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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
Extension
Circular
1464

STRAW POULTRY HOUSES
J. R. Redditt

Poultry houses built of straw have helped farm poultry raisers of the grain belt to lower some of the overhead costs sufficiently to permit the sale of poultry and eggs at the present low prices and still make a good profit. A good example of this new use for straw was seen on a farm of Lloyd McKinzie at Hebron in Thayer County, Nebraska where a 20x70 foot straw house has been in use more than a year and is good for at least another year. The original cost of the house was \$70.00 with the nests, dropping boards and roosts accounting for most of the cost.

Mr. McKinzie's opinion is that this straw house has more than economy in its favor. During the winter it is the driest and warmest unheated poultry house on the farm and in the summer it is the coolest. Along with these advantages are other points worth mentioning. The control of mites, bedbugs, rats and sparrows has been no greater problem than in other houses. The same control measures are applicable to the straw house that apply to other houses.

In construction, the straw house is relatively simple. It is of the combination or two-thirds span type with posts supporting the ridge pole. The ridge pole in turn supports the top end of the rafters while the lower ends of the rafters rest upon the straw walls which are built of bales of straw. The north or back wall is three tiers high and without doors or windows. The front of the house is four tiers high and has two doors and several large windows and these, of course, require some supporting posts and wood frame work. The ends are solid like the back and built of bales of straw laid on edge, one tier above the other. Loose straw is packed into all small openings at the end of bales.

A plate is put on top of the front and rear walls to provide a means of attaching the rafters to the walls. These plates are of some old 2"xl2" second-hand bridge planks and are held in place with large spikes driven into the bales of straw. This arrangement holds the walls in place and prevents them from spreading apart or being pulled into the house.

With the walls and roof frame work in place, Mr. McKinzie's next job was to stretch some old second-hand hog wire over the rafters to support the straw roof. These rafters, by the way, extend out over the walls about 24 inches so that when roofed, the walls are protected. When the wire for the roof has been put into place, it is covered with loose straw from the stack to a depth of about 12 inches. Over this loose straw are laid, shingle fashion, bundles of sudan grass which give the structure a rather attractive thatched roof appearance.

This particular straw house has no glass windows. Glass substitute and muslin cloth on frames which are hinged at the top and opened in, served adequately for windows. This arrangement permits ample lighting and ventilation. These windows are then put into the house in pairs. Each window is three feet wide and six feet high and a pair of them make a double window six feet square. One of the 10481m

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large double windows for each 12 feet of front is sufficient.

Unless a house of this type is located on a knoll or well drained place a drainage ditch would be advisable. This may be a shallow ditch around the structure to prevent water from running into it. If the dirt from such a ditch was piled against the walls in the front and back, it would lessen the danger of water from the roof seeping back into the house.

The low cost of \$70.00 may give the impression that a good many costs, particularly labor, were omitted. On the other hand, when it is remembered that Mr. McKinzie is a one armed man and was, therefore, compelled to hire all the work done, it appears that in his case more than usual costs were included.

The McKinzie farm is equipped to keep 1300 laying hens and to brood about 3000 chicks. During the past year poultry has been one of the dependable sources of profit on this farm. In fact, it is the one phase of farming that has justified any expansion during the last two years according to the McKinzie records which have had an important part in the program on this particular farm.

"If overhead cost can be kept to a minimum, poultry production will pay well", Mr. McKinzie observed. "Take this straw house for instance, it cost 17½ cents per hen and is giving just as good results as houses costing over ten times as much." "Of course", continued Mr. McKinzie, "other costs must be watched just as closely as houses. On our farm we keep the feed bill down by mixing our own feeds. Then we mustn't let too many chicks die, egg production must be kept as high as possible, and broilers must be sold as soon as they are large enough to eat. All of these things must be watched closely if there is to be any profit."

Suggestions regarding the arrangement of doors, windows and dropping boards are given in Nebraska Extension Circular 1416, "Farm Poultry Houses". Write for a copy if you do not have one. Address your County Extension Agent or the Agricultural Extension Service, College of Agriculture at Lincoln, Nebraska.

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