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University of Arizona, College of Agriculture

CULLING THE NON-PRODUCING HEN

BY FRANCIS R. KENNY, *Poultry Husbandman*

The elimination of the non-producing hen from the laying flock must be considered as an essential feature of sound poultry management. The margin of profit for an individual bird is so small even under proper conditions, that we can not afford to lessen our profit by retaining in the flock the birds which lower our average. If the poultrymen in Arizona were to eliminate forty percent of their birds by the use of the proper culling methods, the egg yield would not be greatly lessened and the profit would be very materially increased. Many flocks which are now returning little or no profit would become profitable enterprises if the non-producers were eliminated.

SELECTION OF PULLETS FOR THE LAYING FLOCK

An examination of the pullets in the early fall before they begin to lay will result in the elimination of many of the birds which would not be profitable. As the pullet becomes fully developed, the back should be straight, long, and broad. The bird should be alert and vigorous, and in yellow-shanked breeds the color should be deep yellow. The ability of a bird to utilize large amounts of food will be indicated by a large well-developed abdomen. This type of pullet should be retained in the laying flock while the undersized, crow-headed, pale-legged, unthrifty pullets should be eliminated.

CONSTITUTION

The best layers are birds of good vitality and healthy. A bird of weak constitution can not be expected to lay many eggs. Fowls of strong constitution are alert and active, the beak is short and blunt, the eyes bright, and the comb, even if large, must be of fine texture and good red color. The fowl with long thin beak and crow head, dull eyes, pale shriveled comb, long toenails, and inactive disposition is not found in the high egg record class. Fowls with crooked backs, breast bones, or tail should be eliminated.

Agricultural Extension Service, E. P. Taylor, Director, Tucson, Arizona.
Cooperative Extension Work in Agriculture and Home Economics, University of
Arizona, College of Agriculture and U. S. Department of Agriculture Cooperating

CAPACITY

The usual method of determining the relative capacity of fowls is by the measurement of the distance from the pelvic bones to the rear end of the breast bone. The hand should be placed across the abdomen of the bird so that the forefinger touches the two pelvic or lay bones. One of the other fingers will then rest against the end of the breast bone. The distance from pelvic bones to the end of the breast bone should not be less than three or four fingers, and a greater distance is, of course, desirable. The distance in a bird which is laying will be somewhat greater than in the same bird after it has ceased to lay. A good width across the abdomen from the ribs on one side to the ribs on the other side is also desirable. The abdomen itself should be soft and pliable. The fowl with tightly drawn skin and hard abdominal fat is not a good producer.

THE PELVIC BONES

The pelvic bones should be thin, straight, and pliable and well apart. Fowls with crooked pelvic bones, and those with thick, meaty, pelvic bones with hard lumps on the ends should be sold

PIGMENT TEST

The pigment test may be used with yellow-shanked fowls. As the egg yield increases, the yellow color in the shanks, beak, and vent gradually disappears. As productivity lessens, the color returns. The change is most quickly noticeable in the skin around the vent. During the months of greatest production, the shanks and beak may become very pale, while during the time of least productivity the shanks, beak, and skin (most easily examined at the vent) may take on a deep yellow color. Certain grains, such as yellow Indian corn, probably influence the color of the shanks, beak, and skin to some extent. The condition of the vent, as well as its color, may be used as an indication. The fowl which is laying has a moist, loose skin at the vent, while the one that has ceased to lay has a dry, puckered vent. Since it takes several weeks after the hen begins laying before the yellow in the legs disappears, a fowl which has recently commenced to lay may have deep yellow legs. Her condition should be determined by the physical condition of the vent. Deep yellow legs and moist, loose skin at the vent would indicate a bird which had been resting for some weeks, but was now laying. Pale legs and beak with a dry, puckered vent would indicate a fowl which had been laying heavily but had very recently started to rest.

THE MOLT

The best laying fowls must lay over a longer period than the poor layers. Trap nest records show that the poor layer stops laying earlier in the summer than the good layer. The fowl which ceases to lay and commences to molt in July and August is usually below the average; the fowl which molts in September is usually average for the flock; while the fowl which does not commence to molt until later in the season is usually above the average of the flock.

SUMMARY

Cull in June, July, August, and early September all hens which show a well developed molt, shriveled comb and wattles, tightly drawn abdomen, and dry, puckered vent. And, if a yellow-shanked breed, cull also those birds which have deep yellow shanks and beak. At this season about twenty to twenty-five percent of the average flock may be culled with no appreciable loss in egg production, and perhaps forty percent could be culled with very little loss.

Select for the breeding pen, about November first, the birds which show an incomplete molt, bright eye, red comb and wattles, good abdominal capacity with thin, straight, well spread pelvic bones, and in yellow-shanked breeds select also those fowls having pale shanks and beaks, and moist, loose, pale skin around the vent.

After culling and selecting according to the last paragraphs the birds which remain may be classed as average for the flock.