

2-1923

EC1414 Finishing Poultry on the Farm

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**THE UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA
AGRICULTURAL COLLEGE EXTENSION SERVICE**

February, 1923

Extension Circular 1414

**FINISHING POULTRY
ON THE FARM**

**UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
COOPERATING**

FINISHING POULTRY ON THE FARM

To properly finish poultry before offering it for sale yields the greatest proportionate returns of any labor on the average farm. In many instances gains from 20 to 30% have been made on a coop of chickens by feeding a fattening ration for a period of ten to fourteen days.

The proper place to fatten poultry is on the farm where fattening can be as it should be, just a continuation of the process of growing the poultry or in the case of old birds, a variation from the feeding methods used for stock birds that will improve their flesh with the least trouble and cost.

If a number of farmers in a community will make a point of finishing their poultry properly for the table, making a supply of good poultry in that vicinity large enough to attract buyers of that class of poultry, either the competition of buyers will raise the prices or the farmers themselves can cooperate in marketing and get the most that the market will give. The first essential is to have the goods. In too many cases farmers who organize cooperative selling plans have tried to get a market guaranteed before they began producing the goods for it. They have gone to consumers or retailers who wanted high class goods and said, "If we produce such poultry will you guarantee to take such and such a quantity at such and such a price?" As a rule you will find the buyers do not deal in futures.

Methods of Fattening

Where poultry have been on a large range and secured nearly all their feed from it the fattening to finish is best divided in two stages--about a week in a yard that affords some green food and an equal period of time in closer confinement. Under these conditions, for the period indicated, they may be fed entirely on cornmeal mixed with milk and cracked or whole corn. Feed this mash once or twice a day, as is convenient or desirable, giving the fowls all they will eat clean within an hour or two after feeding. The hard grain, whether whole or cracked, is best fed in troughs or hoppers, keeping a supply available at all times. An abundant supply of clean water should be provided. The quarters should be kept free from lice and if there is any doubt about the birds being free from lice, when placed in the coops they should be treated with a good insecticide. Lousy birds will not fatten as readily as others and where they do it costs too much.

How to Make a Crate

The fattening crates in general use are 6 feet long, 16 inches wide, and 20 inches high, inside measurements. Each crate is divided by two tight wooden partitions into three compartments, and each compartment holds four chickens. The frame pieces are 2 inches wide by seven-eighths inch thick. This frame is covered with slats. The slats are placed lengthwise on three sides, bottom, back and top, and up and down in the front. The slats for the bottom are seven-eighths inch wide and five-eighths inch thick. The spaces between the slats in front are 2 inches wide to enable the chickens to feed from the trough. The bottom slats are put $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches apart; the slat nearest the back of the crate is $2\frac{1}{4}$ inches from

the corner of the frame, to prevent the chickens' feet from being bruised when the crate is placed on the ground. The top slats are cut above each partition, and six strips, 2 inches wide, are nailed under them. The three doors so formed are hinged to the rear corner piece.

The crates may be placed on stands 16 inches from the ground. The droppings from the chickens are received on sand or some other absorbent material. A light "V" trough $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches inside is placed in front of each crate. The bottom of the trough is 4 inches above the floor, and the upper inside edge is 2 inches from the crate. If it is desirable to place the crates in tiers one above the other, the door will have to be placed in front of the crate and a pan or board placed under all but the bottom tier to catch droppings. Crates may be made from old packing boxes, but a properly made crate will be found much more satisfactory.

Crate Feeding.

Crate feeding is more generally used than other methods, the crate for use on the general farm does not necessarily have to be an elaborate one. It is so simple of construction that anyone a bit familiar with tools can construct it at little cost. An ordinary shipping coop divided into four parts furnishes an excellent fattening crate. It should be at least a foot from the ground. Four hens or six broilers can be placed in each of the four compartments. Small triangular troughs should be made to hang on the coop, running the entire length. These troughs should be low enough to enable the fowls to eat without inconvenience. The next thing to remember is that only healthy fowls can put on economical gains. If they are really sick they can be readily detected from the appearance of their heads. The comb and wattles will be pale, the eye will be dull, and the chicken will be generally listless. Those that are just unthrifty and are temporarily out of condition may look healthy enough but still be poor feeders. A good way to find this is to touch each chicken with a stick to see that it is alert. This should be done once a day while the chicken is on feed. If it does not respond to this touch, upon removal from the crate it will show blue skin on the breast and have cold feet, which indicates poor circulation. Such chickens should be sold at this time, since they will not be good feeders.

After the chickens are selected for fattening they must be prepared for the feeding period. They must be starved the first day, with a solution of Epsom salts, one-half pound in a gallon of water before them. Beginning on the morning of the second day a thin mixture of the following rations should be placed before them to serve more for drink than food. Finely ground cornmeal 60%, white shorts 40%, mixed with sour milk or buttermilk. On every farm in Nebraska we find corn and wheat. If you are fortunate enough to have a grinding machine and will take fifty pounds of corn and fifty pounds of wheat and grind the two very fine you will have a mixture that will in every way be satisfactory. Beginning with the regular feed, the mixture should be made about the same thickness as batter for wheat cakes. This should be given to the chickens three times a day, all they can consume in thirty minutes. In very hot weather it is advisable to give cold water in the middle of the morning and afternoon. This will be unnecessary at other times since they get enough water from the sour milk. Great care should be taken to remove any chicken which is bleeding from an injury, since the taste of blood will start cannibalism, and the entire section of the crate may sometimes be lost from this cause. This method of fattening softens the bones, flesh, and tendons to such an extent that bruised and broken legs and wings are very common unless the chickens are handled with unusual care.

The feeding period is usually ten to fifteen days. Old stock rarely makes profitable gains after ten days, but good vigorous young stock will make profitable gains up to the fifteenth day of feeding.

(Prepared by Chas. T. Cornman - Approved by Poultry Department.)

