

PEKIN DUCK FARMING.

An Interview at the Mid-Continental Exhibition with Mr. Charles F. Newman, of Staten Island, New York, who last season marketed over 12,000 Pekin Ducks.

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While in attendance at the Mid-Continental we had the pleasure of seeing the finest specimens of Imperial Pekin ducks that have ever come under our notice, and of making the acquaintance of the man who bred and owned them. Mr. Charles F. Newman, of Huguenot, Staten Island, New York. A three-year-old pair of Pekins exhibited by Mr. Newman weighed twenty-six pounds, the drake weighing fourteen pounds and the hen twelve pounds. By reference to the winnings at the Mid-Continental it will be seen that he won all firsts, seconds and thirds offered on Pekins.

Mr. Newman is the owner of a sixty-acre farm on Staten Island, fronting on salt water. Twenty acres of this farm are given up to Pekin ducks, and the past season he raised and marketed between 12,000 and 13,000 ducklings. All ducklings raised for market are sold when between eight and ten weeks old. Such ducks as Mr. Newman breeds then weigh, on an average, five pounds each. At a point between eight and ten weeks of age Pekins weigh more than they do a little later, after their first moult, as feather-production decreases their weight. They are, therefore, marketed just before they begin to drop their first coat of feathers.

Mr. Newman begins to hatch out ducklings in January and continues steadily through to the middle of July. Sixteen incubators are used on his farm, ranging in capacity from 200 to 800 eggs. He keeps 520 layers, or breeders, and these, only, are given the freedom of the water. Young ducks are never allowed by him to "go swimming," or to get to water in any way except to reach it with their bills to drink. Swimming is often fatal to young ducks, and prevents their laying on flesh as rapidly as is desired for marketing.

Brooding houses heated by the Bram hall, Dean & Co. hot water pipes are used, from twenty-five to forty ducklings being allowed to each pen. The indoor pens ranging in size from 4x14 feet to 10x14. Connected with these pens are outdoor runways ranging in

size from 4x20 to 10x20. Boards one foot wide, stood on edge, are all the fence required to confine Pekins.

On this farm soft food only is fed, no whole grain ever being given to either old or young. The food used consists principally of vegetables, including turnips, beets, potatoes, cabbage, green rye (so long as it remains tender), clover, green corn, etc. Green corn is a favorite food in season. It is sown in rows and cut down when knee-high. It is put through a clover cutter and fed with other foods, in the form of a mash. It lends a tenderness and fine flavor to the flesh. Besides vegetable food, a dry-wet mash, consisting of cornmeal, bran and middlings, is fed, together with meat scraps. This dry-wet (not sloppy) mash is fed to ducklings the first week. After the first week meat may be added with safety. Spratt's dried meat is used extensively by Mr. Newman, also cracklings. Green bone is rarely fed. A good sharp grit is mixed in the food each day, and oyster shell is fed to both old and young.

Said Mr. Newman. "Tell your readers to feed young ducks five times a day during the first ten days. After this feed them three times a day. The old ducks feed twice a day, morning and evening. Give them all they will eat up clean, but no more. Never leave any food before young or old. As soon as they walk away, clean out the troughs and give them what remains with the next feed.

"Use troughs ten to twelve feet long. Use a foot-wide board for the bottom, with four inch sides. Build a lath fence twelve inches high and nail this to the sides and ends of the trough leaving the top open. Have the laths far enough apart to allow the ducks to get their heads through to eat. Have your water vessels close to the feed troughs, as nearly every time a duck takes one mouthfull of food it wants about four swallows of water to wash it down with. I use six inches of the bottom of a barrel for a water vessel, setting it down in the ground half way. Place lath over the water troughs to keep the ducks from getting in with their feet.

We feed our old ducks, our breeders, the same as the young, only heavier. You can get breeding ducks too fat by feeding whole corn. Feed no whole grain at all. Fish food is excellent for ducks, that is, for breeding stock, but not for young ducks intended for market, as it will taint their flesh.

"Ducks and ducklings are surprisingly

free from disease. They do not have cholera, nor roup, no lice. Our one trouble is leg-weakness, caused by cold or overfeeding—too much cornmeal. In case of leg-weakness, feed less cornmeal, more grain food, and give them plenty of bone-meal. Do not give young ducks milk in any form, except when mixed with other food, as they will dip their heads in it and get it in their eyes, causing sore eyes, and thus disfiguring them.

"In the indoor pens use sand or chaff for litter and use enough of it, and change it often enough to keep the quarters clean. We clean out thoroughly once a week. Use litter in the outdoor yards also, for your pens and runs must be kept in a healthful condition.

"Yes, the greenish-colored eggs are all right; the older ducks are more liable to give you these eggs, but we get mostly white ones. The green eggs often hatch out the largest ducks.

"Never handle ducks or geese by the feet, always by the necks. Their legs are very tender. Ducks are extra timid. Do not frighten them. Speak to them whenever you go near them and they will become accustomed to you. Never go to them at night if you can avoid it, and in case you do, leave your lantern behind. To catch them, drive them in a corner and use a bent wire, catching them by the necks, the same as a farmer's wife catches chickens by the legs.

"All our ducks that go to market are dry picked. We hang them up by their legs, insert a knife in the roof of the mouth, cutting the big veins, then stick the blade into the brain to end their suffering, and pluck the feathers while the body is struggling. At this time they let go of the feathers easily.

"As a rule we secure our best prices in April and May. We then get as high as 40 cents per pound, the price running down to 12 cents in August. The average price last season was 18 cents per pound. Our ducklings average five pounds each when dressed. It costs us to raise a duckling to remarkable size—well, simply say that after fifteen years experience, I bear witness that duck farming is, in my judgment, the most profitable branch of the poultry industry. The market is certain. My farm is not the largest in the East, by considerable, there is one farm that markets 35,000 ducklings a season. Not many years ago there was small demand in the eastern cities for ducks. The people did not then know what a rare morsel an eight or ten weeks' old duckling is.