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FALL MANAGEMENT OF PULLETS

Answers to Some Questions Often Asked of Extension Poultrymen

J. H. Claybaugh

Many questions are asked each fall on how a pullet flock should be fed and managed to secure the maximum number of eggs per pullet housed. If the pullet flock has been well grown and culled when housed, the next important problem is a feeding method that will permit the pullets to gain in weight from the time they start to lay until they reach their matured weight, three or four months later.

1. What are the advantages and disadvantages of the cafeteria system of feeding pullets?

Answer

The advantages of this system are:

1. Saves time and labor in caring for pullets.
2. Eliminates a scheduled routine for doing chores, which is advantageous especially on farms where people are apt to be away frequently or are in the fields at feeding time.
3. Corn is available to birds at all times, which is necessary to supplement the mash if body weight is to be increased during the first months of the laying period.
4. Permits the use of more unprocessed farm grain if a protein concentrate of 26 to 30 percent is used.

The disadvantages of this system are:

1. Neglecting to observe signs indicating birds with reduced appetites, unthriftiness, or cannibalism. Greater losses from cannibalism are reported where pullets are self-fed.
2. Proper care of the flock may be neglected. A good poultryman can usually expect more eggs from birds that are hand-fed than from birds that are cafeteria fed.
3. Unless there are the correct number of feeding troughs containing each kind of feed, the balance between grain and mash is apt to give unsatisfactory results. As a rule, two or three troughs should contain mash to each trough containing whole grains.
4. Mash mixtures containing a high protein content are usually not as palatable as those containing a high percent of corn. The proportions of concentrate and grains must be consistent to avoid the effect similar to that of changing feed.

What feeding system is usually recommended for feeding pullets that are to produce hatching eggs?

1. The most common recommendation for feeding pullets is to self-feed mash in three feeders to each one containing whole oats. Hand-feed other whole grains an hour before the chickens go to roost. The quantity of whole grains fed should be sufficient so that the crops are well filled with grains when the birds go to roost.
2. When whole grains are fed on top of the mash and oats in feed troughs, the common practice is to observe the amount of grain remaining after the chickens have gone to roost. The quantity of whole grains fed is determined by the amount remaining at night, and the weight and condition of the pullets. During extremely cold weather more corn will be consumed by heavy producing pullets. Yellow corn is the most popular whole grain and usually makes up from 75 to 100 percent of the total grains that are hand-fed.

Wheat, kafir, milo, and rolled barley may be fed with the corn in amounts varying from 10 to 30 percent depending upon price and availability.

3. To stimulate sluggish appetites during stormy winter weather, limited quantities of teaser feeds are sometimes fed in the morning or in the middle of the day. Teaser feeds are those which are especially suited to this purpose. High vitamin pellets, thick sour milk (cottage cheese), condensed buttermilk, milk moistened mash, cooked, soaked, or germinated oats are other types of teaser feeds. Because of the extra labor involved, teaser feeds are not continued longer than necessary to restore normal feed consumption.
4. Since hens normally reach their full matured weight about three months after production begins, the percent of grain may be reduced after this time. Pullets that are well bred, properly reared, and fed, can be expected to lay 15 to 20 eggs per month for 10 to 12 months after they start laying. Summer culling of non-layers is based on the theory that good hens will continue to lay all summer, if well managed.

3. What are the common practices regarding lighting hen houses during the fall and winter months?

1. Artificial lighting of chicken houses during the fall and winter has become standard procedure on most poultry farms.
2. Bright lights are provided by using two 40 watt bulbs to an area 20 x 20. (400 square feet of floor run.) (Ext. Cir. 1442.)
3. Dim lights result when one low wattage bulb is used to 400 square feet of floor space.
4. A thirteen hour working day is considered the optimum to maintain health and production throughout the year.
5. Bright lights used throughout the night or a working day exceeding thirteen hours in length results in over-stimulation of production for a

short period of time, followed by loss of weight, appetite, health, and later production.

4. Why should pullet flocks be culled?

A good, "ready-to-lay" pullet has a plump body, is smoothly feathered, and richly pigmented. Unfortunately there are a few unprofitable type pullets in every flock but may be eliminated by culling early in the fall. Reasons for recommending this practice are:

1. Poorly fleshed pullets are less productive and the mortality may be high.
2. Heavily pigmented shank color is considered a good measure of future livability.
3. Mortality is greater in pullets having irregular pupils and abnormally colored eyes.
4. Unthriftness is indicated by poor fleshing, pale shanks and ruffled feathers.
5. Hens that are affected with pullorum disease do not lay as well as those that are pullorum clean. On many farms the spread of infection is greater when hens are permitted to range about the farm year. Testing pullets to remove the pullorum carriers as soon as they are housed and leaving them confined to the house is a part of the pullorum eradication program.
6. Culling the last ten to fifteen percent of the pullets of a flock to come into production will eliminate most of those birds that have passed the requirements for body plumpness, pigmentation, eye color, and feathering, yet are slow in beginning to lay. Trap-nest records reveal that the best fall layers are also the best summer layers.

5. Should pullet flocks be wormed?

1. The use of worm remedies for pullets is unnecessary if good management practices are used.
2. Worming may affect subsequent egg production as a result of worming.