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UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE EXTENSION SERVICE

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THE MANAGEMENT OF LAYING HENS

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The brief instructions contained in this circular are prepared for the members of the Arizona Boys' and Girls' Poultry Club and for farmers or others who may desire to get the best results from a few laying hens.

BUILDINGS AND YARDS

One of the most important matters in the poultry business is that of suitable quarters for the birds. No elaborate buildings or yards are recommended, but it is well to plan the yards so that the birds may get exercise, secure green feed and be in a sanitary environment. The chief requisites in the buildings should be to avoid drafts and have them as cool as possible during the hot summer months. To effect this purpose the buildings should be situated, if possible, in the shade of some large trees, where the air may circulate freely.

SELECTION OF BIRDS

There is no breed which is the best under all conditions. It should be understood that the market pays the highest price for uniform products; and it is impossible to secure as uniform a product from mongrel birds as from pure-bred birds. Birds should be selected of pure breeding, uniform in size, age, shape and of the same breed. The following points are well worth considering in selecting the individual birds:

1. Broad back and full breast.
2. Deep body of medium height.
3. A broad head with stout beak, bright, firm comb and large, clear eyes.
4. Stout shanks and toes, legs straight and set wide apart.
5. The toe nail should be short and well worn, indicating great activity.
6. The birds with the greatest vigor and vitality are usually the first to leave the roost in the morning and the last to retire at night.
7. The foregoing points should be combined with a glossy and healthy plumage.

FEEDS AND FEEDING

Hens require a great variety of food, including meat, bone, grains and green forage. It would be wise to have a dry mash composed of a mixture as follows: Corn meal or milo maize, feterita or kafir (2 pounds), wheat bran (1 pound), cottonseed meal (1 pound), wheat middlings (1 pound), fish or meat scraps (1-2 pound), bone meal (1-4 pound), charcoal (1-4 pound); and feed along with this a grain mixture of 2 parts by weight of corn meal, milo, feterita or kafir, 1 part wheat and 1 part oats. A good grain mixture may consist of equal parts of corn and wheat or kafir and wheat. To these may be added other grains, such as barley, oats, etc. The exact quantities of grains used in this mixture are not so important as to give the birds a variety. No matter how the grains are mixed, some hens will eat nothing but wheat and others nothing but the corn at certain meals. The hard grains should be fed in a deep straw litter in order to induce exercise. The hens should be fed sparingly in the morning, but should be given all they will eat at night, thus keeping them in a healthy, vigorous condition and not allowing them to become too thin or too fat.

During the time that the hens are laying they should be given a constant supply of green feed to keep them active and contented. For example, lettuce, cabbage and other like vegetables may be used. Alfalfa makes one of the best green feeds. Other good feeds are skim and butter milk. Where these are easily obtainable at a low market value, it would be wise to feed large quantities.

SANITARY RULES

1. The hens should be freed of all insects and vermin before entering the contest. Spray the houses carefully with a good insecticide, using the formulas and procedure recommended in Weekly Press Letter, Vol. II, No. 5, as follows:

"Formula 1. 3 parts gasoline, 1 part crude carbolic acid, 90-95 per cent strength"

(Do not use crude carbolic at less than 90-95 per cent strength.)

"Formula 2. 3 parts gasoline, 1 part cresol. Mix the gasoline and crude carbolic acid together, or if cresol is used instead of crude carbolic, mix very thoroughly; add gradually, while stirring, plaster of Paris to take up all the moisture. It will require about four quarts of plaster of Paris to one quart of liquid. When enough plaster of Paris has been used, the mixture should be a dry pinkish brown powder, having a combined carbolic and gasoline odor. Sprinkle well into the feathers.

"For a spray to be applied to the roost, boxes and walls, you will find three parts kerosene and one part crude carbolic acid, 90-95 per cent strength, effective, or if the 90-95 per cent crude carbolic acid cannot be obtained, cresol may be substituted. Stir thoroughly and apply with brush or spray pump."

2. It would be well to rub the chickens' heads with vaseline and sulphur.

3. Lousy hens are not egg producers. Provide three nests for six hens, and keep the nests clean.

4. Place some potassium permanganate in the water. This will keep the birds healthy and acts as a preventive of roup.

5. Remove droppings and refuse from the houses and yards frequently.

6. Fill up all mud holes.