WHEN DO YOUR HENS LAY?

By M. W. GIBBS, '26

Late Molters Average 73 Eggs Per Year Above the Early Molters—A Hen That Molts Late Rests Only a Short Time—The Early Molter Loafs During the Period of High Prices

A

study of the relation of the time and rate of molting to winter egg production was recently made by the writer at the University of Arizona Poultry Farm. The experiment was carried out under the direction of the instructors in the Poultry Department of the University, and was made for the purpose of determining whether or not the hens that began molting early in the season would come back into production and lay enough eggs in the winter while egg prices were high to justify keeping them.

Experiments on the molt have been conducted from time to time by various State Agricultural Experiment Stations in every section of the country. In almost every instance the results of such experiments have confirmed the following facts: (1) Under normal conditions hens usually do not lay through the period of their molt, but stop laying to renew their plumage. (2) As a rule hens that begin molting early in the season take all the fall to molt while the late molters change their feathers rapidly and begin laying again about the time the early molters get started. (3) The early molters not only quit laying, but they lay fewer eggs during the time while they are laying. Usually then, the hens that begin molting early are the lowest producers, while the hens that wait late to drop their feathers lay the greatest number of eggs. However there are variations from the foregoing, even under well regulated conditions. Furthermore, the very best of layers may be thrown into a molt abnormally by improper care and management, such as irregular feeding, sudden changes in feeding and housing conditions, and other irregularities.

A good many commercial poultrymen pull out the early molters in the fall and sell them for meat. With this in mind the study was made here to determine whether or not the early molters would produce enough eggs in the winter while prices were high to justify carrying them over their long molting period.

For this purpose thirty-two White Leghorn hens were used. These hens were just completing their first years laying season during the time of the experiment, which began on July 31, 1925, and continued through December 1925. Each hen was examined every two weeks and the progress of the molt recorded. Daily trap-nest egg records had been kept from the time the hens began laying as pullets.

The egg records showed that the lowest producers in the pen laid seventy-five eggs in her first year of production and the highest producer laid two-hundred and twenty eggs. Twelve of the thirty-two hens were molting when they were first observed on July the thirty-first. A number of them were well along in the molt. The highest record made by any of these early molters was one-hundred and thirty-one eggs, and the average for these twelve was 110.08 eggs each. Eleven of the hens began molting during the months of August and September. The highest record made by any of these was 162 eggs for the year, and the average for the group was 134.4 eggs each for the first year, or 24.32 more eggs per hen than the earliest molters. The other nine of the birds molted after October the first, some of them not molting before November and December. These nine hens averaged 183 eggs each for their first year of production, and the highest record made by any of them was 220 eggs. This high record hen did not begin molting, except a little on the neck, until November and by December the fifth her molt was nearly complete. The results are shown below in table No. 1.

This table shows the time molt began; number of hens in each group; and the egg production for the year average for each group.

Group 1. Before Aug 1. 12 110.08
Group 2. During Aug. 11 134.40
Group 3. After Oct. 1st. 9 183.00

The hens that began molting in (Continued on Page 17)
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July did not, as a rule, complete their molt until November. The majority of those that began molting later also were through molting by the end of November. In other words the early molters were slow molters and the late molters changed their plumage quickly. The early molters laid but few eggs from July the 1st until November the 1st. The twelve hens that began molting in July averaged only 6.25 eggs each during the three last months of the year. The eleven hens that began molting during August and September averaged 8.10 eggs each during the last three months of the year, and those beginning to drop their feathers after October the first laid an average of 9.33 eggs each in these last three months.

Although the number of fowls used in this experiment was too small for the results to be of very great significance commercially, the results indicate that about the same relation exists between the time of molting and egg production here as has been found to prevail in other sections. The early molters did not, in this case, lay enough eggs from July 1st to January 1st to pay for their feed. They will have to make good records from January the 1st until their next molting time to justify keeping them for laying purposes. The frequent handling of the fowls in connection with the experiment might have had some influence in lowering the egg yield, but it should not affect the early molters any more than it did the late molters.

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PRACTICE HOUSE

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furniture handled carefully. This is an important item in economy in the home also. The fourth economy is that of time and energy, for the girls must carry a full course at school with the work at the Practice House. Careful planning is the means by which the girls avoid haste and confusion. Convenient arrangement in the kitchen saves many steps and much energy.

The next problem is that of making the house as pleasant and home-like as possible. At every meal the table is set with snowy linen, glistening china and shining silver grouped attractively around a centerpiece of flowers. The rooms are kept clean and orderly at all times and are made attractive by the use of flowers, pictures and the arrangement of furniture. These are customs which one would attempt to follow in one's own home, thereby making it more pleasant, more beautiful and more restful.

The least definite and perhaps the most important problem is that of human relationships. The girls are encouraged in cooperation, usefulness, and thoughtfulness toward others. They cultivate a serene unselfishness, which is master of the most unexpected situation which may arise, and which allows the girl to present herself to the rest of the group smiling, calm, and always kind. This is an attitude which will do much toward making the home atmosphere what it should be.

From these facts, it is clear that the purpose of the Practice House is to enable girls to become more capable homemakers and that it succeeds remarkably well in carrying out that purpose.

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