

# Fattening and Preparing Market Chickens

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We are again in the midst of the dressed poultry season and poultry of all kinds are coming in by the thousands from our farms. The quality this season shows but very little improvement over that of other seasons. With the exception of an odd shipment here and there, there is no evidence of proper preparation before marketing. Our farmers are annually losing thousands of dollars by neglecting to fatten all poultry before they put them up for market or before they are shipped. This seems to be a rather hard question to drive home, but, nevertheless, only one trial is necessary to convince the farmer that fattening will always be profitable. Probably the main reasons given for not fattening poultry are that it is not worth the time and trouble and that the price paid for properly fattened poultry is not any higher anyway than that paid for thin, unfinished carcasses.

Now these ideas are erroneous in that time and labor spent on fattening poultry—especially chickens—for the market is always better paid for in increased returns than any other line of work on the farm. Then, too, practically all our better class dealers in dressed poultry will pay a premium on properly fattened stock. But our farmers should not expect too much from the dealers.

## A Poor Shipment

Just lately I was called into a well known butcher and poultry dealer's shop to look at a consignment of chickens he had received from the country and which the farmer claimed had been crate fattened—these fowls were supposed to be chickens but a person had to look a second time to make sure, for they were so badly calloused on the breast bones and in such rough and bad condition generally that they could easily be mistaken for old fowl. The producer of this stock expected a high price for them, and I know for a fact that in order to dispose of some of them the dealer practically had to give them away. We want to see our farmers receive just treatment from the dealers and I have yet to find a dealer that is unwilling to pay a good price for a first-class product. Simply putting a lot of chickens in a crate for three weeks and fattening them will not necessarily mean a higher price. Such birds must show up as well finished and well dressed carcasses before the high price can be realized. What to feed, how to feed and when to feed are all factors which count in developing a high class dressed poultry product.

## Produce Economically

With proper care in handling the chickens and feeding them the right kind of food in the right quantities it is a comparatively easy matter to fatten a few hundred every fall. Economic production should be the object. With three to four pounds of grain a pound of increase can be produced. This is cheaper than you can produce any other kind of meat and the price paid for the carcass as a whole is more in proportion than for any other class of meat. I have, under ideal conditions, been able once to produce a pound of increase with just a trifle over two pounds of grain, but this was, of course, an exceptional case and the birds had been specially selected for this feeding experiment.

What we want the farmers to do is to take their cockerels about this time and put them up in fattening crates and fatten them for three weeks. Not all birds will do well in crates. Leghorns, for instance, or any of the lighter breeds, will not make very much in the way of gains. The best breeds for fattening purposes are the Rocks, Wyandottes, Orpingtons or Rhode Island Reds, or crosses of these breeds. The type is, of course, the main thing. A low-set blocky chicken with a short back, wide and full breast, is one that will make good gains in the fattening crate. This does not mean necessarily a pure bred chicken, but a cross-bred or mongrel, with a good

cross of the heavy breeds in him will be alright to fatten.

## Age for Fattening Birds

Take the cockerels at four to five months old and put them in the fattening crates, first dusting them with some reliable insect powder. A lousy chicken will never do well in a fattening crate, as lice are a constant source of worry to the bird besides sapping its vitality. Chickens may also be fattened in pens so arranged that they can be darkened all the time except at feeding time. The crate is, however, handier and also more economical in that there is no feed whatever wasted. By allowing the cockerels to get too old before they are fattened they become what is known as staggy and they never make as economic production as they do earlier in life.

The fattening crates can be made about six or seven feet long, sixteen inches wide and eighteen to twenty inches high, with the back, bottom and top slatted lengthwise and the front upright. Slats should be seven-eighths inch wide and five-eighths inch thick and placed one and a quarter inches apart on the bottom, and two inches on back, top and front. The crate should be divided into three compartments and each should open up separately at the top. The feed trough is placed on small braces on the front of the crate. These crates can be

until they are on full rations, which may be anywhere from 25 to 33 ounces. Very seldom will twelve birds eat more than 33 ounces for two meals in succession. After they are on full ration it is a good plan to feed all they will eat up clean in half an hour, never leaving any feed in front of them longer than this. Feed grit once a week. As a rule chickens do not require anything to drink during the fattening period except what is contained in the mash they get. Keep up this method of feeding for three weeks and if at any time a bird should refuse to eat, simply remove it and starve it for a few days or allow it free range then start all over again. The last week or so some melted tallow may be added to the ration as it helps to lay on fat and also aids in making a whiter carcass. Do not feed more than an ounce to an ounce and a half to each of the twelve birds at each meal. When milk is not available, ten per cent. beef scrap can be added and water used to mix to right consistency. Boiled liver chopped up fine will also answer the purpose, in fact any boiled meats will do.

By taking a little care in feeding chickens in crates one should easily put a pound to a pound and a half of extra weight on each cockerel in three weeks' time. The long legged, narrow bodied, scrawny necked type of a chicken will, however, not do it, but one of the right

poultry would not be amiss. The coops should be light and airy and not overcrowded. So much of the live poultry coming in from the farms has to suffer in transit on account of the crowded conditions of the coops. They should be of such a size that the total weight of a coop and chickens is very little over one hundred pounds. A somewhat low coop is always preferable to a high one, as long as it is not too low to cramp up the chickens.

## Preparing Poultry for Market

When it comes to killing and dressing chickens for the market, we are, of course, more or less governed by market demands. Local butcher shops may want poultry killed and dressed in the old-fashioned way, but on our larger markets we have somewhat different conditions. The stock here has to be held over often for a week or ten days and often later on in the season immediately goes to cold storage. This, of course, necessitates putting up the product in such a way that it will keep to best advantage. In the smaller markets the poultry goes into immediate consumption and as a rule the buyers and the consumers want them ready for the table. This may be alright under those conditions, but it would never do on a larger market where dressed poultry is subject to such varied conditions.

The best dealers today are agreed that all poultry should be dry plucked, undrawn and legs and feet left on carcass as well as the head. This leaves the carcass intact and there is absolutely no chance whatever of outside contamination from sunshine, flies or bacteria in the air. There is no raw surface exposed on any part of the body. By bleeding and sticking all the blood is drawn from the carcass, whereas dislocating the neck always leaves the head and neck unsightly by the presence of the large amount of clotted blood in the dislocated portion of the neck. If dressed poultry killed in this way is kept any length of time, the head discolors badly and the carcass presents an unsightly appearance. We certainly prefer to kill by bleeding and sticking. The proper way to kill a chicken is rather hard to describe on paper, but probably by following this outline and trying two or three birds the beginners may be able to become quit expert in a short time.

## Instructions for Killing

The fowl should be suspended from the ceiling or from a brace by a stout cord having a small block of wood attached to the free end. This should be looped round the chicken's legs in the form of a half hitch, suspending the bird in this way will draw the cord tight and hold it securely. Take a sharp knife and insert it in the throat of the chicken with the sharp side of blade towards the top of the mouth. Let the point come back next to the left ear with the knife handle right in the angle of the right jaw. Cut at this point. There are two large arteries in the neck one running down the right side and the other down the left, the former running over and joining the left next to the left ear. At this juncture one cut will sever both. This completes the bleeding. Now turn the knife upside down and place the point of the blade in the cleft in the roof of the mouth and the back of the blade touching the point of the upper bill. Push straight back until you touch the brain or the nervous system, then give half a turn and withdraw. This renders the fowl insensible to all pain and also loosens the feathers. As a rule the more a chicken squawks the better the stick. If it is done right the feathers will literally fall out, and there is practically no danger of tearing the carcass. On the other hand, if improperly brained, the feathers are hard to pluck and the carcass is easily torn. Proceed to pluck as quickly as possible after sticking. If the carcass begins to cool the feathers "set" and

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Two Methods of Packing Poultry for Market

placed in any outbuilding where there is protection from wind, rain and storm so as to provide sufficient shelter for the birds during the fattening period. Four birds go in each compartment and twelve to the crate.

Care must be taken in feeding during the first week or so. Do not feed for twenty-four hours after the cockerels are put in the crates, so that all the whole grain in the crops will be digested first.

## A Fattening Ration

In making up a fattening ration you probably have to be guided by what grains you have on hand. On all farms there is wheat, barley and oats available. Chop up fine two parts of oats, one of wheat and one of barley, and sift out the hulls. Mix with sour milk or buttermilk sufficient to make a pancake batter that will pour nicely. Use about an ounce per bird of this fine chop, dry, and then mix with the required amount of milk. This quantity is sufficient for each of the first four meals feeding twice a day at regular intervals. It seldom pays to feed more than twice a day, as the chickens usually do not make so much better gains to warrant taking the extra trouble. On the fifth and each succeeding meal the amount may be increased at the rate of three ounces per crate of twelve birds

type will usually gain this amount and I have known birds to gain two pounds in three weeks.

## Starve Before Killing

The cockerels should be starved about 18 to 24 hours before being killed in order that all food may be thoroughly digested and the alimentary canal practically empty. This avoids any fermentation in the crop or intestines. If food remains in the crop fermentation will set in, gases are generated and decomposition will take place quickly, and the carcass deteriorates very rapidly. Sufficient starving is, therefore, important.

The question of marketing poultry is one that is governed largely by conditions. Where the market is close by, it is always better to kill and dress the birds at home and later on in the season, when the weather is cold, it will always pay to send poultry out dressed rather than alive. Early in the season, however, I think it is best to sell live poultry only, unless you are quite close to the market or have plenty of ice to put in each case or barrel of dressed poultry. The shrinkage is usually pretty heavy when poultry is shipped alive, but during the warmer weather this is about the only way to do it.

A word or two regarding shipping live