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Poultry Chat

H. E. Vialoux, Sturgeon Creek, Man.

Below Zero Winter Laying at the
Manitoba Agricultural College,
St. Vital

Yes, I went out there one cold day in early January, 38 below zero, that morning, and had the hardihood to ask the obliging attendant to show me the winter layers at work, and he did so!

The long row of houses were decidedly cold with cotton fronts and plenty of windows, perhaps 15 to 20 below zero inside, but the busy hens were not in the least chilled.

Pen after pen of White Leghorns and Barred Rocks were inspected and in nearly every pen I found the hens strictly "on the job," in their useful trap-nests, cheerfully performing a winter "lay" with many a cackle. 30 Leghorns and 25 Barred Rock hens are kept in each laying pen and no gentlemen allowed on the premises. The pens are cheaply made of double boards, the ceilings packed with straw, with slats laid across, and the floors made of concrete covered with a litter of short straw, ten inches deep, which is only changed every two months—so dry and free from moisture are these houses. I noted that the best laying pens had no hallway at the back of them—but simply opened one into the other a dozen or so in a house. The hallway creates a dangerous draught and no fowl will do well in a draughty atmosphere.

A very simple circular trap-nest is used at the college and all layers are trap-nested and a record kept; no small task where several hundred hens are wintered. The birds look quite smart with their celluloid legbands in different colors, which are plainly stamped with each bird's number.

The laying stock is all fed the same ration; good wheat in litter, cracked oats in a feedhopper always before the hens, a warm mash once a day about 11 a.m., charcoal and grit and plenty of buttermilk to drink—no water is given at all. Prof. Herner is a great believer in crushed oats and buttermilk as an egg producer, very little green cut bone is fed at the College as these birds are the breeders of the spring time and are not stimulated to heavy egg production in any way, however some of the pens of early April hatched pullets were producing 15 to 17 eggs per day the first week in January, which is surely a good record for 30 fowls. The pullets hatched in February and March were not doing much at all owing to moulting. In a climate such as Manitoba, birds hatched too early are not profitable as winter layers, but make excellent breeders in the spring. Five thousand birds were raised at the College last season and Prof. Herner and his staff intend to near double that number this coming spring, starting the incubator in the latter part of February and continuing until June 15th.

All preparations are made for the six weeks short course in poultry raising, which no doubt a great many young people are availing themselves of. Any beginner in poultry can gain more first hand knowledge by such a course in practical work than all the poultry literature in creation can teach him.

The comfortably heated brooder houses at the College are at present occupied by a very lusty looking lot of cockerels and roosters, chiefly of the White Leghorn and Barred Rock breeds. In fact these two breeds, one a regular egg machine and the other a perfect utility bird are prime favorites at the College. A few Buff Orpingtons are kept, and some "dottes" and "Reds."

The brooders, which are used in these brooding pens, are all heated by electricity and therefore a perfect temperature for the health of the chicks is maintained without any trouble whatever. The smoky, uncertain lamp which worries the life of the amateur chicken raiser in an ordinary brooder, has had to take a back seat, as it were, and the time is coming when these electric brooders will be used on the small farm plant, where electric light is available.

Each brooder house has a chick run leading from it, which is seeded to alfalfa in the fall. As soon as the frost is out to the ground the grass shoots up and when sunny Spring weather has come to stay the young chicks are let out on the green grass which they eagerly devour. There are double runs to each pen, therefore there is an unfailing supply of pasture for the early chicks. Sometimes the birds are unable to keep down the growth which is then clipped. At 6 weeks of age these brooder chicks can be moved into a colony house where the runs are much larger. There is no less than 12 acres of land used in the colony house runs at the College, where hundreds of chicks flourish during the summer. These runs are seeded to wheat and oats and peas and birds are kept in these houses until ready for their winter quarters. The poultry buildings and small runs occupy another ten acres at St. Vital, making 22 acres altogether, devoted to the raising of more and better poultry for our province.

Prof. Herner is engaged upon the work of getting out three new bulletins on poultry in all its phases, which are to be published for use this spring. These useful bulletins can be secured free of charge upon application to Prof. Herner, M.A.C., St. Vital. Promising myself another visit to this beautiful College when incubation was in full swing I faced the bitter wind back to the waiting street car at the corner.

Note—February is not too soon to be on the alert for a good well bred male bird in the poultry yard.

Feeding Hints

Protein is a large constituent in the make up of milk, flesh and bones. Consequently dairy cows and young growing animals of all kinds require more protein in their ration than do fattening animals, horses or oxen.

A cow producing 50 lbs. of milk a day will need two and three-quarter pounds of protein in her food to supply the protein for the milk alone. When we take into consideration the protein content of her body, a 50-lb. cow should get over three pounds of digestible protein each day.

A fine point in feeding is to supply enough of each constituent to meet the animal's requirement and not too much of any one. Over supply of any constituent is waste.

Here is a case in which I have often come in contact: A farmer goes to town to buy feed. He finds that one feed is a few dollars cheaper a ton than another. He buys it for that reason. The cheap feed may have been the most expensive on the market when results are considered.

Most feeds grown on the farm are deficient in protein. In buying feed therefore we should aim to buy feed that will strengthen the farm ration. That means a feed rich in protein. Many used to buy bran for this purpose but are now beginning to doubt its economy. Bran has 12.8 per cent of protein, but oil cake meal has 30.4 per cent of protein. Compare prices and decide which you can afford to buy.

Three pounds of linseed meal would supply sufficient protein to maintain an animal. From the amount of milk that the cow is giving, the additional amount required to meet all her demands can then be figured out. Of course, however, one would not supply all the protein from the linseed meal. Cotton seed, too, is rich in protein.

A few years ago I was working as a hired man on a dairy farm where we were feeding bran, oats and home grown fodders. I induced my employer to get some cotton seed meal. We could see the difference in milk flow immediately.

Milk is 87 per cent water. Hence a good supply of water and not too cold is one of the first essentials in successful feeding of dairy cattle.

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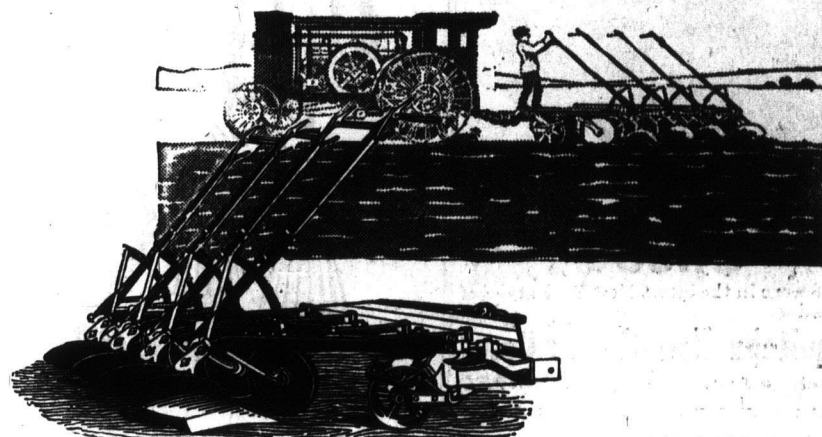
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