

POULTRY.

Judging Utility Barred Rocks.

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A Barred Rock, or, for that matter, any general-purpose breed of chickens, should be judged as to their ability to produce eggs and meat economically.

It is of prime importance that in order for a bird to do these things it must be vigorous, or in other words, able to turn the feed consumed either to eggs or meat, and at the same time be in good health. Health and ability to work hard in meat or egg production are essential. It must be conceded that up to the present at least we cannot always predict, or tell without failing, what the bird's ability is, yet, on the other hand, we usually find certain characteristics common to nearly all good individuals.

A vigorous bird has a bright, active eye. As pullets and cockerels, they show considerable red color on the side of the shanks and the cockerels are very faithful in crowing loudly and often. Frequently the head is very neat and clean cut, this being especially true of high laying hens. If the reader will look at the heads of the two birds in figure 1, a marked difference will be seen between them. The bird on the right has a strong beak and a prominent, active eye—she is alert. The bird on the left has not a very bad head, but it is not good; the eye is dull and sluggish and the beak tends to be long and straight. Avoid crow-headed, hollow-eyed chickens. Vigor means ability to stand up under trying conditions.

The question of a hen's ability to lay a large number of eggs is a question of profit or loss, and as good laying hens, during their first year's performance, are usually the best hens the second year, the culling of the poor producers during June, July and August, or before they moult, becomes a profitable undertaking.

Figures 2 and 3 show, in the head and body type, fair specimens of a good layer (figure 2) and a hen whose surplus food over body maintenance goes to meat, or, more particularly, to internal fat (figure 3). The former has a clean-cut head and a bright eye. The body shape is neat, the crop full, and the fluff, or loose feathers under the tail extend well backward, but do not sag much below the body line. The bone of the legs is flat, not round. Such a hen may be a good layer. Hens of the appearance of the one in figure 3 are seldom good performers. The head itself shows a fleshiness seldom going with high egg production. The fluff feathers sag, indicating a large deposit of internal fat, and the bone of the legs appears round. She is a fair specimen of a real good, healthy, lazy hen; she is a slacker.

One can tell at this season of the year fairly well about how many eggs a hen has laid. With the yellow-legged breeds, such as Plymouth Rocks, certain changes take place that tell the story fairly well. When the hen lays, the yellow color gradually leaves the bill or beak, beginning at the mouth and progressing towards the end of the bill. When she stops laying, the color comes back again, beginning at the mouth: thus, we may have a hen with the base of the bill, or the part near the mouth, of almost white color, the centre of the bill yellow and the end or tip white. This means that the hen has had a rest or vacation during the last month, or that she has not laid thirty eggs without a rest. Now, a period of rest means about twelve to fourteen days with an ordinary Plymouth Rock. She may also moult a feather or so in her wings, which confirms her rest period. The color also leaves the legs beginning at the front of the shank and leaving the heel, or the back part of the shank nearest to the feathers last. Thus, a really high layer will have almost white legs, a white beak, and will not have moulted very much.

It is well known that a laying hen widens between the pelvic bones (fig. 4) and these bones on the best layers are usually quite thin and pliable (fig. 5). The width from the pelvic bones to the keel bone (fig. 6) indicates a good layer, especially where this portion is elastic or soft. If the hen is very fat the space will frequently be wide but hard (fig. 7). This condition simply means a large deposit of fat, which usually means low production.

A good layer also has a thin skin, and usually, if not always, her toe nails are much shorter than those of the poor producer.

A good laying hen may, and frequently does, carry considerable flesh. The flesh on a bird is determined by the muscular development on the keel or breast bone (fig. 8). The breast is fairly long, moderately deep, and is well muscled to the very tip. The thigh is also well muscled. The smoother and softer the scale on the feet the better quality is the flesh.

In general, desirable birds are the ones showing a clean-cut head, having a bright, active eye and with legs and breast well muscled. The skin is thin, and the space between the pelvic bones and the end of the keel is wide and elastic. The good hens now have legs nearly white; their toe-nails are short and they get up early in the morning. Very few good layers moult early. A hen that has laid a large number of eggs looks the part. Her plumage is dry and frequently dirty. The hen that looks as if she had stepped out of a band-box needs watching—she is generally a boarder.

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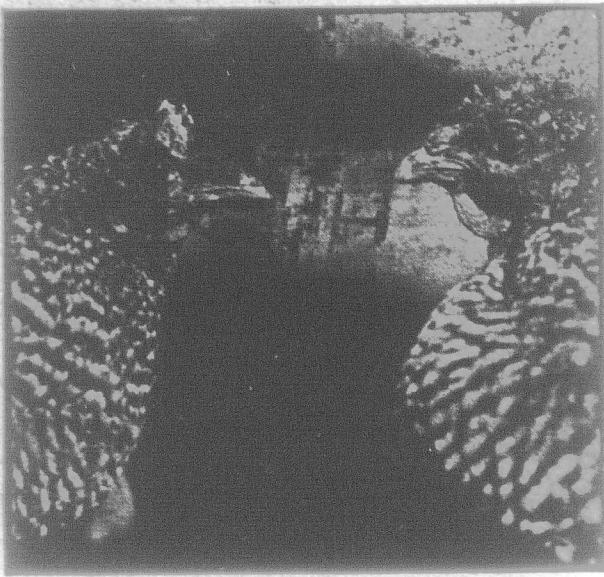


Fig. 1. Look to the Head for Vigor.
A strong beak, full face and active eye are desirable.

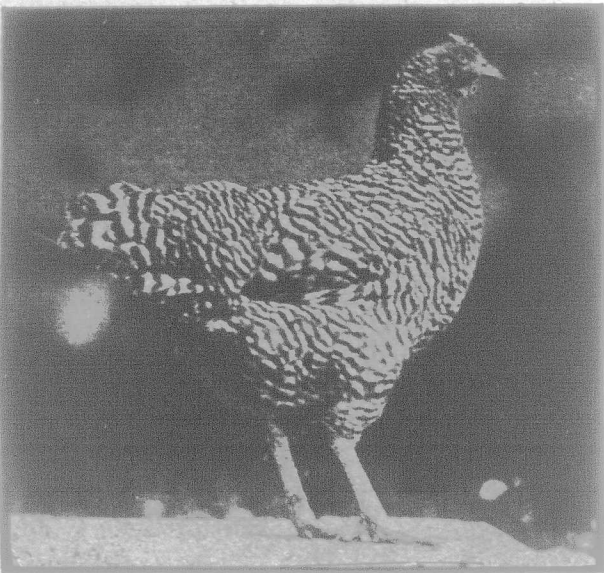


Fig. 2. Fair Specimen of Good Layer.
Note the clean-cut head and neat body shape.

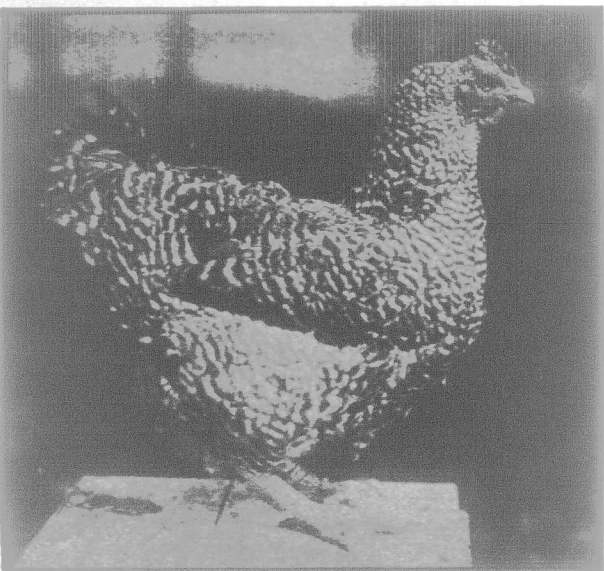


Fig. 3. This Type Seldom Performs Well.
The fluff feathers sag and the head is fleshy.



Fig. 4. The Pelvic Bones are Wide Apart.
A good laying hen widens between the pelvic bones.

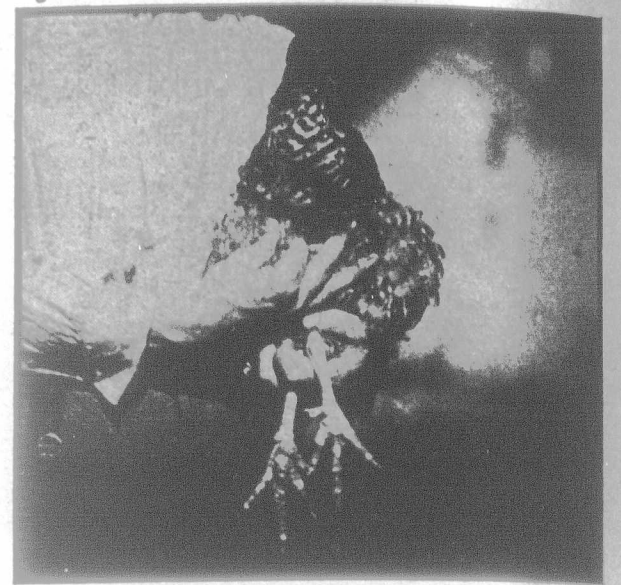


Fig. 5. Pelvic Bones are Thin and Pliable.
This is true of the best laying hens.

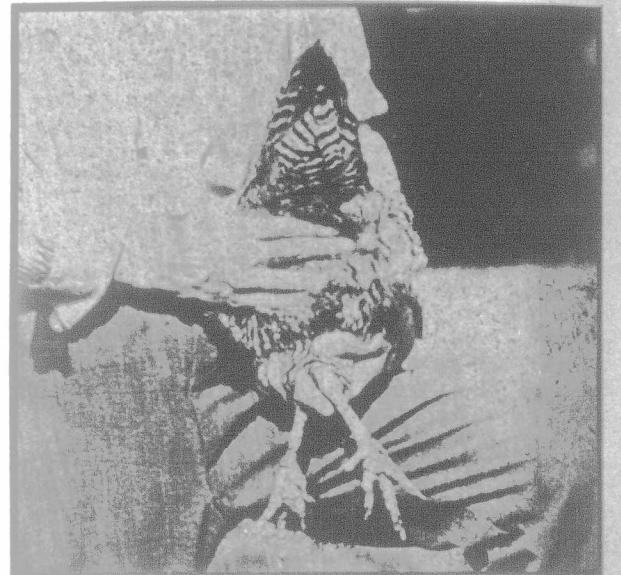


Fig. 6. Span from Pelvic Bones to Keel Bone.
In a good layer the span is wide.



Fig. 7. Hardness Means a Fat Deposit.
The working hen will feel elastic here.

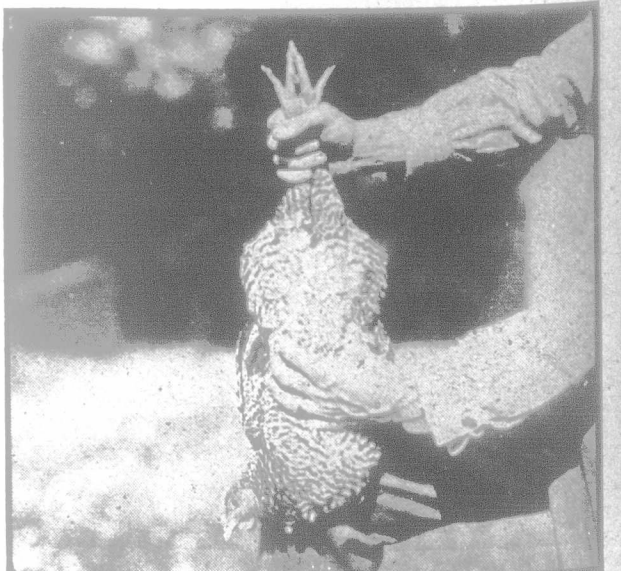


Fig. 8. Good Fleshing Indicated Here.
Muscular development on the keel or breast bone.