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EC1431 Capon Production

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EC 1431

Nebraska
COOPERATIVE EXTENSION WORK
IN AGRICULTURE AND HOME ECONOMICS
U. of N. Agr. College & U. S. Dept. of Agr. Cooperating
W. H. Brokaw, Director, Lincoln
May 1927
Extension Circular 1431

CAPON PRODUCTION

The poultry raiser, whether on a Nebraska general farm or on a specialized poultry farm who cannot meet the conditions given below should sell the surplus cockerels as broilers and not consider caponizing. The market demands heavy birds and the person who cannot produce seven to ten pound capons by the time the birds are from eight to ten months old will be disappointed in the returns he will get from those he does produce.

The conditions which are important are:

- Big, strong, healthy cockerels to caponize.
- House room and range to care for the capons for six to eight months after the cockerels might have been sold.
- Habitual good feeding and regular attention.
- Plenty of grain for normal growth to 7 to 10 pounds by late winter.

Average Person Can Caponize

Capons are, in the poultry industry, what steers, barrows, wethers, and geldings are in the other livestock industries. The procedure in caponizing a young cockerel may seem somewhat more difficult to the beginner than castration of larger animals but it is not an impossibility and many poultry raisers have been able to do their own work with very little loss. The suggestions and directions in the following paragraphs are taken from practical experience. Any person with average skill should be able to follow them and become quite successful with some practice.

Selection of Birds

The cockerels to be caponized should be the largest and strongest ones in the lot, never the culls that are left after the good ones are sold. They should be from six to ten weeks old, weigh between 1½ and 2 pounds, and be just at the stage where the comb is beginning to develop. Light breeds do not make profitable capons as they will not grow large enough to meet the market demands.

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Starve Birds Before Operation

Since the testicles of the cockerel are inside his body and close to his intestines, it is absolutely necessary that the cockerels to be caponized be starved for 36 hours before the operation is performed. Shut the cockerels up in a clean, well ventilated coop one evening, leave them there without feed and water all the next day and that night, and caponize them the morning of the next day. It takes this long to empty the intestines of a young cockerel and he will not suffer from the starving. Keeping water from them also tends to thicken the blood and prevent excessive loss of blood.

The Tools to Use

There are several commercial sets of caponizing tools on the market which can be purchased at reasonable prices. One kind is about as good as another. There are no makeshifts or home made devices that will take the place of them. All of them have good sets of directions with them which can be followed in carrying out the operations.

The main things to look for in buying a caponizing set are: A slender, sharp knife, an instrument to remove the testicles that seems to be easy to handle

and effective in use, a good spreader to hold the opening open while the operation is performed within the body, and a slender rod with a tiny hook on one end and a blunt knob on the other. Some sets include a bow to stretch the chicken out, others also include a table on a tripod. Two strings with loops in one end of each and weighted with small brickbats will take the place of the bow, and an inverted barrel raised to a handy height makes a good table.

Procedure in Caponizing

First make sure that everything will be handy to catch the cockerels without too much excitement, then that all the instruments are clean and in good working order. Have some water available for emergencies, and a little clean cotton.

If a beginner wishes, he may kill one or two cockerels for household use and practice on them first before trying a live bird.

Take the bird, put the loop of one string around both legs and hang the brickbat over the edge of the table, then put the loop of the other string around both wings close to the body and hang the weight over the other side of the table. This will spread the bird out and should keep him quiet. Lay him on one side. Stand so that the bird's breast bone is toward you, feel for the last two ribs and locate them, clip or pluck out the feathers over these ribs and just in front of the thigh. Pull the skin and flesh down toward the thigh with the left hand and make the incision between the last two ribs holding the cutting edge of the knife toward you. Make the cut from 1 to $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches long. Insert the spreader to hold the ribs apart.

The intestines can then be seen covered by a thin membrane. In tearing this membrane with the hook, care must be taken to prevent puncturing or tearing the intestines. With the blunt end of the probe the intestines may be gently pushed aside and the testicle should be in full view next to the bird's back. It is usually yellow, but sometimes dark in color, and about the size and shape of a small bean.

Delicate Part of Operation

The most delicate part of the operation is now to be performed. The spermatic artery, one of the largest in the body lies just back of the testicles and, should it be ruptured, the bird would bleed to death before anything could be done for it.

The problem is to get all of the testicle, but nothing more, enclosed within the instrument used to remove the testicle. This takes practice and patience. The testicle should be pulled out and the spermatic cord twisted off or squeezed in two.

Skillful workers may be able to find the testicle on the other side and remove both of them thru the same opening. In case this is attempted, the lower one should be removed first as the blood from the upper one might bother in the second operation if the upper one was taken out first. In case only one testicle is removed from the first opening, the bird should be reversed on the table and exactly

the same procedure followed on the other side.

Some of the Grief Connected with Caponizing

Even the most skillful and experienced poultrymen usually lose a few cockerels in caponizing so it is well for the beginner particularly to have the family's appetite ready for fried chicken.

"Slips" occur more often than they should, due to carelessness of the operators or to inability to get all the testicle out of the cockerel. He then becomes an ordinary cockerel in all characteristics except that he will likely do no good as a breeder. The capons should be watched as they heal and continue to grow and if any slips can be detected, they should be marketed before they become big, undesirable stags and nuisances in the flock.

Care of the Capons After the Operation

As soon as the operation is completed, and it should not take a second longer than is absolutely necessary, the bird should be relaxed from his uncomfortable position on the table and placed gently down in a clean coop or pen where he will not be disturbed by other chickens excepting the other capons.

He should be given water and a soft feed such as mash mixed to a thin slop in milk. From this feed he can be gradually worked on to his regular feed in three or four days.

The capons should be examined closely several times in the first two weeks to make sure there are no wind puffs forming near the openings that have been made in their bodies. If these puffs form, a sharp clean knife blade point may be used to puncture them.

The wounds should be thoroly healed in about two weeks and the capons can then be treated as ordinary chickens. During the first two weeks, however, they should be compelled to roost close to the floor or ground and not allowed to fly or jump up on or down from high perches.

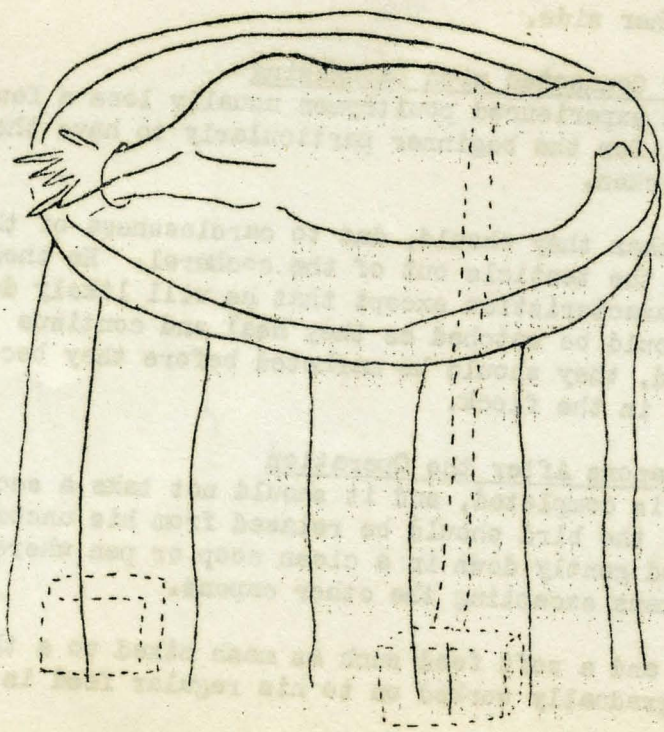
Growing Out Capons

Ordinary dry mash that is used for hens plus some scratch grain, cracked corn and oats or wheat, is a satisfactory feed for capons. If the flock is well taken care of, the capons may be allowed to run with the flock, but in no case should they be turned loose, forgotten about, and allowed to shift for themselves. As was stated in the beginning, too often Mr. Capon comes into the hen house when winter comes, thin in flesh, small in size, and with little promise of ever becoming a desirable product.

The market for capons usually comes from Christmas time to March when the capons should be from eight to ten months old. At that time a capon should have cost the owner about what it takes to feed a hen for a year, say 75 to 85 pounds of grain and mash, plus the cost of the chick at the start, the brooding and housing expense, the labor, and the caponizing expense.

By that time, a capon should weigh at least ten per cent more than the normal weight for the breed, he should be plump and well muscled, and make an attractive dressed chicken for a special trade.

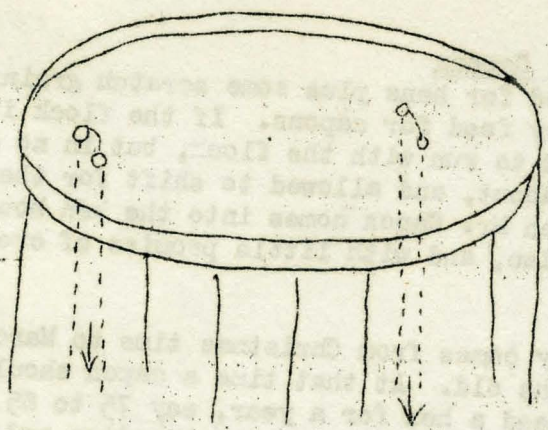
The novelty of caponizing may still be foremost with some poultrymen but the practical side of the operation in dollars and cents of extra profit from well grown capons is what should appeal to Nebraska poultrymen.



KNIFE



SPREADER



An ordinary barrel may be used for a caponizing table.



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