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## EC1408b Pointers on Culling

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NEBRASKA  
COOPERATIVE EXTENSION WORK  
Under Act of Congress, May 8, 1914  
The University of Nebraska College of Agriculture  
& U. S. Department of Agriculture Cooperating  
W. H. Brokaw, Director Extension Service

Poultry  
Circular #3

14086

Charles H. Brown

POINTERS ON CULLING

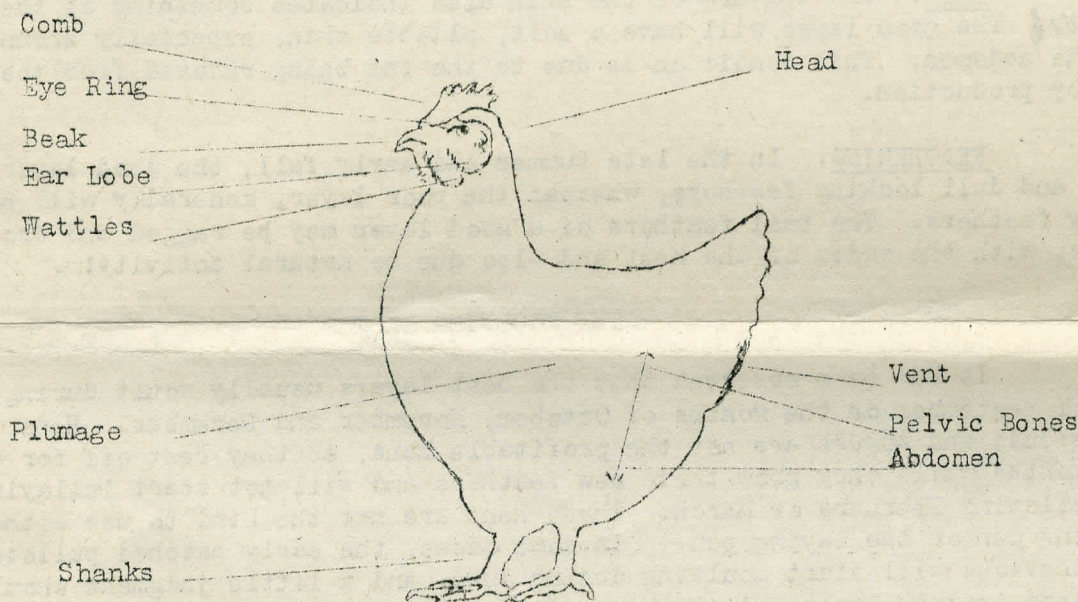
by

H. M. Wells, Extension Poultryman

Poultry profits are not based altogether on the number of hens in the flock, but rather on the number of eggs that the hens lay. The trapnest shows us that certain hens, given the same feed and care will lay 200 eggs a year, while other hens in the same flock will lay only forty or fifty eggs a year.

The elimination of the poor layer from the flock should begin about the first week in June or as soon as the egg production begins to decrease perceptibly and to continue culling during the summer and fall.

Certain standard methods of selecting the profitable layers in the flock have been established and the following points should be given special consideration when culling the poor layers out of the flock.



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THE ESSENTIALS IN CULLING

HEALTH AND VIGOR

The first essential for high egg production is healthy and vigorous stock. It does not matter how well bred a hen may be or how well we may try to feed her for egg production, if she is not naturally healthy and vigorous, she will not be a good bird to keep in the laying pen. Birds that have any physical defects should not be kept.

The indications of health and vigor are noted by a good bright eye, a bright red comb and an active disposition. The poor layer will generally appear listless, inactive, and have a poor appetite. The hen that is first off the roost in the morning and the last on the roost at night, and has a full good crop of feed when she goes to roost, usually proves to be the best layer.

COLOR CHANGES

Certain color or pigment changes also indicate whether a hen is a good layer or not, especially during the summer months after a period of heavy laying. These color changes can be noted in yellow skinned breeds. The heavy layers can usually be distinguished by the faded out appearance of the vent, eye ring, beak, skin and shanks. This is due to the fact that the laying fowl uses up the surplus fat in the body for egg production, using it especially from the skin. The fat carries with it the color pigment so that the heavy layer therefore has lighter colored shanks, skin and beak than has the poor layer.



### BODY CHARACTERISTICS

CAPACITY. The importance of capacity in the body of a good layer is very apparent. A good laying hen is expected to convert a relatively large amount of feed into a large number of eggs. In order to do this, she must have room for her egg producing organs to develop.

The capacity of the hen is measured generally by the fingers of the hand. The distance from the end of the breast bone to the end of pelvic or the lay bones, gives us the size of the abdomen, which is the best indication of the development of the egg producing organs.

A three finger capacity of the abdomen denotes good development in Leg-horns; whereas an Orpington with a four finger capacity would have no greater relative capacity.

The width between the pelvic bones is measured in the same manner. A good egg producer measures three finger or more between the pelvic bones.

PELVIC BONES. The formation of the pelvic or lay bones is an important test in culling out the poor layers. The profitable producers have straight thin pliable lay bones, whereas the poor layers generally have heavy hooked lay bones.

SKIN. The texture of the skin also indicates something of the laying ability. The good layer will have a soft, pliable skin, especially around the vent, and the abdomen. This condition is due to the fat being removed from the skin and body by production.

FEATHERING. In the late summer and early fall, the good layer will have rough and dull looking feathers, whereas the poor layer, generally will have smooth glossy feathers. The tail feathers of a good layer may be ragged and broken due to contact with the sides of the nest and also due to natural activity.

### THE MOULTING TEST

It has been observed that the best layers usually moult during the latter part of September or the months of October, November and December. Hens that moult during July and August are not the profitable hens, as they rest off for three or four months while they grow their new feathers and will not start in laying until the following February or March. These hens are not the kind to use either in the breeding pen or the laying pen. In some cases, the early hatched pullets of the year previous will start moulting during June, and a little judgment should be exercised in such cases. A check should be made with other tests.

Regular culling of the flock every month or two is an important item in good poultry management.

In selecting the hens that are used in the breeding pen, be sure and select only the best hens, for vigor and vitality, for egg production, and for good standard qualities.

### KEEP

Hens that have vigor and vitality.  
Hens that have capacity.  
Hens that have straight thin pelvic bones.  
Active hens.  
Late moulting hens.  
All vigorous pullets raised this year.