

Does It Pay to Put Your

Birds in a Cage?

By Myron Pasvogel
Department of Poultry Husbandry

Since 1945 the most significant change in Arizona poultry operations has been the development of the individual cage for layers. About 35 percent of all layers are now kept in cages. Arizona cage operators have encountered several problems unique to this section and have developed practices to overcome these difficulties.

Need More Birds per Man

A 1953 survey indicated that the average cage plant worker cares for 2000 birds. In California one man cares for 4000 birds. It is evident that Arizona cage operators must make more efficient use of labor during periods of declining prices if they hope to realize profits from their operations. Enlarging the plant and the employment of mechanical labor saving devices such as electrical carts will help put the entire system on a better paying basis.

Studies also show that the annual labor cost under the floor system averaged \$1.68 per hen. Under the cage system it averaged \$2.29 per hen per year.

In the cages the average production per hen will be about 10 eggs per year more than on the floor. At present prices these eggs will not pay the increased labor cost. The net cost per dozen eggs has remained higher under the cage system—a cost that must be reduced if the cage system is to prove profitable during periods of stress.

Personal preference has been the guide in house construction. Houses should be of simple construction designed principally to provide protection from direct sunlight and hot winds. Burlap and lathing materials are often employed as wind-breaks for the rows of birds nearest the

outside of the structures.

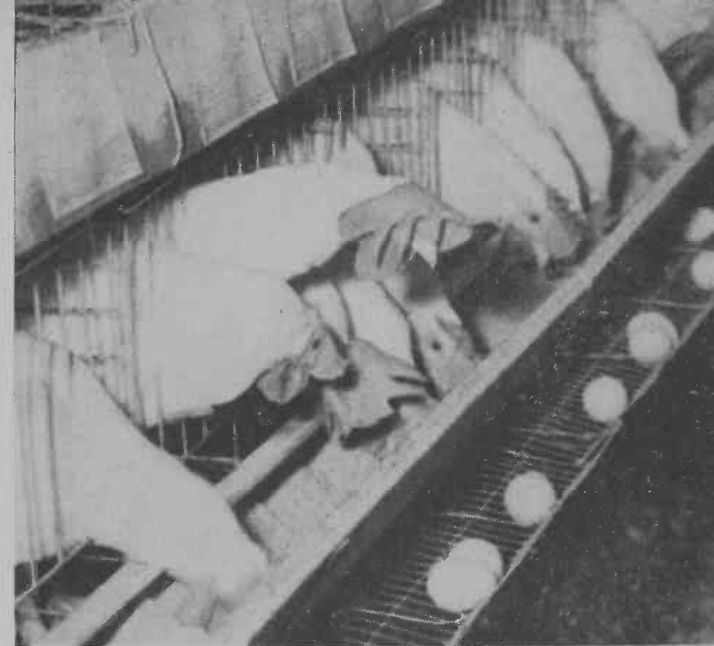
The most popular cage sizes are the 9 and 10 inch models. Their popularity stems from the comfort of the birds, ease of handling replacements when culling, good circulation of air between the birds, and economy of space. The 8 inch cage allows full utilization of house space, but it may restrict the free movement of larger birds.

The 12 inch cage is generally used when two birds are placed in one cage. Studies have shown that egg production is not materially reduced in the smaller cages nor is it greatly increased in the 12 inch cages.

The most important feature of a cage system in Arizona is the water supply. Regardless of the system employed it is imperative that an abundant supply of clean, cool water be available to the birds at all times. Water is important because a hen will consume 2 pounds of water for every pound of feed eaten.

A V-shaped or U-shaped trough made of aluminum is the most popular type used locally. This trough (1) is simple to clean, (2) won't overflow if properly constructed and levelled, (3) is free of parts which will stick or clog, (4) attracts the birds' attention by the water movement, and (5) keeps the water cool.

A common disadvantage of the mechanical types is the fact that they are chronic cloggers. Also they require con-



stant attention to assure adequate water for the hens and to prevent spillage in the feed and droppings. Water supplied by mechanical devices is much warmer than water in troughs.

Because egg production will decline markedly when temperatures go above 100 degrees F., Arizona cage operators must provide some method of cooling the house or birds. The most common method is the use of a sprinkling system located on the roof. The water is turned on when temperatures reach 95 degrees and allowed to run for 10 minutes of each hour.

The birds themselves can be cooled by a spray or fogging system inside the house. In all systems of cooling a drop of 5 to 20 degrees is all that can be expected under any conditions.

Cage systems have proven popular and in most cases profitable. Profit realized will depend to a great extent on the managerial ability of the operator.

Must Care for Each Bird

In cages each individual bird is cared for. Feed must be put in front of each bird and the eggs gathered from each hen. On the floor feed and water are set out and the birds help themselves. Nests are placed in the house and the birds go to the nest to lay. The successful cage operator must, therefore, make the most efficient use of his labor at all times.



A view of a well arranged cage plant. Note the concrete track used to guide an electric feed cart.

