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Preparing Winter Layers

For Winter Egg Production proper fall care and feeding must be given the Farm Flock

By M. C. Herner, Professor of Poultry Husbandry
Manitoba Agricultural College

On too many of our farms the fall feeding of the laying stock consists of merely what the hens can pick up around the farm buildings. This kind of poultry keeping does not pay. If we expect the hens on the farm to produce winter eggs they must be fed for it and now is the time to begin. The yearlings and most of the pullets will be in their moult now or just thru and if there is any time in a hen's life when she will require extra feed it is during the moulting period. Usually weather conditions are such that extra feeding will be necessary during the moult to keep the fowl in good condition and also supply material for growing a new coat of feathers. This feeding should start when the birds start moulting and be continued right thru it. In dealing with the fall feeding of pullets we must bear in mind that we have to depend on them for the greater part of our winter egg supply. The pullets intended for this purpose must be fully matured or practically so when the cold weather comes on and they also must have their winter coat of feathers. It is a physical impossibility to produce meat, feathers and eggs at the same time from the same bird.



PROFESSOR HERNER

Feed for Growth

Fall feeding of pullets should first be aimed at producing growth or maturing the birds. This can be done pretty well even with June hatched birds by feeding a liberal quantity of soft mash once a day. Equal parts of finely chopped oats and bran mixed with milk to make it nice and crumbly form an excellent mash. In addition, feed liberally with wheat or wheat screenings and give sour milk or buttermilk to drink. If the pullets are moulting a small quantity of beef scrap may be fed to supply the additional protein or feather forming material required. This is, however, not absolutely necessary because the milk will furnish considerable of this. Table scraps containing meat will also be very valuable for feeding to moulting pullets and hens. Give the pullets proper protection during the wet, rainy, fall days and nights. It pays to give them good care at this time. Remove them from the coops to the regular poultry house as soon as possible. By doing this they get the necessary protection and also can be cared for a little better during the early part of fall than if they were allowed to roost outside anywhere. Then also by putting them in the poultry house early in the fall they become used to their new surroundings and will do better, mature more quickly and start laying earlier than if left outside. Moving pullets or hens after they have started laying will always stop them, so the sooner the pullets are put in the poultry house the better.

Sell All Two-year-old Hens

In regard to the yearling hens—for those are the only ones that should be left at this time of the year—they probably are now in the middle of their moult or just completing their new coat of feathers. If any two-year-old hens are left get rid of them as quickly as possible for it will not pay you to keep them over winter. Also weed out the yearling hens. This can be done in different ways. The best way for farm practice is to go over them carefully at night time and lifting each bird off the perch note if she is heavy and overfat; if so kill her or at least put her in a box and sell her as meat. Do this with all your yearling hens and notice the effect this work will have on your supply of winter eggs. Another way of culling out the poor layers is to go by the amount or the richness of the leg color in any of the yellow legged breeds. A rich yellow leg as a rule is an indication of a poor layer. It generally is the case that a heavy layer has very light or pale colored legs instead of a deep yellow. This will only hold good in yellow legged hens. Heavy laying seems to take the color out of the legs; there is, however, no hard and fast rule to go by in selectin.

your best layers. The actual performance is the only sure guide. These two simple rules, however, can easily be followed and they certainly will enable one to get rid of a lot of drones in the flock. By weeding out all these and keeping no two-year-old hens the flock as a whole will be more uniform and far easier to feed and handle to better advantage this fall and in the winter than a mixed lot of pullets, year-old hens and two-year-olds.

The yearling hens should get more than just what they pick up in the fall. Give them an extra feed of soft mash once a day the same as the pullets. This will bring along the moult faster and also help them to grow a good coat of new feathers. The effect of giving these hens buttermilk to drink will be even better for them than for the pullets. This fall for the last month I have been feeding year-

ling hens soft mash once a day and buttermilk to drink before them all the time and I have never before had such heavy fall egg production in yearling hens as this year. They moulted well in July and August and then we followed up with wheat and cracked corn fed in the litter morning and night, a soft mash once a day—at noon—and buttermilk to drink. Along with this we fed green alfalfa once a day.

Grow a Plot of Alfalfa

These hens were not let out at all after September 1 and the egg production has been going up right along. The daily egg yield in two pens of twenty-five hens each runs all the way from twelve eggs to twenty. I have always found that yearling hens will do better during their moult and afterwards if they are confined in the poultry house and not let out at all. This means more work, but the egg production has been heavier in every case than when the birds were allowed free range. This, I believe, is due to the hens not being exposed to outdoor conditions, rains, storms and so on, but kept inside, given plenty of exercise, plenty of the right kind of food and plenty of fresh air. I have tried this both with heavy breeds and also with Leghorns and it has in each case been highly satisfactory. In the fall of the year it is essential that hens be supplied with green food in some form or other. For such food at this season it is hard to get anything better than alfalfa. A small plot fairly close to the hen house would form a good pasture plot for the hens all summer and well into the autumn, and then in case the hens are kept inside the daily supply could be cut from the plot.

The feeding of the pullets and hens during this month will largely determine the number of eggs you will get from your flock this winter. Start in now and feed so as to put your birds in the right condition.

Wet weather has delayed threshing. Stooks are damp and wet on the outside, but the weather looks as if it might be dry for a while at any rate. If you thresh, the outside sheaves will be tough, but if you wait it may rain again and hold up the gang for another day or two. What are you going to do? Why not get out in the morning early and set the gang at work turning out the stooks and putting them up two and two in long rows, just like they do yet "down East"? Turn-out about as many as you know you can handle in the day and by the time these are shifted the first ones will be quite dry enough to handle. This suggestion is not theory. Many farmers in the West have followed it this year and have threshed their grain without having it grade tough.

The man who is too hard up to buy a farm paper that keeps him posted is usually the one who has money to spend on fakes.

The town of Levis, Que., has by a vote of 565 to 71 decided for prohibition.

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