POULTRY YARD

Preparing Pullets for Laying

After the trials, troubles, and losses of early chicken days are over there is nothing pleasanter than to watch the young pullets grow and develop in symmetry and beauty. After they have replaced their chicken feathers with fresh, smooth, clean plumage, and begin to show a reddening of the comb and wattles, we begin to realise that they have powers and possibilities all their own and our own. There is something particularly attractive about a demure maiden hen that has begun to exhibit motherly ways. We like to hear such an one beginning to talk, in her quaint way, of laying eggs, of adding to her beauty the proof of her ability.

Oftentimes the amateur poultry-keeper gets impatient and thinks the pullets he has raised or purchased ought, at command, to begin to produce him much needed eggs. The birds seem large enough; they eat enough; they have their keeper's best care and attention. Why don't they lay? Well, because they are not ready. They are not egg-machines, although man tries his best to make them such. They are living, organized beings, and by taking the necessary time to develop normally and completely the organs of egg production, with a definite purpose to bring into the world feathered beings like themselves. To do this the interval reproductive organs, the ovaries and connections, must be fully formed and perfectly developed.

The pullet has no thought of simply making eggs containing yolk and white to be gobbled as a delicacy by hungry mortals. Her strength and vitality are being turned, in large part, to the developing of the minute, but all important, germs of the eggs, each of which shall contain all the force, stamina, hereditary quality, and life powers necessary for the production of a new chick that shall grow and thrive and mature, and in turn reproduce its kind. This is not a machine process; it is life development. It is Nature's work, deliberately done with definite purpose.

DON'T HURRY THEM TOO FAST

At the same time that the pullet is preparing to furnish the eggs for future flocks of chicks, she will be completing the formation of her own bones, muscles, feathers, etc. Considering all that the pullet has to accomplish, she is really doing rapid work. Although much can be done to hasten the process, the veteran poultry-keeper does not seek to hurry the maturing of the pullets too fast, knowing well that if he should succeed in getting eggs extra early, especially in the summer, they will be liable to be extremely small in size, and there will very likely come a reaction, resulting in the interruption of egg production in a month or two, perhaps premature moulting, and, possibly, no more laying of eggs to springtime—the natural breeding season of fowls.

The secret of the genuine success is to keep the pullets developing steadily in a natural, healthy way that shall insure perfect bones, muscles, blood-vessels, nerves, lungs, digestive system, and reproductive organs.

After the sexes are separated provide for the pullets sufficient shelter, but do not overdo this part of the business. Close confinement during either day or night is not desirable. As the birds increase in size, the number in each house should be regulated so that there will always be room enough and no crowding. Comfort and ample, well-balanced rations are wonderfully helpful factors in seeking to promote early and rapid egg production. Exercise is essential to the best gradual development.

VALUE OF GRASS AND INSECTS

Green grass, insects, pure water, and grit are desirable for maturing pullets. Fresh growing grass is the best of green food, and the exercise needed in getting the insects and grass is the best of aids to good digestion and steady, healthy growth. If the grasses where the pullets range get tough and withered, fresh green food may be provided by cultivating a part of the yard or range, and planting oats, rye, or barley. A special word of caution as to the drinking water is in order here. See to it that the pullets have pure, fresh water always supplied, and that there is no impure or stagnant water where they can get at it to drink. Pullets show sometimes a very depraved taste, and even stoop to drink from filthy ditches, sink-drains, and other vile places.

Wheat and oats are the best grains for growth, adding maize as the weather grows colder. Nutritious mashes fed once a day will hasten development. A mash may include wheat, bran, and middlings, with a little linseed-meal, adding maize-meal as the season advances.

SKIM MILK IS VALUABLE

Skim-milk is exceedingly good food to promote growth and early maturity. Buttermilk and whey also contain valuable protein nutriment which can be utilised in producing eggs. Any supplies of the by-products of milk from the household, the farm, or from a dairy, should be utilised if available and economical to obtain and use. The proportions of the food-stuffs may vary much, according to easiness and cheapness in obtaining them. Use what feeding stuffs are available and economical. Keep in mind the proper balance of the protein and carbonaceous nutriments, and the amount of ash constituents, studying first the standard for a maintenance ration; second, the proportions of the standards for growing chicks, and finally adapting the diet to the standard for laying fowls. If insects or skim-milk are abundant, the fowls will get their protein nutriment without further care, and beef scraps will not be needed. Sun-flower and hemp seed in small quantities give a variation to the diet which is beneficial. Remember the value of bran, because of the phosphate of lime this contains, which is useful in building the fowls' frames, and is considered conducive to early maturity. As laying time approaches, or to hasten its coming, fresh-cut green bone may be used. Feed per pullet, at first, one-fourth ounce per day, increasing gradually to one ounce daily. It is very nutritious and stimulating, and, probably, can be fed at this time with greater effect than at any other time in life of the fowl. If the fresh bone is difficult to get, or is only obtainable and prepared at great cost of funds, or labour, beef scraps, meat-meal, or dried blood may be used in addition to granulated dry bone or bone-meal. Use only sufficient of these concentrated feeding-stuffs to balance the ration according to the standards. When the demand comes for carbonate of lime, of which the egg shells are mainly composed, it is easily and cheaply supplied by means of crushed oyster-shells or well broken egg-shells.

Do not use condiments like red pepper, mustard, and patent and pretended forcers of egg-laying, unless you wish to cause inflammation of the digestive tract and the organs of reproduction. Excessive exciting of these organs does not pay, because a reaction is sure to come, and the tissues are then liable to attacks of disease germs which in health and vigour they would resist and reject.—F. L.

Early Moulting

J. L. Johnston, Essex Co., Ontario

As my subject implies I put a great deal of stress upon the care of hens at this time of the year so as to bring them into early mold. Thus they are ready for that important function, of winter egg production. To do this we must assist them in every known manner. In the first place, one question arises, how shall we assist nature in this particular working to the best advantage? My method has been during the first half of July to feed sparingly for two weeks. In fact, compared with the feeding at other seasons of the year, you might call it starving. Then after this I feed heavily, say one half more along with the green food they will eat. For this purpose I grow a patch of cabbage. I have now all of my old hens in the mold, also two of my male birds, which I have away from the hens. I never let them run together.

After the middle of July, during the time they are making new feathers, I give them all the animal food I can conveniently get hold of, such as ground bone, slaughter house offal, or, if this cannot be got, I feed bone meal or dried beef scraps, softened by pouring boiling water over it. It can then be mixed with ground feed of any kind. The result has been that I have always had more eggs from hens during the early winter. My flocks have been healthier and the result has been all that I could desire. My birds have all been with few exceptions, ready for the fall shows, having all or most of their new feathers.

The method which I would adopt if I were raising chickens on a farm would be to confine my hens in a yard, for a period of 10 days or two weeks, just giving them enough feed to live on. If I had not a yard I would make one. I would then let them out for a free range of the grain fields after the sheaves are gathered, giving them a little feed in addition. The ration I have given above. This treatment will give you more winter eggs, less sickness, and it will help your young chickens to develop. I have referred to the pullets more than to the cockrels. Cockrels should be separated from the pullets just as soon as the sex can be determined. If you have not already done something along this line, you may start at once. The old adage of "Better late than never" will apply here to advantage.

If you have a surplus of skim milk on your farm, or whey or buttermilk, use it for wetting your ground grain or meat meal, in place of the water, it will give better results, and will amply repay you for any loss your hogs may sustain by turning their food into this channel. I have tried several systems with the above objects in view, but have forsaken them all for this one. It has worked out very satisfactorily.

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