

Foreword

The poultry sector is possibly the fastest growing and most flexible of all livestock sectors. Driven primarily by very strong demand it has expanded, consolidated and globalised over the past 15 years in countries of all income levels. Livestock is fundamental to the livelihoods of about one billion of the world's poorest people. Rural poultry, in particular, is essential for the livelihood of many resource-poor farmers often being the only asset they possess. It makes up about 80 percent of poultry stocks in low-income food-deficit countries and significantly contributes to: (i) improving human nutrition, providing food (eggs and meat) with high quality nutrients and micronutrients; (ii) generating a small income and savings, especially for women, thus enhancing the capacity to cope with shocks and reducing economic vulnerability; (iii) providing manure for vegetable garden and crop production. The importance of the socio-cultural and religious functions of village poultry production for smallholder livelihoods, beyond its economic or nutritional importance, is also widely recognized.

This publication is a collection of short articles that give an overview of the benefits of poultry products and information about different aspects of their production. The articles are primarily written to provide information for a general audience rather than for technical experts in the concerned fields of specialization. Originally prepared as separate articles in 2011 for the FAO poultry production website they are compiled in this document for easy access and reference.