 weeks. The birds are processed at an area plant, vacuum packed and flash frozen. Processing costs $2.10 per bird, and though they could do it themselves, Al and Rochelle agree the professional handling is worth it.

"They will last a year in the freezer with no freezer burn," says Al. "We spend about $1.25 a lb. for the finished meat and that includes processing and packaging."

"We find we get so many more meals off these home raised birds than store bought," says Rochelle.

When the Gathjes aren't eating home raised chicken this winter, they'll be eating eggs. They raise pullets in a second 40 by 88-in. coop.

The front end of the coop is 35 in. tall and the back 27 in. Framing is 2 by 4's, and the siding is tongue and groove pine boards.

"I got a little carried away with the siding," says Al, admitting that the building looks more like a fine cabinet than a chicken coop.

The 1/2-in. hardware cloth screen door keeps out raccoons. The roof is extended over the front to keep rain out and provide ventilation with more screening between the roof joists and the front and rear walls. CDX plywood was attached to the bottom of the coop with sheetrock screws so it can be replaced over time.

The hens handle Minnesota's winter weather just fine. "We use a water heater and a heat lamp when it gets real cold. Last year we hit 20° below zero one weekend, and they were fine."

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Al and Rochelle Gathje, 26205 Gladiola Lane, Lanesboro, Minn. 55949 (ph 507 467-3579).

Glue Board "Tunnel" Catches Insects

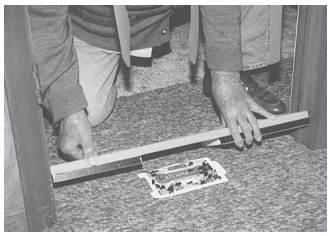
Editor's note: An anonymous reader sent us the following note:

My office is in an outbuilding that's built on a concrete slab. Being low to the ground, I get a lot of crickets and bugs.

I had heard that commercial glue boards would help, but how do you get such creatures to move onto them?

I figured these pests would have to use the doorway for moving about. But doorways are too wide. Then I hit on the idea of building a threshold with a controlled passageway, which would require that pests use it when going from room to room.

I started with a 1-in. thick wooden board, and built it up at both ends with shorter pieces of 1-in. boards, spacing the pieces out just wide enough to make a tunnel where I could insert a Catchmaster glue board. It really catches crickets and other bugs. It'll even catch snakes, mice, and other pests.



A 1-in. thick wood board was built up at both ends of doorway with shorter pieces of 1-in. boards. Pieces were spaced out just wide enough to make a tunnel where a Catchmaster glue board is inserted.

Self-Loading Log Trailer

Getting logs out of the woods is an easy job for James Goetsch of Merrill, Wis., who built a tandem axle walking beam, self-loading log trailer.

"It's built somewhat similar to big commercial self-loading log trailers for professional loggers, but on a smaller scale. It can handle logs up to 30 ft. long," says Goetsch. "I use my Ford 8N tractor to pull it so I can travel on logging roads only 6 ft. wide."

The trailer measures 6 ft. long by 52 in. wide and has 30-in. high steel sides that double as toolboxes. The wooden sides on top are just for looks. Logs are loaded onto the trailer by a 1,000-lb. electric winch that mounts on a metal pole on front of the trailer and operates off a 12-volt battery. A cable extends from the winch through a tackle block, which mounts on a metal A-frame on back of the trailer.

He used 4-in. channel iron to build the trailer frame and schedule 40 pipe to build the A-frame, which fits into sockets at both rear corners of the trailer. The A-frame is reinforced by steel bars that extend diagonally toward the front part of the trailer. The rear part of the trailer is protected by a 4-in. channel iron bumper and a pair of fenders made from 10-ga. steel. The wheels and spindles are off an old Buick car. The car's axles were cut down and welded together with 2 by 6 rectangular steel tubing, with a length of pipe inside the tubing forming a pivot point.

"It makes handling wood so much easier because I can haul whole logs home, instead of having to cut them up in the woods," says Goetsch. "The tandem axle design results in a smooth ride with very little bouncing. The winch has 25 ft. of cable, which allows me to park on a road and drag trees out of the woods for loading. To unload logs, I just hook a chain from the log around an anchor and then drive away."

James Goetsch built this tandem axle walking beam, self-loading log trailer. It's built somewhat similar to big commercial self-loading log trailers used by professional loggers, but on a smaller scale.

Three loops are welded onto an A-frame, one at the center and one on each side, allowing Goetsch to load logs on either side of the trailer. Each loop can support loads over 1,000 lbs.

"I've hauled up to nine logs at a time on the trailer," says Goetsch. "One time I used three tackle blocks to load a log that weighed 2,700 lbs. Last spring I used a double tackle block to winch a 30-ft. long hard maple log onto the trailer.

He says he's willing to provide blueprints for the trailer if there's enough interest.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, James Goetsch, 8011 Meadow Dr., Merrill, Wis. 54452 (ph 715 675-4203).