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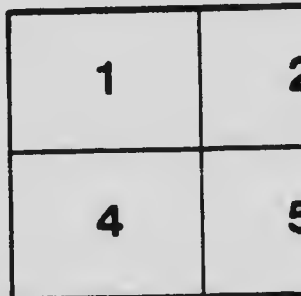
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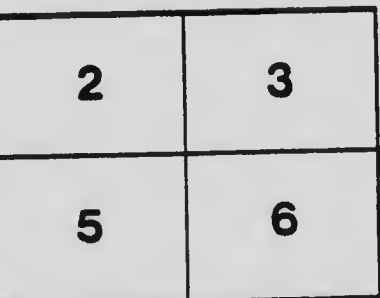
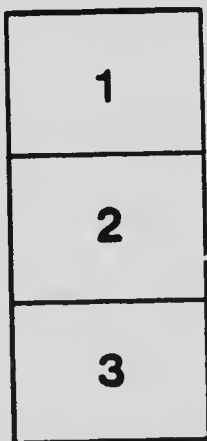
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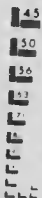
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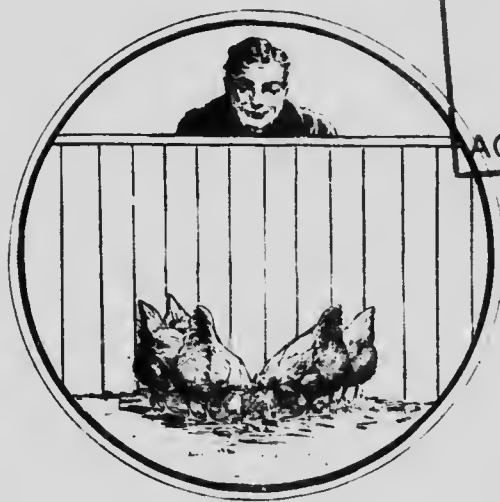


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MANITOBA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION SERVICE

# Getting Rid of the Loafer Hen



International  
Institute Branch

SEP 29 1919

DEPT. OF  
AGRICULTURE

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By authority of Hon. Valentine Winkler, Minister of Agriculture and Immigration

## Getting Rid of the Loafer Hen

There are a great many hens in every flock that do not lay enough eggs during the year to pay for their feed and care. There are a number of causes for the existence of these loafers, some of which can be eliminated. Age, breeding, constitutional vigor and persistence in laying are factors that account for the difference in the laying qualities of hens. If it were possible to keep only the good layers, eliminating those that do not lay, and also all of them as soon as they have passed the period of usefulness, one of the big problems in poultry raising would be solved.

It is possible to lay down a set of general rules by which to get rid of the low producers, but it is impossible to have these rules apply to all cases. While breeding and selection are very important, the proper care, management and feeding play an equally important part. Therefore, the success of the summer culling will depend to a large extent on the proper housing, feeding, time of hatching and the general management of the flock throughout the year.

### TIME TO CULL

The information in this circular can be made applicable to flocks in Manitoba between July 15 and October 30. It is at this time that the birds are in such condition that the difference between the high and low producers can most easily be seen.

### SELECTING THE LAYING HEN

In order to lay well, a bird must have a sound body. She must be vigorous and healthy. Vigor and health are shown by a bright eye, a well-set body, an active disposition and a good circulation.

Further, the bird must be free from physical defects, such as crooked beak, exceptionally long toe nails, eyelids that overhang so that the bird cannot see well, scaly leg, or anything else that would keep her from getting an abundance of food.

A laying hen has a big appetite. In order to lay well, a bird must consume a large amount of food. For this reason the intestines of a laying hen are large and roomy. This will mean that the abdomen will be expanded, showing a large capacity.

### INDICATIONS OF LAYING

**Body Changes**—A hen that is laying has an enlarged abdomen, due to the greater size of the intestines, ovary, and oviduct. The body is V-shaped; that is, deeper at the back than in front. The

pelvic bones are fine and spread far apart. The point of the keel bone is pushed down on account of the enlarged abdomen. When the hen stops laying, the abdomen becomes smaller, the pelvic bones come closer together, and the whole body seems to contract. The size of the abdomen and distance between the pelvic bones will, of course, depend on the size of the hen and the size of the egg laid.

The vent of a laying hen is moist and flabby, showing a dilated condition, as compared with the small, hard puckered vent of a non-laying hen. A laying hen has a soft, loose skin, and the bones are readily felt. A non-laying hen is hard and plump, and the bones are not evident.

**Color Changes** A pullet coming into laying generally has a certain accumulation of fat beneath the skin. This is shown by the yellow color in the vent, legs, beak and eye-ring of the yellow skinned breeds, and also in the ear lobes of the white ear-lobed breeds. The amount of this yellow pigmentation present is a fairly good indication as to whether a bird is laying or not. A heavy laying hen is generally flesh color in face, beak and eye-ring, while a non-laying hen is distinctly yellow. The rate at which the yellow pigmentation disappears depends on the circulation, kind of feed and the amount of fat stored in the body.

If the hens consume large amounts of green feed or yellow corn only a very thin layer of fat is necessary to give a yellow color. Therefore, hens fed on free range do not bleach out nearly so quickly as those that are confined in pens, where they cannot obtain green food.

**Vent**—The first place that changes color is the vent. This change from yellow to flesh color takes place very rapidly. Therefore, a bird having a bleached or pink vent is likely to have laid for the past several weeks at least.

**Eye-Ring and Earlobes**—Next to the vent, the eye-ring will lose its yellow color. The earlobes in the Leghorns and Minorcas bleach out a little slower than the eye-ring.

**Beak**—The color goes out of the beak beginning at the base and gradually disappears until it leaves the point of the upper beak. The lower beak bleaches faster than the upper, but may be used as an indicator where the upper is horn colored or black. On an average yellow skinned bird, a bleached bill usually means heavy production for at least the past four or six weeks.

**Shanks**—The shanks bleach out much more slowly than the other parts and hence indicate a much longer period of laying. The yellow goes from scales on the front of the shanks first and finally from the scales on the rear. A bleached out shank usually indicates fairly heavy production for at least fifteen or twenty weeks. The yellow color comes back in the different parts in the same order as it went out, only that it returns much quicker than it goes out.



**Changes in Secondary Sexual Characters**—The comb, wattles and earlobes enlarge and contract, depending on the ovary. If they are large, full and smooth, or hard and waxy, the bird is laying heavily. If the comb is limp, the bird is laying only slightly, but is not laying at all when the comb is dried down; especially at molting time. If the comb is warm it is an indication that the bird is coming back into production.

**Molting**—When a bird stops laying in the summer she usually starts molting. The later a hen lays in the summer or the longer the period over which she lays, the greater will be her production, so that the high producer is the late layer and therefore the late molter.

**Temperament and Activity**—A good layer is more nervous and active and yet more easily handled than a poor layer. A high layer shows more friendliness and yet elusiveness than a poor bird. A low producer is usually shy and stays at the edge of the flock, and will squawk when caught.

The above discusses the characteristics of the hen only in relation to her laying performances of the current year. Occasionally a hen may lay relatively better during one year than during another year. But usually a high producer one year is a high producer, according to her age, in all other years.

### DEMONSTRATIONS PROPOSED

It is the intention of the Agricultural Extension Service to put on a number of demonstrations throughout the Province during July and August. If you wish to have one of these demonstrations in your district, get in touch with your Agricultural Society secretary.

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**NOTE**—The plan for culling as above was drawn up at a judging school held at Cornell University, July 1st to 10th, 1918, and is approved by the American Association of Instructors and Investigators of Poultry Husbandry.



