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# EC1476 Revised 1948 Built Up Litter for Chickens

J. H. Claybaugh

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# BUILT UP LITTER FOR CHICKENS

J. H. Claybaugh

As applied to poultry house floors, built up litter is the term applied to the system of adding some new litter on top of the old litter. Built up litter is used for brooding chicks and for laying hens. Some investigators report using the same litter for several broods of chicks or in laying houses for more than one year. The increase in the percentage of dry poultry droppings in the litter seems to increase its value. Bacteria action evidently has an important part in the results secured. Advocates of built up litter claim that it not only saves labor, litter, and keeps the floors dryer and better insulated; but also contain some unidentified animal protein or vitamin factor that may cause chicks to grow faster on incomplete rations. It also tends to improve hatchability.

The start is usually made early in the fall when the pullets are first housed. Some advocate placing a thin layer of sand on top of the floor before adding the straw or other litter. Wheat straw is preferred to other straw because it breaks up into a finer litter before a new supply is required. Coarsely ground corn cobs, shredded corn stover, or shavings can be used to good advantage. New litter is added as needed to keep the eggs clean. For laying hens frequent stirring is advised to prevent caking or molding. Some advise feeding whole corn or wheat in the litter each day in order that the litter may be kept well stirred. Others prefer having a sufficient number of feed troughs so that all grains can be fed on top of the mash. The common practice is to keep whole oats as well as mash in feed troughs throughout the day. If the litter becomes caked or wet around the watering pans this must be cleaned out. To avoid this cleaning, place watering pans on top of the roosts or build a screen platform similiar to roosting racks for the watering devices.

Results of Ohio experiments clearly demonstrate that built up floor litter was a potent source of special nutritional factors necessary for maximum hatchability when breeders were confined indoors. Management of the floor litter influenced the need for supplements (such as dried Whey and meat scraps) to the basal ration necessary for the production of eggs of good hatchability.

In other Ohio experiments day old chicks were started and raised on built up floor litter with only a slight retarding rate of growth even though the ration was incomplete. In these experiments the complete rations contained 10% meat scraps, 5% dried whey and 5% alfalfa meal while the incomplete rations did not carry these important ingredients. Mortality between the different lots were comparable.

With deep litter the house, particularly the floor, is dryer and this reduces the dangers of respiratory diseases which often occur after the house is cleaned during cold weather. Built up litter in the chicken house is comparable to the system long used by successful hog men where clean straw is added during the winter without cleaning out the old bedding. Dairymen are now using the same idea in their so called covered corrals where the milking herd is bedded down during the winter. By spring the bedding may be quite deep but dairymen report less udder trouble where there is some degree of warmth from the deep litter.

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The idea of using built up litter in the hen house without cleaning may seem at variance with former teachings regarding poultry sanitation. It would not be practical to use it if screened in roosting racks and filth proof feed troughs were not, also, used, or where outbreaks of filth barn diseases had occurred.

Just why built up litter really works under certain conditions has not been full explained. Its use and limitations are controversial. The limitations needs to be carefully considered.