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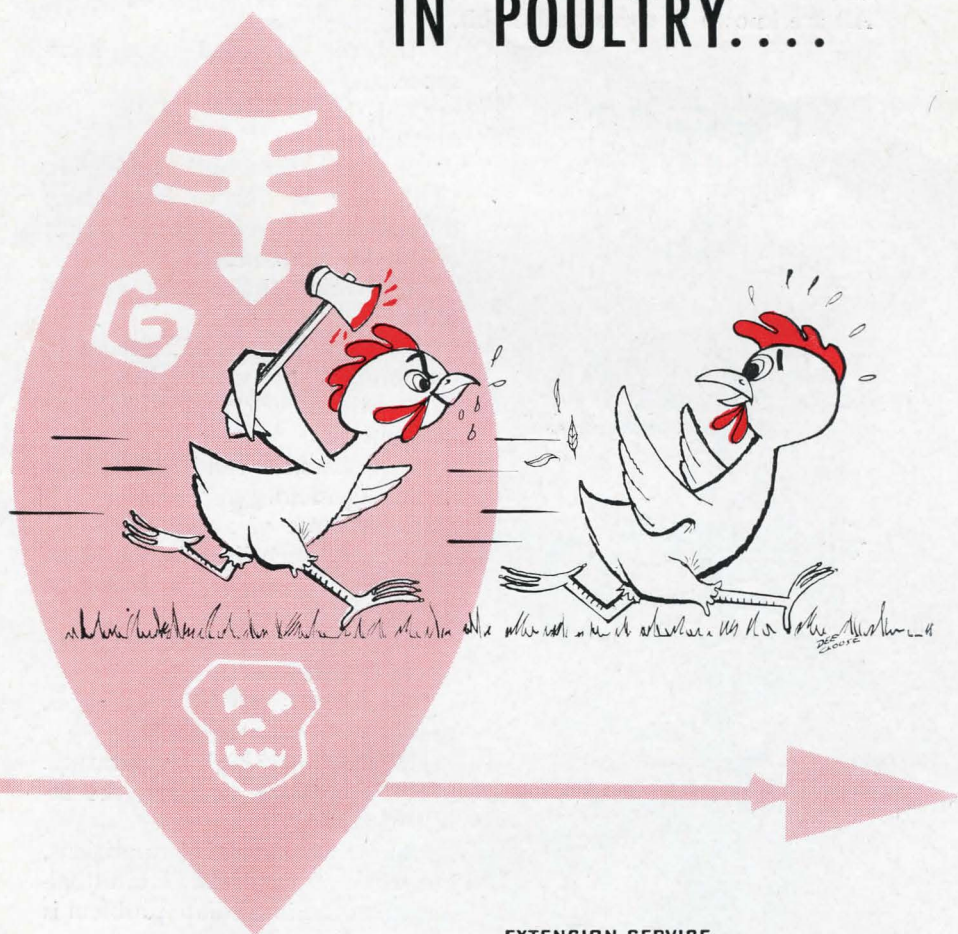
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# CONTROLLING **CANNIBALISM** IN POULTRY....



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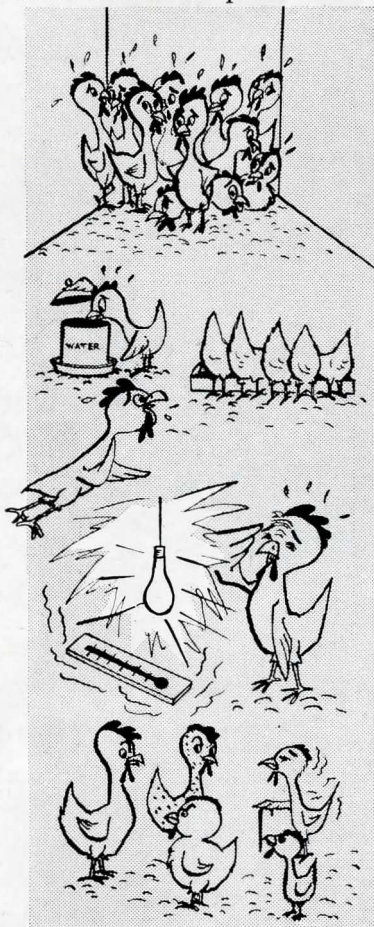
# Controlling Cannibalism in Poultry

By John Skinner, Extension Poultryman



"That nasty habit of consuming one's fellow beings" is a problem that poultry producers cannot afford to ignore. It is a habit that, once established, must be dealt with mechanically by debeaking. Prevention of cannibalism is much preferred to treatment.

There are numerous reasons for an outbreak of cannibalism. Usually one or more of the following conditions of management are present. All are known to spread the habit.



1. Birds crowded for floor-space.
2. Lack of feeder, waterer or nest space.
3. Nervousness and excitement. (This may be due to inheritance differences in strains or the result of outside influences).
4. Dietary deficiencies or absences.
5. Improper use of lights (days too long) (lights too bright).
6. Injured or crippled birds left in the flock.
7. Stresses, the results of changes in management.
8. Prolapse of another hen.
9. Too much light in the nests.
10. Hens persisting in laying on the floor.
11. Birds that lack feed or water (hungry or thirsty).
12. Keeping different ages, breeds, or colors together.
13. Extremely high temperature.
14. Abrasions or tears, the result of mating.

These are causative conditions, but when an outbreak of cannibalism exists the immediate problem is what to do.



## What to do?

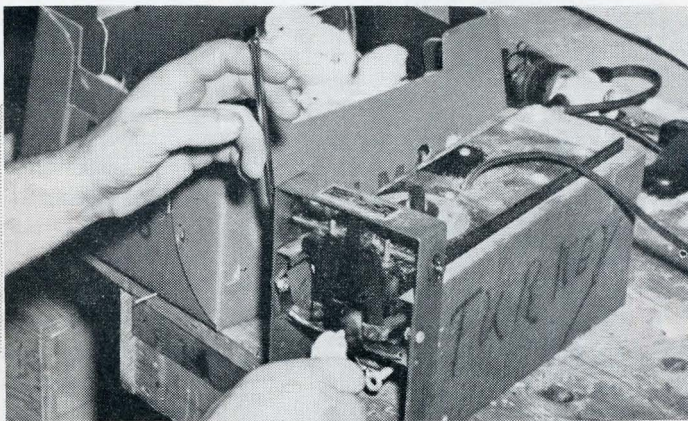
Stop the habit fast. In most cases, this will mean debeaking your flock. "Goggles," "bits," and other mechanical devices are sometimes affixed to the birds' beaks and have proven fairly satisfactory, but when costs plus labor are taken into account, debeaking will usually be the preferred solution.

Along with debeaking or applying "anti-pick" devices, there should be a close look at the management program. Correct those conditions which may have contributed to the outbreak of cannibalism. Make sure they do not enter the picture on the next brood and also, while it is fresh in your mind, calculate the losses in time, work and expense brought on by your present experience. When you plan for your next brood, prevent the condition before it occurs rather than stop it afterward.

## When is debeaking necessary?

You have to stop cannibalism when it starts. Usually, it will be a problem with every flock of egg production type chickens. So most producers plan debeaking as a regular part of their management program. Thus, it can be done with a minimum of additional expense. In addition, this planning prevents losses that would occur with the initial outbreak of cannibalism (before the producer could get it stopped).

Differing systems of growing birds, purposes for which they are being grown and management of them during adult life are all items to be considered when deciding upon a schedule of debeaking. In general, with birds being raised for egg production purposes, debeaking at housing time or just prior to the beginning of egg laying is very essential and should be a universal practice.



Day-old debeaking involves both the upper and lower beaks.

With broiler growing and meat production stocks, it often results in less loss to debeak at day old. This will last till the broilers are marketed. Research indicates that debeaking, when properly done, does not reduce the rate of gain of meat type chickens, and some work indicates debeaking may increase feed efficiency. This is probably the result of less feed being wasted by debeaked birds.

Certain feed ingredients can be used to retard or depress the habit of cannibalism, but these are not generally recommended. When an outbreak of cannibalism occurs, time is of the utmost importance. You can't afford to wait by mixing additional rations and gambling on their effectiveness. Expensive feed additives (above nutritional levels) cannot be justified from the economic standpoint.

### Debeaking Schedules

**Schedule A**—Plan to debeak moderately at housing time and at other times only if necessary. (The general recommendation for flocks where pullets are grown at liberty and hens are not intensively housed.)

**Schedule B**—First debeaking at under 10 days of age (usually day-old); a second treatment at 8 to 10 weeks of age and at housing time. This often requires tipping the lower mandible after the bird has been in the laying house 4 to 5 months. (The general recommendation for flocks that are grown in confinement and adult birds housed on one of the intensive systems.)

**Schedule C**—One debeaking, usually under 10 days of age. (This schedule will usually suffice to marketing time for birds being grown as broilers.)

**Schedule D**—Some growers have been able to control cannibalism by using distasteful compounds sprayed on the feathers. These are generally effective as preventive measures but are not sufficient to check or control severe outbreaks.

These schedules are offered only as suggestions to aid in planning your debeaking program. Many successful operators are using variations or combinations of these. The important thing is to realize that cannibalism will have to be considered and planned for as a regular management problem.

